Coke in the Garage

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My mom never liked Coke. My younger brother and I did, but she preferred Pepsi. "It’s too sweet," we’d complain. She’d agree, but add that that’s why she liked it.

We tried convincing her that Coke was better, by making fun of Pepsi. "I heard," my brother said once, "that Pepsi is actually leftover Coke. They have these big vats, that cola starts in. And whatever’s leftover—the foam and head—after all the cans and bottles of Coke get filled is given to Pepsi." My brother laughed, liked he’d never said anything funnier. I chuckled, because I was on his side. It was funny then, but not so much now. My mom ignored him, like she did whenever she was tired or annoyed by our shit.

We came home for Christmas one year, and had a whole week to just sit around. It was good, too, because winter was really winter at that point—terrible storms, icy roads and such. My mom had to work every day that week, but we didn’t. We just sat and watched TV. She bought us some Coke, she said, and all we had to do was go out into the garage and bring it in. But since it was so cold out, we drank her Pepsi. It wasn’t that bad. Not bad enough to freeze over.

My mom came home later and we were watching a movie. I heard the fridge door open and Mom sigh. Seconds later, I heard her walk into the living room and stand behind us. I didn’t turn around, though.

"Did I tell you guys about the Coke in the garage?"

My brother grunted yes.

"Why didn’t you drink that?"

"Too cold," my brother said, as though it were the both of us.

I could feel her stare at us for a moment or three, waiting for us to explain further. But we didn’t, and before long she left. She sighed, and left. I heard her fiddling around in the back room, putting on boots. A long second later, the back door opened and that cold, bitter wind made rounds through the house and sent shivers over our bodies. I got goose-bumps, and suddenly I wished I had gone to the garage. I got up and grabbed a blanket. My brother growled and rolled himself into a fetal position and tried to tuck himself into the crack of the couch.

A few seconds later, the door closed and the warmth of the house began to return.