We sat on the stoop of our musty green house...

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We sat on the stoop of our musty green house...

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

"We sat on the stoop of our musty green house. Its white shutters peeled in the Florida humidity. The wooden boards beneath us flattened our behinds and stuck to our flesh when we stood up. I pulled my knees to my chest and wrapped my skinny arms around my bruised legs. We thought of our house as a wicked castle and the two of us as maidens in distress. Together we dreamed that a pair of handsome princes on fine white horses would sweep us away through the orange blossoms to some magical land. The princes never came."

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A horsefly buzzed by me. I wondered how it could fly through the thick air. The insect lighted on my arm and stung me. I raised my arm slowly into the air and struck it dead.

As I wiped the yellow remains on my patched cotton dress I turned to see her eyes move from my face to the slimy spot. Her golden hair glowed in the red evening sun and pressed in curls against her sweaty tanned skin. Her eyes were as blue as the swan on the peroxide bottle and deep as the swimming hole when she cried. I liked to make her cry. My hair was not really any color, and I was long like a weed for my age. When she was around I blended in with the wallpaper. Her baby smile through chubby cheeks always made Mamma melt. I was always underfoot. ‘‘Angie shoulda’ been born a boy,’’ Mama would say. ‘‘She’ll drive me to my grave before I’m outa’ my prime.’’

When Dad took me fishing on Saturdays his buddies said, ‘‘That’s quite a boy you got there, Harv.’’ Dad would beam with pride.

I remember the night she was born. I was three. That’s when I first started hating her. Mamma screamed from her room. I ran across the hall and stubbed my toe in the doorway. Tears were rolling down Mamma’s face as she grabbed her swollen belly. I watched as Dad, still pulling up his dark blue work pants, ran out the door to get the doctor. He wore no shoes on his feet.
‘‘Mamma, Mamma! What’s the matter? You sick? I screamed, running to her bed.

‘‘The baby’s coming tonight,’’ she said. I was never going to have a baby, I decided. It hurt too much.

When Dad came back, he had Mrs. Wilkins, the midwife, with him. ‘‘Stay out here,’’ he said, shaking me by the shoulders. I was locked out of the room.

Hours passed. Every scream was like a shiny dull knife through my body. I slid down the wall to the wooden floor and cried. I could hear a little breeze push against the palm leaves, but I was sweating.

I heard another cry, then nothing. Was Mamma dead? I jumped up and pounded on the door. My hands and knuckles stung. I wanted my mamma. Dad unlocked the door and bent down to hug me. There was sweat on his face. ‘‘Wanna meet your sister? he said, smiling.

I used his big body as a shield as we went into the bedroom. There was no light except the night light plugged into the wall that shows where the bathroom is late at night.

Mamma had pillows behind her back to hold her up. She looked tired and old. ‘‘Meet Maggie,’’ she said, smiling like Dad.

She lifted the towel with a little blood on it to show me a red wrinkled thing that squirmed. Trixie’s babies looked cuter than that. They were all covered with fur and looked like little Lassies. Mamma’s baby didn’t have any hair. I stuck my tongue out at her and she gave a pout as big as a soup spoon. I hated her for giving Mamma pain.

She stared at the dead horsefly on my dress. I tried to ignore her, hoping she’d go away. It didn’t work. She knew I hated to be stared at. She always did things I hated. I spun around and met her surprised look with my fingers in my ears, hazel eyes crossed and cherry-stained tongue wagging back and forth. That sweet mouth dropped, then tightened into a large pout. I wished a cow would stomp on her bottom lip. I wanted to make her ugly. I wanted to make her go away so Mamma would love me.
the way she did before Maggie was born.

Before I could stop myself, I shoved my dirtiest finger up my nose, dug deep, and slid what I had gotten along her bare shoulder. She uttered a shrill howl, like that of a cat that had had its tail stepped on. Every ounce of blood in her body rushed to her face. Her body stiffened as she cringed from the goo on her skin.

Mamma flew out the screen door, clutching the wooden spoon with which she’d been stirring dinner. ‘‘What’d she do to ya now, Maggie?’’ she said.

Before I could get a word out, Maggie spewed forth the disgusting thing I had done to her. Mamma looked at her arm, rubbed the area clean, and said, ‘‘What do I have to do to make you mind?’’ Her wooden spoon rose and landed with a ‘‘swack’’ on the tender part of my neck. Mamma led Maggie by the hand into the house and I was alone on the stoop.

‘‘I’m gonna run away,’’ I thought. ‘‘That will show her. I’ll get hit by a car so she’ll have to visit me in the hospital. Then she’ll be so sorry that she hit me when I die.’’

A cardinal hopped along the power line, lightly touching here and there as it waited for a draft to fly in. It swooped down and landed on the Mother-in-Law’s Tongue that Mamma had in the yard to keep us out of the road. It had stiff green and yellow leaves with long sharp needles that would go right through you if you fell.

A cloud of dry white dust caught my attention. It was Dad. His saunter matched the tall swaying palm trees in a storm. I jumped off the stoop, leaving a sting on my behind, and ran down the road to meet him. The bleached white shells crunched in the sand beneath my feet. I didn’t notice how the sun-beaten path burned my soles.

He threw me in the air with his work-hardened hands as easily as a feather pillow. I landed in his arms and nuzzled my face against his shoulder that smelled like grease and fresh-pumped gas.

‘‘How’s it goin’, Sport?’’ he said, punching me in the arm.
“Eh, the usual,” I said, punching him back. Laughing, he pretended to be in pain.

He carried me to our house now almost covered by evening shadows. A cloud of salty dust rose behind us. His untied workboots clumped in the dirt with every step.

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