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## Snap

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# Snap

**Keywords**

Virginia Woolf Essay Prize

**Author Bio**

Kris is a sophomore English and Theatre Arts double major from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She currently serves as the fiction section editor of The Mercury and looks forward to future years on the staff. She's honored to have been published in this year's magazine. A personal message: Good luck to all the writers out there. You've got what it takes to make it into this magazine too! I'd love to read your work, so don't be shy and send it to us. You've got nothing to lose and so much to gain.

# Snap

Kris McCormick

The clawing smell of her cotton candy is going to make me sick.

Danielle, my little sister, is looking so happy, standing in front of me on the step of the tugboat attraction. I don't know what's supposed to be so fun about watching these smelly, noisy, rude grown-ups shoot balls at those piles of metal at the far end of the tank. None of them seem to care the tiniest little bit that there are two young girls standing here by themselves, being battered around by their forceful shoves. And why should they? We're not their kids, so not their responsibility.

She's still enraptured by the display despite having been here for so long, so that means I'm going to be stuck here for a while yet. Turning to glance through the crowd of people boxing us in, I saw no sign of Dad or his new wife and their kids; he's probably off pampering them. He likes them so much better even though they're much worse than us.

An elbow slams my ribs when Danielle moves around to get a better view of the boats and shoves the cotton candy in her hand into my face. Good to know she's having fun while I get knocked around trying to keep all the other people from crushing her. My arms are braced on the edge of the game, surrounding her in a protective ring, shaking from the strain of keeping them straight to hold off all these bigger adults. Dad will yell if anything happens to her while he left us, and I've had enough of that in the past two days to last me for weeks.

Just two years younger, she's a little short, but she's a big girl. She's hardly at risk for being knocked over or hurt by the people around us. She's standing here with her new sweatshirt, cotton candy, and the bear she won at a game earlier, getting to enjoy the game she wanted to see with me making sure no one bothers her. All of that stuff's too young for me, who is supposed to be so mature at my age. I'm nine years old! How is that too old to be acting like a child?

She grabs my arm and tries to tell me a story about something that happened in the game. A shout from the drunk fat man on my left drowns out her words, forcing me to lean in to hear her, but that just makes the crowd feel they can move in closer and maybe jab their way to the front. With arms braced as securely as they can be, they bounce off the barrier around her, but only slightly, and they manage to make her standing room a bit smaller than it was a minute ago. Luckily, she doesn't seem affected by it. Not like the girl jumping on the right who nearly fell over from tripping

over a little foot during her antics.

What I wouldn't give to walk away to that bench I can see on the side of the game and take just five minutes to sit there watching the moon and ride's lights sparkle on the waves, fresh air blowing around me.

While she tells her story, the little fake jewels in her ears are sparkling from all the lights on the pier. She and I got our ears pierced at one of the shops down the boardwalk earlier tonight. Danielle had seen the display of earrings out front and drew Dad's attention to it, which, of course, made him think this would be a great idea. So, he walked us in and asked the man with the gun for two sessions. Naturally, I'd had to do it before her, so she could see it wasn't anything to be afraid of, despite the fact she had been the one to beg for this and I hadn't said anything of the sort.

I was walked in and placed on the counter by two constricting hands around my arms so the guy could reach me. Gold balls were picked out, tiny little tags. He put the gun to my ear, pulled the trigger, and there was a small pinch to prove it went through. Dad's wife picked up the nearby mirror to show me how it looked.

That was a big mistake.

She tilted it at such an angle that I could see the tiny gold dot on my left earlobe. As soon as my eyes made contact with it, it was all over.

I broke down sobbing.

Several people rushed over to see what was going on. Who knows, maybe they thought some crime was being committed from the screams. Dad ran over, yanked me off the counter, out of the store, and across the boardwalk to a small bench so I could calm down while he had Danielle's ears done. Having already put out the money, he wasn't going to have it wasted.

As I was still a mess upon their return, the whole group had to walk from one end of the pier to the other and back before a calm began to numbingly take over. Of course, that didn't last long once the shop was reached and again I was escorted in to get the other ear pierced. Another pinch, and it was over.

It hadn't hurt, not once. None of the crying was about the piercing or the throbbing ears. I cried because it was unfair. Like a piece of cattle, I had been taken against my will and tagged. I was made a sacrificial offering for the example of my sister. That's what hurt most of all: knowing that I didn't really matter to anyone I was with, most importantly my own dad.

This was made clear with my appointment to guard duty at the game tonight, this was the entire reason my sister and I had been brought on this vacation. Our father doesn't want to spend time with his older kids, he practically ran away from his previous marriage. He wants to use us as babysitters who can keep the younger two in line and entertain them

while he and his wife laze around. As the two little brats are so small they need companions on the rides, Danielle and I can be left with them to race around the pier on our own. Naturally, it sounded great to her. Barely older than them, she loved the idea of having companions for every ride and getting to run around as she chose. Left on the other side of the gate, holder of the ticket book, for me it was a lot less entertaining and more of a sad reminder of my worth in this family.

People finally started to leave the game, leaving some room to move and breathe, though it's still crowded enough for it not to be safe to leave Danielle completely. When is this game going to end? It's already been going on for a good half hour, at least. Out of the corner of my eye, Dad's spotted on the other side of the boards with his new family. He's holding several toys he must have won for them from the balloon pop because they're as big as the kids and it's the one game he's really good at. Both his kids are holding some treat, faces a mess from whatever it is while their mother flits around to the several shops selling cute t-shirts with silly stuff on the front.

Why does he love them so much more? All they do is run around like a bunch of sugar-powered, untrained monkeys, making a mess of everything they touch and talking back to him. All three of them are like that. None of them care about anything other than themselves and what they want. Ungrateful about everything they're given, they dismiss it with an air of entitlement, that they deserve nothing less than all they want. It's so infuriating.

A soft object smacks into and sticks to the right side of my face. The sickening, sweet scent of the cotton candy gets ten times worse from close contact.

"Danielle, watch what you're doing! You almost got me in the eye." She turns to face me. "You're not my boss."

"Yes, I am. Dad left me in charge of you until he gets back, remember?"

Tongue sticking out, she returns to watching the balls as they fly through the air to clang against the ships, making sure to step on my feet and knock my arms from about her. After getting beaten up by the crowd and forcibly getting my ears pierced for her, she thinks she can just turn around and yell at me like that. That is not going to happen.

A voice reaches me from off to my left. "Hey girls, there's a nice spot open down here. Come on over." It's our Uncle Joe, holding open a spot for us right in the middle, one big enough for both me and Danielle to be right at the front of the crowd, a clear view of the whole attraction. He's a really nice guy, always doing these kinds of things for Danielle and me when we see each other.

Danielle kicks my leg as she tries to lean forward to get a better view. Clearly, she didn't hear what he said, too absorbed in her own world to bother with anything else.

Putting my hand on her arm, I give her a small shove. "Come on, we're moving over here." I start moving toward Uncle Joe, leaving her to catch up when she can.

Halfway, I'm stopped by the sound of a sharp "thunk" sound and a scream from behind.

Danielle, being small, must have turned too fast or lost her footing when getting off the little step we were using to watch the game and fell. On her back in the middle of the walkway, she's lying there with her left arm at a weird angle under her back and screeching, but not moving a muscle.

Dad rushes over to her from the other side, trying to get her to sit up and start moving, but that only makes her scream louder. He keeps trying to get her to talk, to soothe her, but all she can do is cry and make sounds. He's getting frustrated quickly because people are staring at all this.

Seeing me behind him, he demands, "What happened?"

I look right at him.

"She tripped."