

Extending Family

RCA WRITING PROGRAMME IN COLLABORATION
WITH THE FOUNDLING MUSEUM

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Pablo De Miguel

Still

Edu stared through the crib bars at the shapes of animals floating against the window. Snail, tiger, whale. Isabela didn't care for animals. She particularly disliked these kinds of animals, their illusory presence stealing him from her. Isabela liked situations in which real human beings featured. Like sandboxes. She enjoyed pressing her little hands against wet sand to make a matt ball. A kid would babble something in wonder. Meaning: You know magic! Isabela liked this, to feel special.

Edu also knew the word for magic. Magic was when you made something go still. He was familiar with what happens when you look carefully at the room: shapes change into one another. A pot into a twig into a leaf. Edu had noticed those machines that turned the world into a smooth sheet of paper showing Mother's face, or a tree. He liked these as much as he liked the animals floating above.

It was quiet in the room. Any minute now it would be bath time. And then night-time. Weeks did not yet exist, only many days melding into one.

Don't go too far away, Father said. That afternoon the garden was overwhelmingly green and blue. Isabela was trying hard to keep her attention on the steamy lawn, the row of grasshoppers sucking on the hose's underbelly. She knew Edu had seen them too. His head was still, his eyes lost. *Come here and sit*, Father said. Isabela did not want to upset Father, but she did want to upset Edu. Not the time to give herself away now. A little more waiting and perhaps she could make it happen.

A hush.

Excitement swirled to and fro within her.

She sprang.

Arrrgh! Edu jumped. The suddenness rattled his brain and thrust him back into the viscous afternoon. *I hate her*, he thought. And then, a little sadly, *I wish I was more like her*. Father lifted the twins back onto the chequered blanket. Isabela adored Edu. She thought they were inseparable, like the two floating whales he liked so much.

The sun got lower and lower until darkness came and then it was bright again, and this happened many times. In their different ways, the twins were starting to form memories. Isabela could recall the smell of orange blossom coming through the window one night, followed by the scent of warm wood emanating from their parents' bedroom. Most of all, she remembered Mother and Father tickling her

until she laughed all the air from her lungs. Edu remembered when grandma came to visit. It was after the trees had lost their leaves.

Edu had begun to archive memories. He would look at the room with his eyes wide open and shut his lids to see the objects pressed in darkness. Edu thought this was just like the images of Mother and Father hung on the wall. He could revisit his memories when he was bathing, or in the garden. At night he would go over them in his head, trying to unearth the smallest details. He could make out the crib and, inside it, Isabela's face. *Isabela gets more attention than I do*, Edu thought. *She is always at the centre of my memory*. After a long effort, he would finally see the ruffled sheets behind her face, and, buried in them, the stuffed rabbit. Isabela watched her brother. *I wonder what's in his mind*, she thought.

Mother and Father often told Edu not to be jealous of Isabela. It is true that he was, but underneath his resentment he had a deep love for her, a regard for someone sensed to be worthier. Edu felt that, despite his self-absorption, he had a profound sense of selflessness born out of his love for Isabela. *I have known her before whale*, Edu thought. And this came with the feeling that they were both protagonists in a film in which Mother and Father played supporting roles.

The heat came again, and with it shadows became darker and colours brighter. Mother and Father were thinking of going on a trip. Mother took a big book off the shelf and showed them pictures of faraway places. Huge waves splashing against big boulders. Edu looked in astonishment. He had no idea you could have memories of places you had never been. Father seemed grumpy. Isabela understood this happened when he felt worried. Mother was different, she thrust herself forward, sorted everything out in half the time. *Travelling is hard*, Isabela thought, *but Father always likes a new place once he gets there*.

It was balmy in the twins' room. A big window let the light in, giving forms a soft radiance. Edu had learned a new word: photography. Photography was when you clicked Mother's machine and the world went still forever, like magic. All Edu dreamed of was having Mother's machine. Then he could keep all the memories he wanted, for as he grew older they had become harder to recollect. There was one memory Edu wanted to keep more than others: the crib with tangled sheets and Isabela wrapped inside. Perhaps this could be the first photo in his album, followed by one of the floating animals.

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Museum**



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