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My Other Sister

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"I know it's my fault, but if it wasn't for my dumb other sister Julie and stupid Matt Hayney it never would have happened. Julie's sixteen and because I'm thirteen she thinks it's all right to say I'm a sissy because I don't smoke or because I don't sleep with my mouth open on the school bus like her boyfriend Harry does. She teases me, too, because sometimes I get nervous when people make fun of me and once I had to go to the doctor about it. Even if he's a couple years older than me, I wanted Julie to like me so I hung around with Matt for a while. A lot of people didn't like him because he went to vocational school and stole a car once, but I didn't care because Julie said he was O.K."

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Ellen's my other sister. Me and her have always liked each other. I'm only two years younger than her and we always played together since we were little.

All the boys liked Ellen because she was so pretty, but she never liked them. She said that they swore too much and their breath smelled from smoking. Once I got in a fight with some boys at school. I don't know why the fight started, but I think those guys just wanted

to show off. One of them, named Joe Ernest, would shove me into the lockers until I dropped my books. Then the rest of them wouldn't let me pick them back up. They all wanted me to fight Joe, because they knew I'd get beat. I knew it, too, and I stood there just looking and Joe was about to shove me into the lockers again when Ellen came and hit him over the head with her big history book.

"Ow! God dammit!"

"Don't you swear around me, you big swamp rat! Can't you see I'm a lady! What makes you think you can pick on boys smaller than you!"

Ellen was madder than anything and she stood there with her book ready to hit him again if she had to. Joe knew he couldn't hit no girl, so he gave up and walked away. I was glad that Ellen had come even though I was embarrassed that I had to let her save me.

"You just ain't ready yet!"

"What?" I was watchin' the other boys walk away so I didn't hear her.

"You think that you're all better from getting upset when people make fun of you but you ain't."

"I am too!" I said it loud, but she stood there staring at me and then I wasn't too sure. Sometimes,

I think she knew the inside of me a whole lot better than I did.

Ellen didn't like Matt Hayney. That's one thing I knew for sure, but I didn't listen to her when she said to stay away from him.

Me and Matt were alone at his house one day when he said that we should go into his father's room and read the *Playboy* magazines that were under the bed. I didn't want to, but then Matt brought a bunch of them out into the living room. "Go ahead. Ya ever read these before?"

"Course I have. Lots of times."

"How do you like the tits on this?" Matt pulled out the centerfold and held it up in the air.

"They're O.K., I guess."

"Whad'yu mean, you guess? They're bigger than the ones you got on them cows of yours!"

"We don't got cows. We got horses is all."

"Just wouldn't you like to screw her, though?"

I hadn't thought much about that before. Me and my friends had talked about it, but none of us had ever done it. I just figured that I'd get it when I was supposed to.

"Yeah, I guess so." I said.

"Oh, come on! I'd screw her eyes out for a Wooden Nickel! Hey, who you ever screwed before?"

Phil Livingston, a native of Geneseo, is working his way up from the short story to the novel.

"Nobody." I felt stupid.

"Nobody! With that nice sister of yours, Ellen, you never screwed anybody? I don't believe it!"

"How's sister got anything to do with gettin' screwed?"

"Why, you dumb ass! I screw my sister Lisa all the time. With a nice ass like your sister's, I'd be on top of her every second!"

I didn't know whether to believe him or not then, because I ran out before he even had time to finish. I couldn't think of any reason at all how a person could talk about their sister like that. I went home and stayed in my room for a while until Julie came home, then I went into her room. "Julie," I said, "how come you like Matt Hayney?"

She was playing her record player and singing to the words, so she didn't like me coming in.

"Get out of here. Get lost! Maybe I'll talk to you when you're not a little girl." Julie curled up her lip and said, "You can go see Matt for lessons about being a man . . . if you're not chicken."

She made me so mad that I wished I was like Matt and knew things like he did.

I couldn't see how Mom and Dad liked Julie so much anyway. I wanted to make them happy by getting along with Julie. They were always hoping that we'd be a family that was together. It was always Julie and me who'd be fighting. Julie and Ellen just didn't talk to each other. It had to be me who was the one to start getting along though, because Julie didn't care what Mom and Dad thought. She lied a lot so they thought she was being good.

Only me and Ellen cared about what Mom and Dad thought, and Ellen got mad at me when I kept hangin' around with Matt. She said he was a hood and a bad influence. "How am I supposed to protect my little brother, if he's spending so much time with Matt Hayney?" She was smiling, when she said it, but her face looked real sad. Sometimes when Ellen'd catch me comin' home from his house, she'd really give me the devil.

I liked Ellen so much that sometimes I wanted to hug her and not let go. Maybe that's why I thought of doing what Matt said. I only thought it after Matt kept talking and talking about it and Julie kept saying I should be like him. I thought if I could do something like Matt could, Julie would like me.

Ellen came outside with me

every night when I had to put our horses in the barn. Since it was late fall then, it was cold, but when the horses all came inside and we closed the doors it got nice and warm. We would run around the loose straw and laugh and talk and then go to the house, until one night I pushed her down in a pile. We both stopped talking when it happened and just looked at each other. She



put her arms around me inside my coat because she liked me so much, and if I hadn't listened to Matt I would have gotten up after that because it was so mushy. Instead, I reached in to see if she'd let me put my hand in her blouse. She jumped when I did it, but then I felt both sides of her, and she must have felt it because she pulled me closer. I was surprised that she was lettin' me stay on top of her, but I was feeling in her blouse and then between her legs. When I did that, she liked it because she reached down and undid our pants and pulled me inside of her. She held me as tight as she could and said that she wished other boys could be like me, that I'm the only boy she'd ever want to marry, because she loved me. I just kept going until I had to come out from her, but then we lied there in the straw with our arms around each other. After a while, I got up and went outside because I had forgot to bring in the water for the horses and it was getting late.

When I got back inside the barn, Ellen had her pants back on and said we ought to go. I didn't know what to say, but she touched my hand and said that everything was good, and I knew she meant it.

On the way back to the house we talked about playing basketball.

The next day I wanted to tell Matt that I did it with Ellen only I couldn't find him. After school, I had to tell Julie, so I went into her room. As soon as she saw me, I said, "Hey Julie, guess what I did last night?" She didn't believe me at first, but after I stood and looked at her, she ran into Ellen's room. The way she ran out of the room was funny, so I listened at Ellen's door. Julie went crazy askin' Ellen questions and tellin' her what was gonna happen. Julie said that what Ellen and I did was disgusting and that once everybody found out, "because if your rotten brother doesn't tell everybody, then I will," that we would be disgraced. Ellen said that I wasn't ready for that yet, and how could she ever let me hurt myself like that, and she got so upset that she got sick. She tried to come out to the bathroom, but when she saw me, she started crying again and started to run. I tried to talk to her, but she just ran too fast.

Julie told Mom and Dad, who were in the kitchen. Dad slapped me around a lot and Mom said that we were both disgusting and Julie

was the only decent girl in the family. Ellen came back and Dad slapped her around too.

Ellen didn't say nothing. She didn't even cry, even though Dad had hit her pretty hard. I went in her room to see her, but she said, "Just get out."

"I didn't mean nothing, Ellen."

"I got you in so much trouble already that I ain't gonna ever let you get in no more from me."

"Huh? I ain't in much trouble, I've been beat up by Dad before."

"Didn't you listen to Julie! Just don't be mad at me."

"You just won't be coming around me no more. I ain't gonna hurt you."

"Ellen, it ain't your fault. It's mine!"

Later on, Mom and Dad sent Ellen to live with my Aunt Joan. I see her on vacations, but that don't do much good, because she don't talk to me.

When we were alone, once, Julie tried laughing at me, but I told her that if she ever said anything to me again, I'd kill her because I hated her so much.

The Actor

*When I reach the end of my rope
I'm going to tie a knot and hang on.
When I'm drowning in quicksand
I'm going to strip to attract a crowd.
At the auditions tomorrow
After a whole year's sorrow
My career will start again:
They will give me the right part then.*

*I'm coming.
I missed another entrance, dreaming.
Sorry, Director, tell me what to do,
After the first performance is through,
You'll see what it is to be
Suffering on opening night
Without me.*

John Herring