

Last Warning

By Jin Fernbacher

My little sister was screaming. Again. She wouldn't stop those high pitched screeches that echoed down the hall. She was going to get me in trouble again.

"Shut up you." I growled at her. But she only screamed louder, fat tears running down her red cheeks. One happened to be redder than the other, not that I would know anything about it.

The sound of Mom's frantic steps came closer as she climbed up the stairs to find me and my sister on the rough carpeted ground covering the floor halls of the house.

"Rosa!" Mom's shrill voice stung my ears as she reached down to pick up the wailing child. "Again? Hitting your sister is not going to solve your problems."

"She ripped my drawing and she wouldn't stop laughing about it and-"

"You come to me when that happens. Try considering your sister isn't as grown up as you so you need to be more patient with her." Mom turned her back and carried my sister back down those old wooden stairs. Each step she took made a creaking that bounced off the walls of the house.

I stared after her, my eyes burning in rage. I hated her. Some days I wished she were dead. At least for her to be mute, then mom wouldn't get mad at me for hitting her to quiet down. I never cared for a sister and now I only wished to be a single child again. She was loud, always yelling or crying or making a fuss over the smallest of things. And when she was loud, I

would hit her. I would slap my hand right across that chubby little face. And then she'd start to scream and mom would get mad.

Mom never got mad when I hit my little sister. No, she only got mad when my sister would start screaming. Because when she started throwing a tantrum of tears and ear splitting vocals, now that was when it became Mom's problem. But if she just stayed quiet, then Mom wouldn't care how much I hit her. I think Mom would be rather happy that I hit her when she made such a fuss in our household.

I picked up my torn drawing and sulked into my room across the hall. Another thing I hated about my sister was that I had to share my room with her. Where I once had the full open space to dance and play in, it now was squished tight with another twin bed and another whole set of crayons and notepads and toys.

I picked my way through the mess of clothes over the ground and plopped down onto my bed. I lay back staring up at the twinkling stars on my ceiling. They had all taken on a gray tint from when they had first been placed to decorate the white paint above me. I still remembered the bright blue that used to resonate through the room where now there was merely a dull greenish glow. Mom had helped me stick them to the ceiling, I hadn't been tall enough then. Now, maybe if I stood on one of the little stools in the room I could touch them with my fingertips.

I heard the door to my room opening just as I closed my eyes. I opened them to look over and find my sister waddling into the room with an icepack held to her cheek. Mom was right behind her.

“Rosa, I’d like you to apologize to your sister.” she said, her voice was stern, a mother’s sort of stern where I felt threatened but not enough to not talk back.

“Why? I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Rosa. Apologize for hitting your sister.”

We’d been through this many times. I remembered the last one going exactly like this one, almost word for word. Which meant I knew how it ended. And it ended with my apologizing and Mom walking out of the room only to come storming back to my screaming sister after I hit that happy smirk off her face.

“I am... so very sorry for hitting you.” I said turning to my little sister.

Mom’s lips twisted into a tight line but she nodded, leaving us and the room with the door swung wide open.

“You’re really mean!” My sister’s voice was a whirling screech in my ears.

“Would you shut up?” I asked.

“No.” The stubborn word flew from her mouth just a beat too fast.

Hate burned in my chest and anger coursed down my limbs. I brought my hand up and let the satisfying feel of my palm hitting that plump cheek of hers ring through the room.

She started screaming.

I went to hit her again when Mom’s voice, loud as a siren bellowed from below.

“ROSA!”

Just as it had before. Word for word, action for action. We were repeating the same event from just yesterday, I could have laughed.

Mom rounded our bedroom corner and grabbed me by the shoulders. "This is your last warning. Do you hear me Rosa? Last warning!"

She turned to my sister, reaching down to wipe the tears from her face. "You're okay sweetie, just put the ice pack on it."

My sister sniffled, "It hurts Mama." I couldn't believe her vocal chords still worked after what she put them through.

"I know, you're okay." Mom whispered.

Mom turned back to me. "I will call you down for dinner in ten minutes. I don't want to hear anything from this room before then." She turned on her heel and left.

Last warning? What did that mean? She'd never told me that. I watched my sister sit or rather fall onto the ground, holding the ice up to her newly swollen cheek.

"Rosa?"

My hands curled into fists. She never stopped talking, she wouldn't close that big mouth of hers for one damn minute. I was going to hit her. But Mom's words kept singing through my skull: *last warning*.

"What." my voice was flat, sharp, mean.

"You're a mean sister."

I looked into her beady black eyes. Hate burned in my own as I stared at her. My fists flexed open and my breathing sped up. *Last warning*. I blinked. My hands fell to my sides, my fingers relaxed from where they had been curled into each other.

"I know." I sighed.

Silence followed my words, not a chuckle, not a yapping word sounded from her. For the first time I could hear the roaring beating of my heart in my ears. For the first time I didn't hear my sister's voice flooding through the house.

She only stared at me, her eyes wide. She looked from my face to my hands at my sides and closed her mouth from where her jaw had hung open.

She shut up for the rest of those ten minutes.