

**SECOND PRIZE**  
**\$75**  
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## **Control**

**By Alexandria Browne**

The day started out like any other would. I took a shower, brushed my teeth, tied my shoes, and as I was about to leave the house, my mom stopped me at the door, wearing her black heels, plaid suit, and her pearl earrings that matched perfectly with her necklace. I knew exactly what she was going to say to me. “Lucy, I almost forgot, can you babysit your brother tonight, I have a last minute business trip in Tokyo. You can order take out for dinner if you want, or make something, I don’t care.” She does this all the time, always taking trips and waiting till the last minute to tell me. “Yeah, sure” I replied, and walked out the door to school. My classes felt extra long today, taking notes in every class, until my hand cramped up. I think my teachers were trying to torture me.

I drove home as soon as the bell rang, eager to make my brain stop throbbing from the five hundred paged textbook that I was required to read during school hours. I opened the front door, and the house felt empty with a strange silence filling the air. Usually my mom is singing as she folds the big, gray basket of laundry, and my brother is yelling at the TV while he smashes

his fingers on his Xbox controller. I tossed my backpack on a chair, and collapsed on the couch. I texted my brother,” Hey James, what time does the bus drop you off again? I forgot.”

Suddenly, my phone started to ring. It was James. I pressed the neon green answer button, wanting to know when he would get home. “Lucy, listen to me because I don’t have much time. Get away from the house, and if someone’s at the door, even if it’s me, *don’t* let them in. They’re coming for you, and I can’t explain. Run away.” A chill went up my spine, “James, who’s coming for me? James? James?.” There was no answer. I could hear the endless static coming from the phone, the line had disconnected.

That state of shock I was in suddenly shattered, when there was a knock at the door. I had my phone out, ready to call the police. I slowly crept up to the front door, and looked through the peephole that was always too small for me to see, but I could tell from the thick, bronze hair that it was him. “James? What are you doing here?” I said as my voice shook with fear. “What do you mean?” he replied. “I’m your brother, duh. This is where we live.” My mind started racing; why was he freaking out on the phone? How is he perfectly okay now? “What’s wrong Lucy? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” “Why were you freaking out on the phone? You sounded like you were in trouble, but now you’re fine.” he froze “ Well, umm. Oh yeah, it was a prank call. Me and my friends were playing truth or dare and they dared me to prank call someone I knew.” Although this boy had the same physical appearance, for some reason I couldn’t shake the feeling that there was a stranger in my house. I felt like I’d just met him.

Maybe I stayed up too late last night, I need to stop watching those sitcoms. My head was probably just messing with me, so I tried to forget about it. “Oh ok then, you just sounded scared was all. Go upstairs & get a shower; dinner will be here soon.” He crawled up the stairs with his small feet, but somehow still managed to make a big thud that shook the entire house like a

thunderstorm yelling at me. The doorbell rang and after I tipped the delivery guy, it was finally time for some pizza. “James! Dinner time.” I tossed a piece of pizza onto a paper plate for him, and cut up an apple. The diner table was oddly silent that night. He was very quiet for some reason, and when I tried to start a conversation, he gave me quick answers. “How was school?” I would say, “Good” he would reply, staring at his plate as he spoke to me quietly, like he was telling me a secret that he didn't want anyone to hear. “Did something happen at school today? Is that why you're not talking?” I wondered if someone had bad mouthed him. He always was a skinny, little kid. “No, I'm just tired.”

After about five minutes of complete silence, he finally spoke, “I'm gonna go play Xbox.” Well, not exactly the words I was hoping to hear, but it's better than nothing I guess. He ran to his room, and I could hear him start to scream at his friends through his cheap, Dollar Store headset. “James, come here. I've got to reband your arm.” About a week ago he was cutting an avocado, and the blade of the knife slipped and cut his arm. The wound was pretty deep and he had to go to the ER and get stitches. He handed me his left arm. “Your cut is on your right arm, remember?” he paused for a second. “No I'm pretty sure it was my left.” I grabbed his right arm. My eyes grew wide. Where was his cut? It couldn't have healed that fast, and I'm sure it was his right arm, I looked at the hospital forms yesterday. I took his other arm, and there was a wound exactly like the one that *had* been on his right arm. But there was something that didn't look right about it. I grabbed the gauze that I had prepared to cover his gash with. I took a piece and started to viciously rub his arm.

“Well, great” I thought “I've become a psychopath.” I could see the pain in his face, trying to get away and break free, but I tightened my grip. I was about to stop because tears started flooding his face, I looked crazy, but then I glanced at his arm and saw what I kept telling

myself wouldn't be true. The blood and dried skin that had blood rushing from it a week ago, started to smear. No, this wasn't a cut, this was ink. I felt like my lungs had just collapsed, and I started to hyperventilate. I slowly backed up towards the counter. He was acting weird earlier, but now there was no changing my mind. There was no hiding the truth. "Y-y-you aren't my brother, who are you?" He gave me a cold smile, one that will haunt me for the rest of my life....