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SISTER APPLE
SISTER PIG

Story and pictures by Mary Walling Blackburn

Grateful acknowledgement is due to BKW, MS, RRK, FS, TK, JH & my ghost sister.

To Little Friends, earthly and unwordly.

Masochists, look elsewhere; between these pages you will not find the “luxury of grief,”¹ culpability’s sharp sting or salty guilt.

¹ Within *Man at Play* (1923) Karl Groos allocates one section to a cursory investigation of “the luxury of grief” within European contexts. Groos describes a bourgeois individual who draws upon distress as a form of play, aiming for a certain “mental suffering, a feeling of suspension between pain and pleasure.” Lee, Sister Apple, Sister Pig’s protagonist, allays the possibility of repressed psychic distress by the active formation of an ally born of that anxiety and Lee does this without lingering in the interstitial space between pleasure and pain. Is there a political stratagem here...when sorrow and fear become light and active?

Lee is three.
This is Lee.



Lee knows this:
Vegetables makes a good mask or a good meal.

Mama helps Lee make a mask from the chard by
holding it up to Lee's face.

Where are you Lee?

This is Papa.

Papa hoists Lee up to the clothesline so Lee can hang the dripping wet kale on the line to dry.



Next, Lee wants to climb a ladder.

Lee asks Papa, "Is my sister in that tree?"

"You could find a sister in the tree if you wanted to," muses Papa.

Lee is Papa and Mama's only child for now, although there once was a sister.

But Papa and Mama could not keep her. Where does Sister live now?







Soon, Lee spies a rosy apple on the highest branches.

“Is that my sister?” asks Lee.

“If you would like the apple to be your sister..”

Papa replies,

“But, the winter is long and you would have to eat her!”



Lee is held up to the apple.

Lee knocks the fruit down, gathering the apple from the grass.

“Nah!” exclaims Lee, “The apple is not my sister!
The pigs will eat the apple but the apple is *not* my sister!”



Lee and Papa bring the apple to the pigpen.
It is a short tromp down the hill and through the grass.

Lee declares: "The pig is my sister!"
Papa holds Lee's hands in his own.



So Papa feeds the pigs by himself.

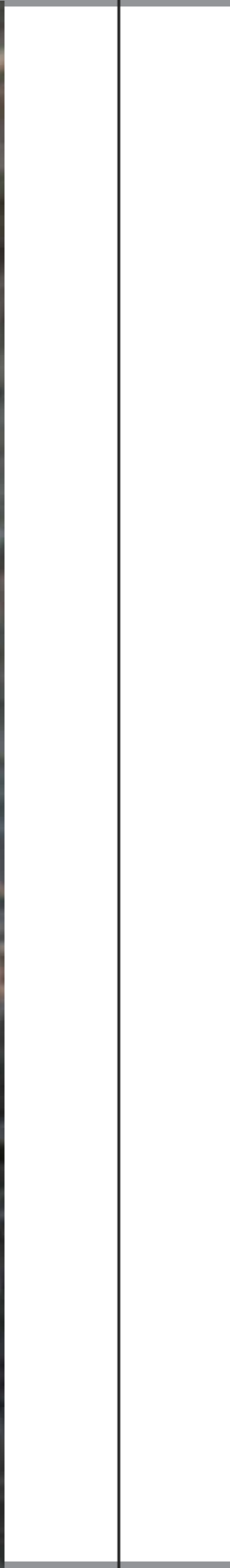
“If you would like the pig to be your sister,” explains Papa as he feeds the swine,

“be my guest! But...will you eat her fried, stewed, or baked?!”

Lee finally has an answer:

“No, the pig is not my sister! Look at the pig’s behind! That is not my sister’s behind!”





The pond is further down the path from the pigpen.

There Papa takes Lee in his arms.

“Papa, why must I be in your arms?” complains Lee.
Papa points to the cool dark pond.

“I do not want you to drown.
You don’t know how to swim yet.”





Lee asks: "Does my sister live here?"

"Do you want her to?" asks Papa.

"Well, she used to live in Mama and doesn't anymore. She doesn't live with us," Lee explains to Papa.

"That's right," Papa softly affirms, "she briefly lived in Mama."

Lee has more to say:

"She lived before me, but Mama couldn't keep her. Mama says she is a ghost."



Papa considers everything Lee had to say. He finally asks: “Yep, does that make you sad or scared?”

“No! Let’s go play!!!” yells Lee and bursts from Papa’s arms.

They play.

They flip. They flip rad flips.





Lee seizes a stick.
Lee pokes it at the air.
The air is filled with sunlight.



The stick is
forked like a
divining rod
—a branch
used to locate
water.

Lee tells Papa:

“I’m not sad that my sister is a ghost! If you kept my sister, you would be tired, and sad, and mad!”

“Why?” wondered Papa.

“Because we would be wild and loud and sometimes we would fight.

Mama might be scared that she could not buy enough food for us.

Mama might not have enough time to read to me, to paint with me, to play with me, to talk with me....

Hey! What are you doing with my stick?!”





Papa is dipping “the divining rod” in the pool.
“I want to know where the water is. I want to know how deep
the water is.”



How deep could the water be? How cool?
Is it two feet deep?

Is it up to your elbow if you stick your arm in?
Is it up to your knees if you jump in?





Papa remembers that the sister ghost is on Lee's mind.

"Lee, you have some good reasons to not have a sister right here right now.

Maybe you will have another sister when there is more time, and there is more money."

Lee might not be listening. Or perhaps Lee is speechless.

Lee does not understand—there is no answer. Lee calls out: "Is it time for lunch?!"

Papa understands that Lee is confused, and also hungry. It's time for lunch.

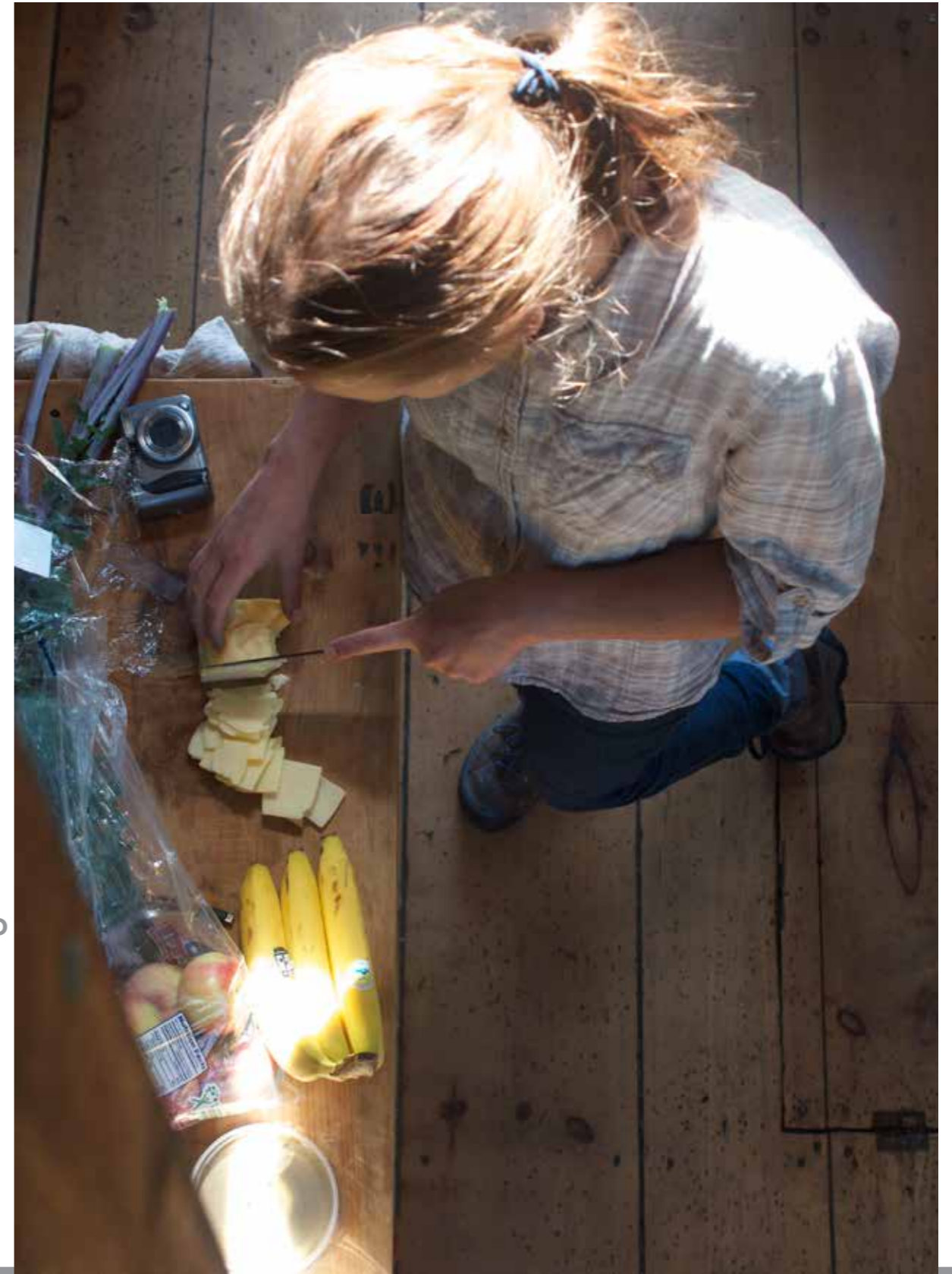


Lee's mama and Lee's uncle are preparing lunch.



They are washing kale, cooking vegetables, slicing cheese, cutting bread!

But it isn't quite time to eat yet.





Lee's uncle asks Lee if Lee would like to read a book together, *The Little Prince*.

"It's a secret!" whispers Lee. "The secret is that she's...she's a *ghost!*"

"The ghost girl can sit beside me," whispers Uncle, "but you can turn the pages."

"OK! Her ghost hands are full!" giggles Lee.

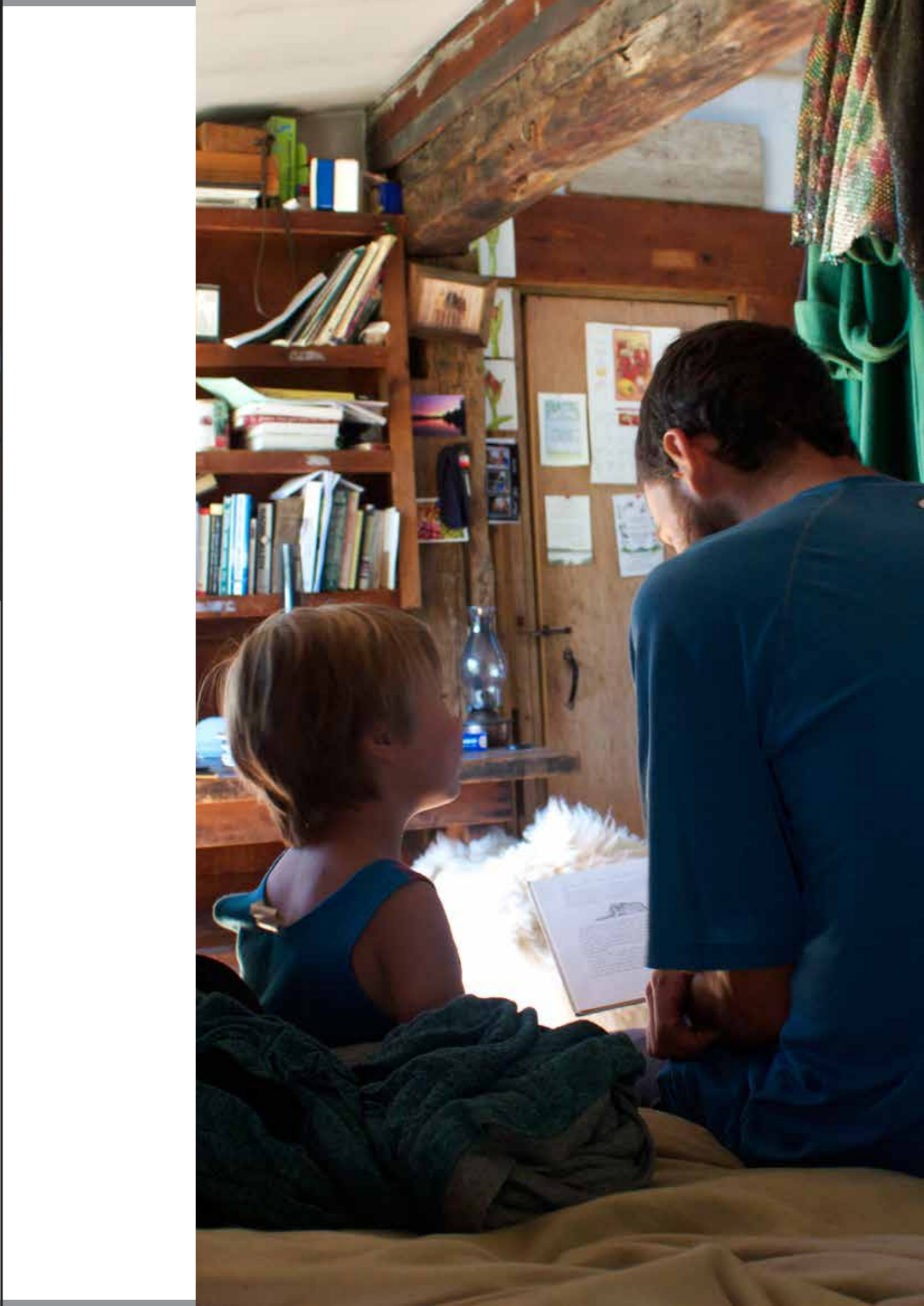
"This is a beautiful book! gasps Lee.

"A snake swallows an elephant!"

"Yes, one thing ends up inside another," smiles Uncle.

Then a golf ball distracts Lee. Where is it? Inside the notch in the timber.

It is unexpected and round.
Similar to the moon or an egg, but not.





Lee's uncle asks:

"Why is your sister a ghost, Lee?"

"Mama had an abortion before she had me."

Lee explains to Uncle.

"Sister is a happy ghost!" Lee reassures Uncle.

"She's content to quietly sit beside us?"

"Yeah, right now."

"Do you love her?"

"What does she look like?"

"Me!" shouts Lee.

"Wow," says Uncle.



After lunch, Lee and Mama and Papa and Uncle and his friend Jess lay on the grass.

The sun made everything warm. All take turns reading cartoons aloud to Lee.

This panel features a bald male with glasses.
A superhero with hair and x-ray eyes bursts out.

Which one to be?





Today, Lee chooses to impersonate the super hero.
And Lee knows that every superhero needs....a *costume!*

Everyone decides to make Lee a superhero costume out of any
materials in the house.

Jess finds a long white t-shirt and gives it to Lee.
Uncle finds markers.

Lee directs the drawing:
Lightning bolt!
Encircle it in orange!
Stripe the collar in blue and yellow!



Jess wonders where the ghost sister is.

Maybe Lee had forgotten about the ghost sister for a while.

“Ghost sister has her own things to do!” Lee hastily explains.

“She returns when I call her...if I need her.”



But it is time for the superhero and the adults to clean the lunch dishes!

And when all is sparkling and neat...it will be time to leave the cabin.

Mama, Papa, Lee, (and sister) are about to head into the late afternoon... towards home.

Notice the toucan...on the way out the door...





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