

## Wrestling Maneuvers and Ragdolls

Annamarie Bellegante

Tony is my big brother. He dangles worms in my face, causing me to stumble backwards into lakes. He chuckles as I lament over my brand new, now algae infested shoes. Tony likes to test WWF wrestling moves on his baby sister, as if I am nothing more than a doll. His favorite move is Bret Hart's *Sharpshooter*. He nearly snaps my four-year-old frame in half on more than one occasion, promising each time to allow me a free shot if I don't go crying to Mom.

Tonight, however, we are not fighting. Tonight is Tom and Jerry night. Mom and Grandma serve us a platter of buttered saltines to celebrate the occasion. They bustle off through the kitchen to discuss boring adult matters. Tony sits on the floor in front of the TV with me slightly behind him, my back resting against the L-shaped couch. Even though the furniture offers a variety of vacant seats, we prefer a more cinematic effect.

I grab a saltine and bring it to my mouth. Jerry abuses Tom in some way that proves why cats need nine lives. Tony laughs, perhaps taking note of a new maneuver to try out on me. I try to laugh too, but I don't make a sound. I try again—nothing.

An image of a pebble jamming a motor flashes across my brain and I realize I'm not breathing.

Why can't I breathe?

His laughter becomes hollow and I feel like I'm under water. I shout his name but he can't hear me.

I need my mommy.

I crawl up the couch digging my fingernails into the scratchy fabric and make a horrible scraping sound as I hoist myself up off the floor. Tony turns and yells something, but I can't make out his words. I stagger into the kitchen.

Mom rushes toward me—one arm in a cast from carpal tunnel surgery, the other flailing above her head, "Do something, Tony!"

Do what? Why can't I breathe?

Grandma is pounding the saints against her chest and running to the front door.

Tony wraps his arms around my waist and stops me from moving forward. I struggle against his vise-like grip as his iron fists pound my stomach, lifting me off the ground.

What are you doing Tony? Let me go so I can breathe!

He won't let go. Everyone is screaming and crying, but I don't know

why. I see their mouths agape, faces splotched red, tears cascading down their cheeks, yet I can't hear any sound. Tony's commanding silence is deafening.

Tony punches a hole through me one more time and the pebble is knocked loose.

I see the motor whirring.

I can breathe!

Mom squeezes me, then Tony, then me again. I glance at Tony's pallid face—his hazel eyes wide and unfocused. He looks at his shaking hands then meets my gaze. I squirm out of Mom's embrace and shuffle toward him. I hug my brother, finding comfort in his trembling arms.

Tony, the ten-year-old worm dangling, shoe ruining, Sharpshooting brother actually loves his little sister.

I owe him my life.

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**Annamarie Bellegante** is studying English with minors in Performing Arts, Journalism, and Technical Communication. When she isn't studying, reading from her book collection, or acting, you can find her enjoying life with her family and her boyfriend, Tom.