“Sibling Rivalry” by Rae Lundberg

[JORDAN TAPS THEIR FOOT NERVOUSLY. THE ROOM BUZZES WITH WHITE NOISE]

JORDAN:
(deep breath) Okay… Come on, come on, come on. God, why’s it so hot in here?

[FROM JUST BESIDE JORDAN’S LEFT EAR, AN IMPATIENT WHINE FROM PEANUT.]

PEANUT:
Too hot, too hot.

[THE DOOR OPENS. DR. SAMSON ENTERS AND CLOSES THE DOOR.]

DR. SAMSON:
Good morning, Jordan. I’m Dr. Samson.

JORDAN:
H-hello.

DR. SAMSON:
So, how are you today?

JORDAN:
Uh, glad to finally have an appointment. Your waiting list is long.

DR. SAMSON:
Yes, well. Sorry for that. Consequence of having a rare specialty.

JORDAN:
That’s why I’m hoping you can help me.

DR. SAMSON:
Of course I’ll try, Jordan. But what did you want to see me about? Your chart just says “surgical consult.” You didn’t want to tell the nurse what this appointment is for?

JORDAN:
It’s… well, it’s not easy to talk about. I-I guess I should just show you.

DR. SAMSON:
I wondered what that scarf was about.

JORDAN:

(uncomfortable) Yeah. Just, uh–

[FABRIC SOUNDS AS JORDAN REMOVES THEIR SCARF. PEANUT LETS OUT A SOFT HISS.]

DR. SAMSON:
(shocked) Oh.

JORDAN:
Sorry. I, I should have warned you.

DR. SAMSON:
No, not at all. I've just never seen anything quite like– Was it always this size?

JORDAN:
Yeah. When I was born, they– uh, it was about the size of my head at the time.

DR. SAMSON:
I see. Did your guardians consider having it removed?

JORDAN:
They wanted to, but the doctors were worried about damage to my spine.

DR. SAMSON:
That does complicate things, if it's fused with your vertebrae. We'll need to take some X-rays. *(a long pause as Samson considers)* Stepping back a moment. You've lived with this for twenty-four years. What has that been like for you?

JORDAN:
(nervous exhale) Uh, wow… big question. Well, most people don't react as calmly as you, so I try to keep it hidden as much as I can. Which isn't always possible. Obviously, people get curious about the big lump under my scarf. It's hard to make friends. And even the people closest to me, who know… I think it scares them.

DR. SAMSON:
A birth defect is not your fault, Jordan.

PEANUT:
Your fault, your fault.

JORDAN:
Not even in a case like this?

DR. SAMSON:

No, of course not. You wouldn't hold someone else responsible for an aberration in utero, would you?

JORDAN:
No, I… I mean, I understand, intellectually, that I didn't do anything wrong. But this has always been part of who I am. I don't blame anyone for only seeing this when they look at me. How could they not? And it feels like… it's my responsibility.

DR. SAMSON:
Why is that?

JORDAN:
(more sure of themself than before) Because I lived.

DR. SAMSON:
Jordan, listen–

JORDAN:
Because I lived, and Peanut never got that chance. So, if I have to carry them with me, maybe that's only fair.

PEANUT:
Liar. Liar!

DR. SAMSON:
(after a pause) "Peanut"?

JORDAN:
Oh, well, I just call them that because…the shape is kind of– a silly nickname just made it seem…less serious. Less fucked up. In medical terms.

[ANOTHER SILENCE. DR. SAMSON DOESN'T LAUGH.]

DR. SAMSON:
But you're here because you don't want to carry this anymore. Right?

JORDAN:
I… it's complicated.

DR. SAMSON:
(choosing words carefully) I understand that our cultural ideas of familial relationships may make this situation feel complex. But it's really not. "Peanut" is not your sibling. It is an extraneous appendage that is putting undue strain on your personal life. And your neck, I would imagine. It should be removed, if we can do so safely.

JORDAN:
Yeah. Yeah, you're right.

DR. SAMSON:
I'm sorry for what you must have been through.

PEANUT:
You'll be sorry.

DR. SAMSON:
But something led you to add your name to my very long waiting list. Has anything changed? Are you in pain?

PEANUT:
Pain…

JORDAN:
Well, it– I'm afraid you might think it sounds ridiculous.

DR. SAMSON:
I'm here to help you, not judge you. Please, tell me.

JORDAN:
(hesitant, as though speaking it aloud will make it true) A few months ago, I started feeling like… like I could hear their thoughts. It's weird, like these thoughts are coming from inside me, but not my brain. Not-not me. Somewhere else.

DR. SAMSON:
What kind of thoughts?

JORDAN:
You know, um…Peanut's feelings. Things we see. Sometimes I think that…I think they're talking to me. Is that crazy?

DR. SAMSON:
It's not impossible. There have been cases of conjoined twins sharing cognitive functions.

JORDAN:
Yes, but Peanut is– they don't have any brain activity. I was told their brain had barely developed at all.

DR. SAMSON:

We'll need an MRI to confirm that. It may be that these thoughts you're having are an unrelated issue, something to be treated in behavioral therapy. Regardless, I think our first step is to assess the viability of separating you from your hanger-on.

JORDAN:
Okay. How do we do that?

DR. SAMSON:
Like I said before, we'll take X-rays of your spine, a brain scan. And I don't want to make any decisions before I've performed a biopsy.

JORDAN:
Why? You don't think Peanut is cancerous, or something?

DR. SAMSON:
No, but I've never treated a condition quite like yours before. I'd like to analyze the tissue, be certain of what we'll be dealing with if we decide to operate.

JORDAN:
Right. How long will this take, to-to get results?

DR. SAMSON:
Our radiology office can get your X-rays today, and I'll look at them this afternoon. We can fit you in for the MRI later this week.

JORDAN:
Uh, well that–

DR. SAMSON:
I'll collect a sample for biopsy right now, but it'll be at least a few days before it comes back from the lab. Maybe longer, depending on what tests we need to run. Two weeks, at the outside.

JORDAN:
That's too long! I've been waiting so long just to get here–

PEANUT:
No more waiting.

DR. SAMSON:
I understand what you're feeling, Jordan, but if what your previous doctors said about the surgical risks is true, we have to do this carefully. Measure twice, cut once, you know?

PEANUT:
Yes. Cut.

JORDAN:
I know this might not seem urgent to you, but…

DR. SAMSON:
But what?

JORDAN:
I don't know. I don't know what I'm scared of.

DR. SAMSON:
Your anxiety is normal, and it will pass. We'll figure this out together, all right?

JORDAN:
Uh… I guess.

DR. SAMSON:
And I'll do whatever I can to make the process go faster. Starting with this biopsy. Is that okay with you? Ready to get started?

JORDAN:
Yeah. Yeah, just… get it over with. B-but, can you– I, I don't want the nurse to–

DR. SAMSON:
That's fine. It's a very simple procedure. We can do it just the two of us.

PEANUT:
Just the two of us.

JORDAN:
(heavy exhale) Okay. I'm ready. I'm… I'm glad we're doing this.

[IMPLEMENTS CLATTER AS DR. SAMSON PREPARES THE INJECTION.]

DR. SAMSON:
First, I'll give you a dose of local anesthetic to numb the biopsy site. You do have physical sensation there?

JORDAN:
I feel everything Peanut feels.

DR. SAMSON:
Right. Well, *you* will feel a small pinch from the needle. In three, two…

[PEANUT GROWLS, INCENSED. JORDAN GASPS.]

DR. SAMSON:
Jordan?

JORDAN:
I'm fine. That wasn't too bad.

DR. SAMSON:
Really?

[PEANUT GRUMBLES, MAKING A NOISE LIKE A RAGGED BREATH.]

JORDAN:
It's just…a little weird, that's all.

DR. SAMSON:
The sudden numbness can feel strange, yes. Now I'm going to use this core needle to take a sample. You shouldn't feel anything more than a light pressure.

[PEANUT'S NOISES GROW LOUDER, MORE VIOLENT.]

DR. SAMSON:
Are you sure you're all right? You're breathing pretty hard.

JORDAN:
Fine. Just do it.

DR. SAMSON:
It'll be over in a moment.

[A SUDDEN RUSTLE OF MOVEMENT.]

DR. SAMSON:
Jordan, what are you doing?

JORDAN:
I-I didn't, I'm not–

DR. SAMSON:
Let go. Now.

JORDAN:
I'm sorry! I, I can't!

DR. SAMSON:
Jordan–

[CLOTHES RUSTLES AND DR. SAMSON GRUNTS AS HE TRIES TO PULL AWAY. PEANUT LETS OUT A SQUEAL OF EXCITEMENT.]

DR. SAMSON:
Nurse–

[MEDICAL SUPPLIES CLATTER AS PEANUT LEAPS ON DR. SAMSON. SOUNDS OF EXERTION FROM BOTH.]

JORDAN:
Peanut, stop! Stop it!

[DR. SAMSON IS CHOKING AND STRUGGLING. PEANUT'S RAGGED BREATHING SOUNDS LIKE LAUGHTER.]

JORDAN:
You have to let him go! Please, you have to–

[DR. SAMSON'S HEAD IS SLAMMED AGAINST THE FLOOR THREE TIMES, CRUNCHING WETLY. HE LIES STILL.]

JORDAN:
(crying) Oh, God. Oh, God, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't want to. Oh, please, someone help…

[MOVEMENT, AND THE SCRAPE OF A SMALL METAL OBJECT.]

JORDAN:
What are you– Peanut, no. You, you can't.

PEANUT:
You can't.

JORDAN:
Please, just–just put it down. You don't want to hurt me, Peanut. I carried you, since we were born! We, we're siblings! We need each other! Pl–

[PEANUT STABS THE CORE NEEDLE INTO JORDAN'S THROAT AND DRAGS IT ACROSS. JORDAN GURGLES, CHOKING ON BLOOD, AND SLUMPS TO THE FLOOR. AS THEIR SOUNDS OF STRUGGLE DIE AWAY, ONLY PEANUT'S EXCITED WHEEZING CAN BE HEARD.]

PEANUT:
No worry. Carry *you* now.

[PEANUT GRUNTS, PALMS SQUEAKING AND SLIPPING IN BLOOD AS THEY DOGGEDLY DRAG JORDAN'S BODY ACROSS THE FLOOR.]