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Drawing with Light

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Published by Bloomsbury Publishing

Extract

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1

'*Where are you? Kat? Emily?*'

'*Em-il-y?*' *Cassy's voice echoes round the still, hot garden.*

I'm wriggling up, about to call back, but a hand grabs my arm.

'*Shh!*' *My sister Kat pulls me down lower, under the tall grass and flowering plants and fruit bushes where we are hiding at the bottom of the garden.*

Lying on the hot ground so close, I can hear her heart thumping as if it is my own. The air is heavy and sweet with the smell of hot grass roots and the tang of blackcurrants: above us the ripe fruits hang in shiny black clusters along the branches. Too sour to eat raw: we tried earlier and had to spit them out. In any case my tummy is full to hurting with the raspberries and redcurrants we've been stuffing into our mouths all morning.

'*Ow. You're squashing me.*'

'Shh, you great goon. Shut up or she'll find us!' my sister hisses into my ear. She's pressing me down so hard my face is rubbed into the hard edge of the book she was reading to me. I try to lift myself up enough to

tug it out from under me but she's pinning me down too tight, as if she wants to be mean and hurt me. She'll swear she didn't, when I say, later.

Why doesn't she want Cassy to find us? Cassy has come to look after us. Cassy is soft and kind and when she reads stories she doesn't hiss or frighten me like Kat does. But Cassy *is not our mother, Kat says, and we must not like her. And then she might go away.*

When Kat says the words 'our mother', my head goes fuzzy. The stories make me scared but I have to keep listening anyway; it's like I can't stop.

When Kat is at school, sometimes I get the book out of the blue drawer where Kat keeps it. There's one picture about halfway through the book of a pretty lady with dark hair and a blue silky dress who is drinking water from a stream under some trees. I say the fuzzy words 'my mother'.

Cassy has stopped calling. She's gone back into the house.

'*Sit up, then, silly,*' *Kat says.* '*Look what you've done to the book! It's all squashed.*'

'*You made me. You did it on purpose.*' *I start to cry.*

'*Stop that right now, crybaby,*' *Kat says.* '*I didn't do anything to you. I'm reading you stories, aren't I? So listen.*' *She starts over again, reading aloud our favourite story.*

I lie down on my back so I can see the blackcurrants shining in the sun and the way the light makes patterns through the grasses when they move. I suck my thumb even though 'you're too big for that now you're four'*, Dad says. I twist the hem of my dress in my*

other hand, round and round. My favourite blue dress, all soft and comfy except it's getting tight under my arms now and today it has red stains all down the front, from the berries.

'At the edge of a big forest there lived a poor wood-cutter with his wife and his two children . . .'

Kat does her telling-a-story voice, which makes me sleepy, to begin with, until the horrid things start to happen. In the story, I mean. Not for real, though sometimes I get them mixed up.

My earliest memory. It's the first memory I have of something connected to my mother. So perhaps that is the right way to begin to tell this story.