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Gravity

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GRAVITY

June Rose

The Melanegro children watched their father. They knew their father. They loved their father.

"Do you love dad?" Monroe asked his mother, the others too young to ask such questions. They all sat under the apple tree in their garden, enjoying the late summer's fruit drop.

"I do," she replied.

"Why?"

"Because he's a good man."

They all listened to their mother.

"Where does dad go?" Louis asked his older brother.

"He goes to work," Monroe replied.

"What does he do?" asked Bianca, the youngest.

"He tells other people what they should do," Monroe said.

"Why does he do that?"

"Because someone has to," said Monroe, proudly.

The children grew, and their parents grew apart.

"Where's mom going?" Bianca asked.

"She's leaving," Louis said.

"She's not leaving, they're divorcing," Monroe corrected with the sense of responsibility inherent to all oldest children.

"Why?" Bianca asked with the sense of naïveté inherent to all youngest.

"Because dad's losing it," Louis said.

"Dad's not losing it," said Monroe, "he's just—he's just sick."

"Mom doesn't like being told what to do," Bianca said.

"And what would you know about that, stupid? You're just a kid," Louis said.

"Am not."

Before it happened Monroe had been complaining about men who followed him to work and listened to him sleep through the vents. He visited his father in his office to ask for help, only to find his father absorbed in the dominoes he would stand upright and then knock down individually.

"Please tell me you can hear them, too," Monroe said to his father.

The father said nothing, but stopped playing with the dominoes.

"Please," Monroe repeated.

The father said nothing, but Monroe watched as his question was answered in his father's tears.

Monroe left the office and went home.

Their mother found him when she came to the old house to see if his father had gone to work that day. She found him in the foyer. She cried mothers' tears before she cut him down and told his siblings.

Louis and Bianca sat at the table in one of the countless rooms they didn't need to a house they couldn't share.

"What are we going to do about dad?" Bianca asked.

"I don't know," Louis said.

"He's not well."

"I know."

The conversation between them was awkward. Each wanted to accuse the other of wrongdoing, but neither was certain where the fault lay.

"He's getting worse."

"Is he?" Louis asked.

"Did you see him in his office today?"

"I don't visit dad at work."

"I don't either, but I was called in because he was standing on his desk, roaring."

"About what?"

"I don't know, it was...incoherent," Bianca said, "but when I tried to get him down from the desk, he started kicking at me, screaming, calling me mom's name."

Louis didn't say anything; he stared down at his coffee. He hoped one of Bianca's millions of responsibilities would take her away from him soon and leave him in peace.

"It's your responsibility, Louis," Bianca said.

"Why?"

"You're the oldest now. I'm still in school; what are you doing?"

"My life's more than dad."

"You're not doing anything: that's what you're doing."

Louis said nothing. He only stared out the window, looking at that old apple tree, looking at all the apples laying on the ground, rotting in the late fall. There was no ground large enough for the two of them to share.

"So you're just going to let dad go? Look at this," Bianca gestured to the room they occupied together. "All of this? This house we live in? That's dad. Our money? Dad. Our school? Dad. You're just going to turn him away?"

Louis was silent, shamed and angry for having been shamed. Bianca cried.
"Do you even miss him?" she asked.
"Who?" he answered.

Louis walked through midnight into the endless halls toward the garden entrance. Time had come and time had gone. Louis walked through the door and into the garden, passing the trees and their fruit, still nestled highly in their branches, and thought of his sister. He gazed at the engraved stone, once new and now old, affixed to the ground, and thought of his brother.

He had gone to talk to his father, to visit him in his new home, but the conversation had been fruitless.

"Dad," Louis had said. He stared down at his father, bedridden and deteriorated.

"..."

"Dad, it's me."

"..."

"Your son, dad."

"..."

"I don't know what else there is to say. I don't know what I'm supposed to tell you. Are you even listening? Can you hear me? Is there anything you want to say to me?" he asked.

"..."

"Bianca will have to take care of you. You're hers now."

Louis walked through the garden and out the gate, leaving behind the old house and its old occupants. From the street, he looked back and saw the home in all of its grandeur, its imposition.

The two women walked around the garden again, the older one for the first time in years, the other for the first time in days, too soon for either. They stopped at the named stones at their feet, one new joining one old.

"I loved this tree as a kid," Bianca said.

"I know. I did too," her mother replied.

"I love it now, too."

The tree before them was barren, the apples all having fallen long ago.

"Who planted it?" Bianca asked.

"I think it was your grandfather."

"He must have liked apples."

"He did, in his own way."

The two of them hugged each other and watched the old tree.

"Do you think dad was a good man?" Bianca asked her mother.

"He was always a good man at heart."

"Did dad like the apples?"

"He did in his own way, too."