

Chapter Thirteen

In the early morning, at half-past three, the protagonist, Leighton, is jolted awake by the creak of her bedroom door, surging fear coursing through her as remnants of a nightmare linger. She reassures herself that it was just a bad dream — her sisters are safe, and her mother is okay. Just then, her younger sister Juniper appears, seeking comfort amidst the unsettling noises from outside the room. Leighton encourages her to climb into bed.

However, the muffled voices from downstairs continue to disturb her, indicating a brewing tension. Juniper, feeling restless, opts to play a game called "Anywhere But Here," a form of mental escape from the distress outside. As they begin to settle in, the older sister Campbell reluctantly joins in, reflecting the heavy mood in the room.

As they engage in their imaginative game, where they describe idyllic places like the Galápagos Islands and London, the atmosphere is disrupted by a loud crash downstairs, abruptly heightening their fear. They instinctively huddle closer, with Juniper nearly choking back a cry. Realizing that the distraction isn't enough, they seek refuge in their grandmother's armoire, stashing away items to create a cozy hideout. Leighton retrieves a kerosene lantern, reminiscent of their grandfather's, and lights it, illuminating their small sanctuary.

Inside the cramped space, they create shadow puppets, their laughs and imaginations momentarily replacing the fear creeping in from outside. Leighton recalls how their father taught her this game long ago when nights were filled with simpler fears. The sisters, lost in their playful shadows—puppeteering animals on the wall—find solace in their temporary world amidst the looming threat outside.

However, as the flickering lantern light dims and the reality of their situation returns, Leighton remains alert, steadfast in ensuring her sisters feel safe. She blows out the lantern's flame, plunging them back into darkness while they silently face the uncertainty that challenges their sanctuary—a testament to their unyielding bond in the face of adversity.