

VERISIMILITUDE

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NORMAN WAS NOT A TYPICAL BOY. HE DIDN'T SPEND COUNTLESS hours forging paths through the woods, hunting for treasure, or wading through the muck in search of mud puppies. Norman spent all of his time in his room trying to shut out the imperfections of his life. His parents, he was certain, did not love each other. He wondered if they were forced to marry and hoped it wasn't his fault. Though he feared it was.

Norman squeezed his eyes shut to erase the horrors manifesting before him every time the shouting began. Fists opening onto skin, clawing nails, knees and feet and arms and hair all clambering to fight back. When the images wouldn't go, he'd force himself to remember what it used to be like.

Years before, when he was still learning to talk, the family would gather for regular dinners. His grandmother would come to the table with a big roast and set it down in front of his grandfather to carve. They were always partners that way. She would cook and he would serve. Then they would both clean up. Every meal at that house was heavenly. Norman couldn't remember the taste of the food, but he did recall being surrounded by smiles and laughter.

How was he to know that the smiles from his parents had been forced; that they silently seethed beneath the veneer they presented—all for the sake of family. ❧



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