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Dog Jaw

Julia Vitells

“Do you want to feel my dog jaw?”

I moved my gaze slowly, slowly from the page in front of me and regarded my brother.

“I know all your jokes already. I know that one.”

“Do you want to feel my dog jaw?” my brother repeated, hopefully. He swung himself off his bed and came over to me.

“Here,” he pointed at his chin. “Feel it.”

“Will you promise not to talk to me for fifteen minutes if I do?”

He thought about it. “Yeah. Just feel it. Come on!”

I brushed his chin with my fingers and then jumped back with a squeak as he growled and snapped at my hand.

“You’re terrifying. That was a good joke. Now shut up for fifteen minutes and let me read.”

My brother was smiling. I guessed it had been worth it. He hopped back over to his side and stretched out on his bed, staring at the ceiling. The late-afternoon sun coming through the window made his hair look dusty. I brought my book back up to my face, but my mind wandered. It was hard to pay attention to a story in this kind of sunlight.

I let my mind roam at peace back into its honeycomb of memories. It was a specifically pleasurable feeling, letting it skip where it wanted and stop where it pleased. My mind’s eye hung for a moment on a recess memory, from elementary school, swinging up on the swing set and letting my eyes unfocus on the blue sky until I saw tiny clear creatures, like snakes or worms in a tide pool, swimming across my vision. It was astonishing. When I told my teacher about it he said it was tiny specks of dust on my eyeball.

“If you could have any kind of birthday party in the world, what would it be?” My brother asked out of nowhere. He was wearing his catcher’s mitt and batting idly at the string that hung from the lamp over his bed.

“Davis...”

"No, I'm serious. Like a party with a theme. Like would it be Star Wars, or wild west, or pirate ship..."

"I truly have no idea," I told him. "I would rather just have a party where I could dress up."

"I would probably have it be a space theme. It wouldn't matter what movie or TV show, or it could be sort of all of them.."

I snorted. "Not very likely. Can you picture dad letting you have a space party?"

"You never know. He used to let us do more fun stuff. Maybe he'll get in a good mood again."

I looked at him. He was still staring up at the light fixture. His eyes looked untroubled.

"Maybe," I told him. We were silent for a few minutes.

"You know," I said, after a while. "Summer vacation is not going to last for that much longer."

Davis grinned and jumped his eyebrows at me. "I know. I can't wait to see...everybody."

"Are you going to talk to the teachers?"

Davis was thoughtful and silent for another minute.

"I don't know." He flipped over onto his stomach and dangled his arm off the edge of the bed. His cheek squished against the mattress. "Are *you*?" he said in a squished-sounding voice.

"I don't know."

There were footsteps suddenly outside the door. It rattled. I heard the key in the lock.

The door opened and Dad was in the doorway with a tray. He fixed us with a cold eye and put the tray down. He gathered up the dirty dishes from yesterday, shifted the stack to one arm, grabbed the little porta-potty with the other hand.

"I'll be back with this and some more TP in a minute," he said. It was all he ever said.