T he sun woke me with its white light coming through the blinds. I lay in bed, alone, my blue blanket quiet all around me. I ran my fingertips over the little bumps on the white bedspread. I was being quiet and still, because it was Sunday morning. But Peter’s bed was made, the white spread was pulled loosely over the pillow. He must be reading the funnies. Suddenly I drew my breath; he was probably already dressed! I kicked the blue cover down to the end of the bed, and ran across the cold floor. Was it this Sunday? Was it? Last Sunday, when I thought it was, Daddy had said, “No, next week.” Maybe it wasn’t today, after all.

Nobody was in the living room. It was still shadowy in there and the curtains were closed, making the tables and sofa seem like soft brown shapes against the cold walls. I could hear the high, soft whine of water running in the bathroom. That was the only light on, and I could see Daddy through the open door. He was leaning close to the mirror, his blue robe open across his stomach and scarred chest. His face was full of shaving cream except for the shiny clean path where he had just pulled the razor. Then I knew for sure he was getting married.

Daddy never shaved on Sundays. On Sundays he wore colored shirts with big, open collars and the cleft in his chin would look black where he hadn’t shaved. Then, when he went to the movies on Sunday nights, he would look just like a gangster. Peter thought that was fun. I thought the most fun was when he kissed me goodnight, because then his unshaven whiskers made a chill tickle-scratch on my cheek.

His razor didn’t even look like it was cutting anything. It just scraped off the cream, making the wet skin show. It was like shoveling snow right after it has fallen. You scoop up the white mounds and it is a surprise to find the raw, wet sidewalk underneath. Everytime he finished a stroke, Daddy would rinse his razor in the steamy hot water running from the faucet, its chrome clouded over with steam. The only sound was the soft whine of the water running and the steady gurgle as it went down the drain.

I watched and held the doorknob. I wanted to swing on the door, but Daddy would probably say, “Okay! That’s enough!” Julie had said no swinging on doors when we moved into the new apartment. But it would feel so exciting to swing on the door and jump off fast, just before it slammed shut. I knew just the way to do it. I put one leg on each side of the door squeezing it tightly with my knees. That was hard, because the door was so thin, and my knees hurt. But the best part was to hold onto the outside knob with one hand and push off from the wall with the other. Then, hanging onto both knobs, I could swing around in a wide arc, and jump
off just when the door slammed. That was the best part, and I was the only one who could do it.

Peter was sitting on the edge of the tub, dangling his legs. He wasn't saying anything at all. I was afraid to sit like that; it was too high for my feet to touch the floor. If you didn't balance just right on the curve, you would fall into the tub. Then you would crack your head. I knew what that would feel like. I could hear the crack. It was like the hollow dead sound when someone does a somersault wrong and their head comes down first, hitting the ground hard. But Peter could balance fine, and he wasn't scared about cracking his head at all. He just balanced there in his gray pajamas; his eyes were squinting, and his chin was puckered. I wondered if he had been crying.

Daddy still hadn't said, "Good morning, baby," like he always did.

So I said, "Hi, Daddy." I smiled at his face in the mirror.

"Hello," he said back. His voice was raspy. I wondered if he was worried, getting married. Julie was so different from us. She wasn't even Jewish. But the three of us were: Daddy, Peter, and me. So we won.

Last night Daddy said it was the last time he would ever sleep with us. Why was that? He and Julie would have a bedroom, but why couldn't he, just once in a while, still come and sleep with Peter and me? We had only two beds, now—that was why he had to sleep with one of us. But maybe, sometimes, he would still come and keep me warm, after we moved into the new apartment. But I heard the razor making its light scraping sound, and Peter and I both knew Daddy meant what he had said.

"What am I going to wear?" asked Peter.

Daddy didn't answer. He was cutting between his mustaches. He used just the end of the razor for that, making little short strokes on the part of his nose that goes between the nostrils. He twisted his mouth to do that. He had to pull his upper lip down over his front teeth, and that made his eyes go out of shape. He tipped back his head and looked down into the mirror to see the little spot, right in the middle, where there was no mustache. All we heard was the scratch, scratch, scratch of the razor on the edges of his mustache.

Ha! Julie had never seen him shave! That was a good thing, because that meant that Peter and I were his real favorites. We knew him much better than she did. After all, I had known him for eight years, and Peter had known him for nine. But Julie had known him for only two years. No matter how long they were married, even ten years, Peter and I would always know him better, because we had a head start. And we would always be his real favorites because we were really related and she wasn't.

He was done shaving now, and was splashing water in his face. He blew the water out of his nose and mouth, making a loud sputtering noise. It was like the noise a hippopotamus makes when
it gets out of its tank, blowing a spray of water against the glass of the cage. Mamma made that same sputtering noise when she washed her face, too. She made an O with her mouth and blew out the water when it came running down her face. Maybe Daddy learned how to do that from her. I wondered how Julie washed her face. I decided that after this I was going to start blowing water and making a sputter out loud with my mouth when I washed my face. Then I could be like Mamma. But I still wondered how Julie washed her face and what she was doing while Daddy was with us, shaving.

Goodbye, Mark

K. Rountree

No air was stirring on that hot July night . . . the heat oozed into the studio apartment. Mark wiped his perspiring face and got up to turn the fan a notch higher. He was starting toward the kitchenette when the French doors began rattling . . . he opened them to a delightful freshening breeze.

Whistling softly, he went to the kitchenette and started to mix a Tom Collins. He could stand at the counter and reach everything he needed without moving . . . bachelor efficiency, he smirked. A knock on the door interrupted his thoughts . . . or was it the doors rattling in the wind? He finished making his drink . . . adding an extra half-jigger of gin plus a lime stuck on the lip of the glass. Looking pleased, he headed for his leather chair and sat down. The knock again . . . no mistaking it this time . . . someone was at the door.

"Why, hell, it's past twelve," he muttered as he got up. "Well, I'll be damned," was all he could say when he saw Jean standing in the doorway.

"That's quite a welcome," she said coming in.

"I thought you were all safe and sound back in Des Moines . . . what're you doing here?"

"Oh, nothing much," she said vaguely, taking out a cigarette. She waved his lighter away, and laid the unlighted cigarette down quickly.

"How about a drink . . . here's a nice fresh almost untasted one. You can nurse it while I run up another."

"No, Mark, thanks. I wish you'd sit down." Jean said this as she got up and walked over to the French doors.

"You looking for someone, Honey?"

"Yes, I really can't stay long. I just wanted to see you before I leave."

"Who's the lucky guy this time?" Mark said looking at her shapely legs.

"Lucky guy? Oh, you mean the one calling for me. No one