I wake up to the sound of giggling. Then I hear her voice. She tries to be serious but can’t help herself and giggles again.

“Shannon, wake up.” I roll over to face her, keeping my eyes closed. “Wake up,” she repeats after another fit of giggles.

“I’m up, I’m up,” I tell her drowsily.

“Open your eyes,” she says. I feel her little fingers on my face. They move up to my eyes and she tries to pry them open. She succeeds. The light is bright and I see my little sister’s head hovering above mine. I shut my eyes.

“Oh, just a few more minutes,” I groan. I pretend to start snoring.

“Shannon, wake up!” she starts to shake my shoulder. She is still laughing.

“Okay, okay baby, I’m up.” I sit up in bed. I see that Ilene still has her pjs on.

“You hungry?” I ask her. She shakes her head yes and her blonde hair goes everywhere.

“Come on. Let’s go get some breakfast.”

We get out of bed and walk out to the kitchen. “What do you want to eat?”

Ilene brings her tiny finger up to her mouth. “Hmm…I want…I want some oatmeal.” She walks over to the table and climbs up on a chair. She sits down and pulls her Dora nightgown over her knees.

I grab the box of oatmeal. “Okay, let’s see. Do you want plain, strawberries, blueberries, or—“

“Blueberries, please.”

I grab two packages out of the box: one for her and one for me. I dump the packages into two bowls, add water, and bring them to the microwave.

“I want to do it!” Ilene yells. She jumps off her chair and runs over to the microwave. She pushes the button to open the microwave door and laughs as it pops open. I put the bowls in side by side with a smile on my face.

“Okay,” I tell her. She closes the door. “We have to put it in for one minute.”

She brings her finger up. I grab her finger and direct her to the correct buttons.

When we push the start button, she yells, “I did it!”

After we finish breakfast, we get dressed in jeans and a white t-shirt. I put my sister’s hair in a pony tail to match mine and we brush our teeth.

“You better brush good,” I tell her. “You don’t want any ickies left in your mouth.”

After we finish, my sister turns to me and asks, “Are they gone?”

I bend down and look into her mouth real close. “Yup, I think you got them all.”

We walk to the front door and start to put our shoes on. “Shannon, where are we going today?”

“You’ll see,” I say. “You’ll love it. I promise.” I hand her her pink zip-up sweat shirt and I grab my green one.

Ilene grabs the door handle and turns the knob. She pulls on the door, but it won’t open. “It’s stuck,” she says simply. I walk over and give the knob a turn, only to find out
for myself that it is in fact stuck. “Uh-oh,” my sister says. I look for the reason to our problem. At the very top of the door there is a shiny silver padlock.

“I guess they don’t want us to go.”

“Now what?” Ilene asks. Her eyes are big and she is close to tears.

I kneel down next to my sister. “You stay here. I’ll fix this, okay?” I get up and walk to the kitchen. “Key, key,” I say under my breath. I look around the kitchen until the idea hits me. I walk to my mother’s room and quietly open the door. I see her sleeping on her bed. I tip toe to her dresser and grab the small box resting on top. I walk back out of the bedroom and close the door behind me. I walk back to Ilene, who is still standing in the same position.

“Mommy’s key box!” she gasps. We both know that this box is completely off limits. I open it up and pick around through the selection of keys until I find the one that matches the padlock keeping us inside. I set the box down on the floor and reach up to unlock the padlock. It comes open with a click and my sister and I smile at each other. I place the key back in the box along with the cover and leave it on the floor. “Let’s go,” I say.

As we walk around to the backyard, we see that the sky is dark and it is cold outside. Rain is falling lightly on our heads. It is so dark out that I can barely make out my sister’s face. She grabs my hand as we walk across the yard. I get the feeling that someone is following us and look back. I see a black figure standing on the back porch.

“Come on, Ilene. Run!” When we get to the edge of the yard where the grass meets a field, we stop. “Are you ready?” I ask her. She smiles and nods her head. We step across into the field.

The sky becomes bright and everything is golden. The field whispers to us in the warm breeze. My sister and I laugh together as we take off our sweatshirts and drop them on the ground. I begin to run through the field of purple and yellow flowers. The flowers dance around my ankles as I yell back to Ilene to come on. I let her catch up to me and we grab hands again. When she catches up, she hands me a purple flower and I bring it up to my nose. It smells sweet.

We run for a while until we come to a grassy patch. We both plop down on the ground. My sister rests her head on my shoulder and I hold her close. We stare up at the sky and watch the clouds float lazily by.

We lay there for a while. Ilene asks me questions like: Why is the grass green? Why is the sky blue? Why do the clouds look so fluffy? For all these questions I know there is a scientific answer, but I don’t know what they are. So I tell her, “Because God made it that way.” She is happy with that answer and moves on to her next question. Soon we both fall asleep under the warm sun.

I wake up to the sound of giggling. I know who it is. “Shannon, come find me!” I know where she is, but I pretend that I don’t. I walk around calling her name. “Ilene, Ilene!”

Soon I come upon a hollow log. I yell my sister’s name again. I hear her giggle again. She tries to hide her laughter with her tiny hand. When she fails, she sticks her head out and yells, “Here I am!”

I act surprised and scoop her into my arms. I throw her over my shoulder and threaten to tickle her. She giggles and screams for help. I bring her back to our grassy
spot and put her down on her back. I tickle her until she gasps for breath and laugh with her. She begs me to stop.

“Okay. But on one condition,” I tell her.

“What?” she asks, still on her back and still out of breath.

“You give me a hug and a kiss.” She pops up off the ground and gives me a hug and kiss.

“There,” she says. Her face is red.

“Hey, baby, I love you,” I tell her.

“I love you, too, Shannon,” Ilene says back to me. I can tell that she means it.

“Well, what do you say? We should get going.”

We walk through the whispering purple and yellow flowers that tell us it is still a beautiful day. We walk past the hollow log and continue to walk to the edge of the field. We both pick up our sweatshirts and put them on. First I zip Ilene’s and then I zip my own.

“Are you ready?” I ask Ilene. She grabs my hand.

“Yes,” she says. Together we step into our backyard. The sky turns dark and the breeze becomes strong and cold. It turns into a wind and the dark clouds move fast across the sky. I scoop my sister up into my arms and run the length of our backyard. Ilene buries her face into my sweatshirt as the wind becomes even stronger. It’s no longer a whispering breeze, but a screaming rage. I run up the steps to our backdoor. I pull the door open and dive into the house. The door slams shut behind us as we fall to the floor. We both get up and look at each other.

“Are you okay?” I ask her. She shakes her head yes. “Tomorrow?” I ask her.

She smiles

“Yes, tomorrow.”