

no one ' s home

著者	Bettridge Michael
出版者	Faculty of Global and Interdisciplinary Studies, Hosei University
journal or publication title	GIS journal : the Hosei journal of global and interdisciplinary studies
volume	7
page range	5-16
year	2021-03
URL	http://doi.org/10.15002/00024296

no one's home

Michael Bettridge

Faculty of Global and Interdisciplinary Studies, Hosei University

bam! goes that nasty screen door.

it nearly startles her off the bed, makes her jump so, causing the bills she's holding to fly out of her hand and onto the covers, and little brother, lying on his belly beside her, he looks up from his drawing, fits the stub of a sea turtle-green crayon into his ear, twists and turns it, working his mouth, about to let go with something, she can tell, is gonna be stupid.

so, before he has the chance, 'shh!' she hushes him.

but being stupid like he always is, he says to her anyway, the corners of his mouth damp with Oreo cookie, 'what, Sissy?', and she is just flabbergasted.

'you didn't hear what I just said? take the colored wax out of your ear. I told you! shh! now, shut up!'

but already he's not listening. in his hand he's got one of a 20's she let fly, and he crinkles it, and giggles at the sound, at the feel, just so enjoying himself, she could scream.

'don't you make another sound!' she hisses at him, pressing a finger to his forehead so he gets it once and for all, and she grabs the 20 back, and smooths it out on the mattress.

she has the door to the bedroom closed, and the front door closed too and locked, and all the lights and the tv off, even though you need the lights on even in the daytime to see real good around this place, because it's a basement apartment. but she wants to make it look like no one's home, and if they keep quiet and lay low, she thinks they can pull it off. it's midmorning and past the time she should be in school, but she's not going to school today. maybe tomorrow she'll go, or the next day, or the next day after, or maybe never again. but definitely not today. not this morning she isn't, and with that settled, she reaches her hand into the canvas bag and pulls out another handful of leafy-green notes.

still, she knows that she and little brother have to be ready to make a run for it. the school's done it before, sent some drag-ass after her. weird thing is, it's getting late, and she wonders if maybe the school's already on its way, the sneaky bastards. or they couldn't bother, maybe. or maybe they haven't noticed she isn't there. only when she isn't seems the only time they do take notice. or maybe they're game is to telephone first. they've done that before. but if they call, and if she bothers to answer, she's gonna tell them that Sissy's gotta stay home to watch after little brother, which is true, and take care of mother who's sick in bed, which is not true, and she knows probly the school will see through it in about two shakes, since it's one she's used before.

but, whatever they do, whatever she does, she's got to work fast and quiet so they don't tip. we make any noise, they'll hear us and whip us away, that's how she's selling it to the little guy, that's what they do with disposables, she's let him know, though technically they aren't that, not just yet, anyway. but the fact is, she heard that from a girl it once happened to, a girl she knew way back when. the girl said she was 'disposed of', those are the words she used, to some old numbers' house, a couple who sucked on their dentures when they got bent out of shape with you, and they fed the kids watery oatmeal and dry toast three meals a day, and dressed them in thrift-store, and to punish, restricted toilet privileges till you couldn't hold it anymore and ended up doing it in the crevices and corners and heater grates and backs of closets and at the bottom of the castle wall-impenetrable bushes up top outside.

if the geezers even noticed the mess they were making, they didn't show, or it was that their noses were so old they couldn't smell, but noses or not, they punished most severely for like the dumbest things, like for clipping your nails on the carpet, the girl said, they'd lock you out of the house for days at a time, and you'd live on raisins and paint chips and pocket lint and garden hose water, and you'd sleep in the open with the rats and the cats and under the welcome mats. but don't you worry, little brother, is what she's told him. that's not gonna happen to us. no one's gonna lock us out, with or without raisins or reason. we will go, and when we do go, dude, we go on our own terms, we go when we're good and ready to go, little bro', no two ways about it.

and to keep little brother still, and to keep an eye on him, she has him on the bed with her, his crayons like birthday candles in a box and the coloring book open in front of him as far as the eye could see, and a bowl and a box of Fruit Loops and a package of Oreos on the pillow, at the foot of the bed. he's in seventh heaven, almost, but not quite, she can tell by the way he's

twisting that corkscrew of hair that hangs across his forehead like an inverted question mark. he isn't oblivious, which means he isn't always as dense as he acts, which means she's got to keep him distracted, 'cause he's at her again and again with his questions, like, what time last night was it mother and father left, and she tells him, 'it's not your father, stupid, why can't you get it into your pea-headed brain, it's just what they say to cover their asses.' 'but what time,' he asks, and, 'are they coming back soon, Sissy,' and 'what color,' he asks, 'do you color a daddy for pete's sake,' and she forgets now what she answered him about that, except that finally she just says to him, 'who cares what time? you can't tell time anyway, stupid. so what difference does it make?'

then, bam!

so caught up in counting the money, the numbers like cotton in her ears, she'd stopped listening for the screen door, their one-note wood-toothed watchdog at the top of the outdoor stairs. she had counted out short stacks of 10's and 20's and 50's, had put only a small dent into the pile of cash on the bed, when she heard the bam! and she jumped, like to pop the top off her head.

bam!

'did'ju hear that? you heard that!' she tells brother, grabbing at the cash she's spilled, her hands swiping and scooping, missing as much as she is grabbing, but brother-stupid, he lies there on his tummy, twisting and twisting that question mark, and 'stop that!' she tells him, 'stop. that.'

and he's looking up, watching her, and she tugs and undoes his fingers from his hair like unwinding a spring.

'you'll have it out by the roots,' she says, using mama's words.

'Sissy?'

'be quiet,' she says. 'just be quiet, now,' she says, but already he's back to his coloring, not even listening.

she presses a bouquet of green bills to her stomach, closes her eyes. that's where she feels it, you know, the butterfly in the jar. she lifts her head and listens out. a tree falling in a forest? a single hand clapping in the wind? but maybe little brother is right. maybe there is nothing to hear. nothing to get jumpy about, and then the nervous butterfly does another loop-di-loop, and she thinks, maybe it wasn't the screen door she heard, but her heart trying to break

out through her ribs, and she takes a deep breath to calm the beat down, rubbing two oily \$10 bills between her thumb and first finger.

she looks at the mountain of money on the bed, wondering how much there is. seems more than she could ever hope to count. she wishes she didn't have to count it. numbers. she wishes she didn't know how to count. she wishes she didn't know how to breathe. she wishes she could trade the numbers for the crayons, that she could lie there and curl herself up, get in tight with the colors, do like little brother does, his whole life pressing crayola to paper, and little brother could do the counting, except that he can only count to twenty, and even then, he skips over the number thirteen along the way like already he knows not to mess with it. like she said, he isn't all stupid, and now Sissy asks, she suddenly speaks up, like it's any of her business, Sissy says, what color should you color a daddy? well, she tells Sissy, how 'bout any color that suits your mood? you give him monster burnt-orange skin, and blue-black hair the color of sin, and the candy-apple red nostrils of a demon.... but, stop, that's no answer at all, Sissy says. that's just going at it the wrong way. well, if it's the right way you want, she tells her back, I'd stick to the counting if I was you ... the counting, it's black and white, and ready or not, like it or not, you got your answer. except maybe you shouldn't count it at all, Sissy says. you stay with the zero, the see-through 'oh' of wonder you started out with. you stop before you start. stay with nothingness. stay put while you're nowhere. still.

when, bam, goes that screen door, but this time it is followed by the sharp tap-tapping of shoes heading up the concrete stairs and away from the entrance to their cool cave.

who's it, Sissy asks. it's no one, she answers her. now, be quiet, she says, behave, shh! you got me so not paying attention to what I'm doing, she says, now I gotta count it all over again. damn, anyway, she says.

sometimes Sissy is such a scare-baby, but still she loves her. she has to. she's got no one else, except if you count little brother here, but what's he know beyond crayons and Oreos and dumbing himself down? she raises her head, listens out. mostly all there is to hear, is what she always hears in this basement with them gone. and it's not scary. not scary like you'd think it'd be for someone her age, not at all. at those times, with them gone, the place seems to have a ... not a life of its own, exactly ... but certainly it has those bunches of sounds that go with life. grunts and squeaks in the wood, groans in the foundation, hiccups in the waterworks, and lights that hiss and sputter at the end of their connections, like spitting out morse code, and floorboards that coo when you pad across them in your bare feet. you can almost feel the house

stretching out under you, over you, like some giant oak tree maneuvering, uprooting, positioning itself for a takeoff down the road with these two clinging as if to the ribs of a unmoored ship.

she hears sound all around. the squeeze of the doors on their hinges, the curtain hush of the wind, the muffled voices coming down from the landlady's house overhead, the woman's own voice, now and again, carrying on a conversation. with itself? ah, but that sunlight, that great, slow sigh that grooms the apartment for a few early hours each day and burns off the damp blotches of condensation on the walls ... and even the dust, like musical notes floating each way free that she runs her fingers through and scatters, then steals away on tiptoe and sing-a-ling.

she gets up from the bed, and goes to the door, cracks it open. she peeks out. nothing. she opens it wide and ballerina-steps herself across the front room, past the tv set with its cool, green eye, to the front door, and she tries the knob, easy-does-it, like she's not sure it is still working for her. but the door, it is locked, and she presses an ear against its chest, rests it there, listens in, and she can hear grains of wood flowing, rubbing against each other like those giant plates in the earth that fire volcanoes and stir earthquakes, reroute rivers and uproot lives. it shakes, then, the door does, and her heart races at the sound of boots shuffling on the coarse-haired WELCOM- mat outside the door, and as quietly as a shudder, Sissy takes a step back, her hand going to her mouth as if she can't trust herself to keep quiet.

he ... they are home.

the apartment has only the one entrance, and the one exit for that matter. you go out the same way you come in, at the side of the upstairs' house, through the frisky screen door that nips and closes at your heels, and down the concrete steps, and through the front door. the yellowed newspapers trashed in the hedges along the walkway up top, they tell of delivery boys who don't know it's there. the flat is so well positioned, so well hidden, and so unrecognizable as a habitat, it explains to Sissy why her friends can never find it. she frets, sometimes imagining her and little brother wasting away, and no one knowing for years and years, when one day their white, chalky skeletons, like coral thrown up on a beach, like long, petrified tubes of their phony father's cigarette ash, are found frozen in the sand, and people from all around come asking: 'Who were this girl and this little boy,' and 'Where did their parents go off to,' and they scoop up the remains, as they might the burned out logs of a campfire, and bury them with a prayer and a ten-gallon hat salute....

a potted gladiola crouches on the ground-level windowsill in the front room: a one-legged figure, it seems, begging for coins of sunlight to be dropped its way. she moves to the sofa under the window, and crouching, props herself up, looks out and over the gladiola, the strips of wood dividing the window into panes acting like the cross hairs of a scope, but peeking out, she sees nothing and no one. she shimmies off the sofa, and as noiselessly as an anemone, slips back into the deep, deep dark of the house.

“nothing,” she hears him say to her mother, “can touch us here.” and that, of course, is all he wants of the place. “the apartment’s seclusion,” he says, “keeps certain parties guessing,” and her mother nods, accepting that he knows what’s best for them all.

but, goddamn him, anyway. certain parties? the girl wonders.

she doesn’t know who he means by “certain parties.” though she can guess. she can imagine. in fact she has to, guessing and imagining being the only way she get any answers around here. ain’t that right, Sissy? just like she imagines what that money can do for them, she sometimes imagines that those “certain parties” are their real parents.... she knows anyway that this man who stinks of stale beer and cigarette smoke is not her real father. he might be the boy’s father, she sees a resemblance in that finger-twist of curly blond hair falling across the forehead, but he isn’t hers. her hair’s like her mother’s, so dark and rich and tangled, you could lose a brush in it, mama says. and that man, he isn’t Sissy’s father either, forget what she tells you. Sissy was orphaned in a laundry basket to a downtown laundromat, the poor girl, spin dried and raised by coin-laundered hands, until mother came looking for her, found her and took her back.

mother wouldn’t be living with this man if she didn’t have to. the girl knows that. it’s her excuse. but is it? Sissy wants to know. and what excuse would that be? and the girl looks down at the money, knowing she can scoop out any damn excuse she needs from her green mound of 10’s and 20’s and 50’s. Sissy heard him tell her mother, “use the money I give you. that’s what it’s for. to use. so, use it. what the hell’s gotten into you,” and he’d said to her, “you’re the first person I ever met thought they could do it without money.” but, mister, mama could do without it, she could do without you, that’s for sure, if she wanted, except that, this time she didn’t, and she’d taken it, the money and the man, and off they’d gone.

one time after he’d taken mother away with him, and they’d been gone for two, or was it three days, and then they’d come back ... but while they were gone, that time, those “certain parties” had come calling. first she saw their shadows hulking outside the door, then pea-

shooting past the windows, and so spooked she was, you could'a cut it with a knife, so help her God, when she heard the storm-trooper crunch on the gravel, heard the screen door, the nail studs of their boots descending the stairs, and the turn of the doorknob, and she slapped a hand over Sissy's mouth, and Sissy fought like the devil to give them up, but finally, the storm troopers gave it up, howling out that they would be back, they promised the children that much, the storm troopers did, and they went away, for day and a night and a day.

it was after this time, after her mother and the man come back, that she did ask. "certain parties?" she questioned the man. "and just how would she know about that?" the man had asked her mother. "she wouldn't," her had mother said. "she doesn't. this little pitcher has big ears," her mother said, her voice feeling its way carefully through the words. "listen, you," the man said to the girl, he said, "you don't listen in on what ain't any of your business," he said. but she stuck her chin out at him. "you don't tell me what's not and what is my business," she said. and he put up a hand, cocked a finger, and she closed her eyes tight so she wouldn't feel it coming. and "don't you dare," mother said. "the little punk," the man said. "the little bitch," he said. and mama said, "don't you dare call her that! don't you dare call my daughter that!" and the man went quiet for all of two seconds, when he said, "you need to be taught some manners, little girl," he said. and finally, she took a breath and opened her eyes to look straight at him. and he said, "you listen to me...." but she wouldn't listen. "what parties?" she screamed. "you better set her straight," the man said to the mother. "and do it quick." and her mother said, "honey." she came and bent down to the girl. she took her face in her cool, dry hands, and wound and tucked the girl's hair behind her ears, but the little girl shook it back out, angry. "there are no 'parties'," the mother said. "It's just ... grownup talk." the girl stepped away. "what parties?" she insisted, when now the man stepped up. he took her by the shoulders. he dug in with his fingers. he wanted her to cry, to make her shut up. but she wouldn't shut up, she wouldn't cry, she would grin and bear it, she would show him what was what. and he said, "you know what's good for you, miss smarty pants, you stay outta my way," he said. but she made him get outta her way. she chomped down on his hand, chomped down hard, held on like a dog, bit him through till she drew blood, till she hit bone. that is what she did.

you didn't, Sissy says to her.

didn't what?

didn't do what you say you did.

did, too.

you didn't, she says.

you weren't even watching, she says.

did, too! she says. did! bit that bad man in pieces and stuffed him piece by piece down the garbage disposal!

she creeps back across the room, the wooden floor chirping under her heels as if to egg her on, to the bedroom, and open the door and easy-does-it, she shuts it behind her. she could almost die. maybe she already is dead. but maybe now she does know who those parties are, she tells Sissy. do you want to see how she knows? no, Sissy says. and which no is that, she asks. n-o, or k-n-o-w? Sissy covers her ears. k-n-o-w it is, then, she tells her. and she goes to the closet, stands on the chair she used to reach the canvas bag he'd put up there, and she reaches up and takes down a shoebox, and goes back to the bed, and sits herself in its lap.

the rubber band that held the box had broken the first time she tried to slip it off. and that first time she opened the box and got a look at the photos, at that time, while little brother slept, she spent what seemed to her like a whole night awake trying to make heads or tails out of what she'd found, still thinking it through until the curtain edges turned pink with the dawn. and she now again opens the lid, and there on top is that single photo. it shows the inside of a wedding chapel, of the married couple and of the minister, whose long face and bird-like neck make him look like in any second he'll break out in song, or break his neck in trying. the bride, all beautiful in chiffon-cake white, is her mother, but the groom in the photo is not the now-man who is trying keep her from them. he bears no resemblance. the man in this photo, his hair is the color of a sunset, his face the clear sky of well-being.

down further in the box, there is a wedding certificate folded in half. her mother's name is on the certificate, but the groom's name is not this now-man's name. it is a different name. she had a different father, she tells Sissy. this-now-man thinks he can pass himself off as the man in the photo, as the name on the license, but he can't, cause he's as phony as a two-dollar bill.

at the bottom of a bunch of other photos of people she doesn't know or only half remembers, there is the photo of a family of four. Sissy is the little girl in the photo, and she wears a frilly, white dress, an Easter dress, must be, and she stands with her hand neatly pressed in the man's hand, stands waist-high to him, this same man as in the wedding photo, not the now-man who comes and goes out of her life like wind banging a screen door open and

shut. this man in the photo, he might be holding a flower bud, he does her hand so gently, and mother holds the baby.

but she's all confused. these certain parties. where did they disappear to?

it was this last time, with her mother and the man gone once again, that she felt ... that she first acknowledged a feeling in herself that had her wanting to extend it, that had her wanting to drive that distance he left between them to its furthest edge, and then when he wasn't looking, to push him over it. to be done with him, and mother, too, if she wouldn't stay with them. once and for all, done with them both. and that was as terrible a thought as she had ever had, but she ran with it to see how far it would take her, and she saw that if they would stay away a while longer, if they would be gone just another two days, maybe as long as a week, she felt, or maybe it would take a little longer than that, but if they would be gone long enough to give her the time she needed on this, she could get past the separation, to the point that it didn't matter or not if they came back. except, here they had come back again, just short of what she felt she needed to make the move, and acting as if they'd never been gone.

bam!

'did you hear that, then?' she asks her brother, but the little boy's busy with his coloring, his eyes glazed over with crayon, and it's a wonder he can even make out the lines.

'stupid,' she calls him, but he doesn't hear, and just maybe she doesn't mean it.

she stands up from the bed, and she steps to the door. she listens. she opens the door, looks out. she thinks she sees something pass by the ground-floor windows, but can't be sure, watches, waits, and then closes the door in a hush, and it never was.

she goes back to the bed, to the photos. she scoops them up and returns them to the box, and puts the box beside the pile of money. she stares down at the money, shakes her head. forget it, she tells herself. there is more money here than you would ever know what to do with. but "use it, or I'll take it all back," he'd told their mother. "it's not yours to give us to use," she'd said. "it's mine to give to you, if I say it is," he said, "and mine to take back, if I say it is. what the hell's gotten into you?" "what's gotten into me is, it matters where it came from," she told him. "it didn't use to," he said. "I'm not a like that anymore," she said. "what? you're not like me anymore? is that what you're telling me? well, it's me, not you, keeping you in bacon and eggs, lady," he said. "man, but you're a bitch to satisfy anymore. wasn't like this before little miss sassy-mouth opened her trap." "it was never like this," she said. "it was just like this the last time I saw to it that you were taken care of." "maybe I'm finally getting my priorities

straight,” their mother said. “and you’re saying, what? providing for you and yours is not a priority?” “no. I’m saying the money is no longer a priority.” he laughed at her. “how you gonna meet your priorities, you don’t have the money? go on. take the goddamn money I give you. take it. take it while it’s there.”

she takes up bunches of money in her hands, and stuffs it back into the canvas bag, puts it all back in, and zips it up. she grasps it by the handles. the bag smells of oil and is stenciled on the side with the one word TOOLS, and she’s had to explain to her brother a hundred times what it’s doing here. and it is a lot of money, more money than she could ever carry by herself. but then she tells herself, of course, you don’t have to take it all. you can take only some of it, and leave the rest. but, no, she tells herself. some of it, or all of it, she doesn’t want anything from the man. so, don’t want it from him. just take it from him. and with it, you and little brother can be long gone before anyone comes looking it or you. but long gone to where, Sissy asks, speaking up, and how long would the money last? how should she know, she answers Sissy. Sissy asks, once it’s used up, what’re you going to do? where you going to go? but, damn it, Sissy, you keep asking questions, you will end up going nowhere. so, she tells Sissy, I love you, but we just got to go. no more questions, Sissy. no more. fine, Sissy says. so, shut up and just go, you wanna go so bad, go, go by yourself, Sissy tells her.

then, quickly, no, she says. Sissy didn’t mean that. don’t go, she says. ’cause you don’t have to go. you can stay. you stay with what you got, because what you got is what you know, and what you know is this ... is them, those certain people. what you know is in you to stay, Sissy tells her. you aren’t going to cast them out of you. they are what you are. they are who you are. they are you, baby, settled in a place, a space right there next to the heart, next to home. like a pair of cats curled up with the sun in the corner of the sofa. but the girl shakes her head. no, she tells her. that’s not at all what she feels there next to her heart. what she feels is a slug from the pistol, so close, she can feel its prickly, red hot metal every time she takes a breath. well, Sissy tells her, you know then, you don’t breathe. if you don’t breathe, you don’t move, it can’t get to you.

she sits on the bed. two nights before, that night, the slamming of the screen door startled Sissy awake, and she heard the tap-tapping of the nails of his boots on the hardwood floor in the front room, and the pointy squeal of the hardwood, and she heard him outside the bedroom door ... a great big wolf come to blow their house down. Sissy curled herself up on the king-size bed she shared with mother and little brother, and jammed her fists into her stomach. she

tried to disappear herself so that the wolf would not know she was in, and she reached out to her mother to take her down with her, but already the woman was up and out of the bed.

the bedroom door opened, and the sound of him coming into the room made her forget that she was playing not-at-home, and she reached out in the dark to her brother lying next to her, and caught hold of him, hugged him with all her might, the lucky little guy, he hasn't a clue, when she heard the man with a huff and a puff throw the bag on top of the closet shelf, shove it up there, and then turn, his breath clicking in his throat like a fingernail tapping against a window pane, his breath smelling of beer. and he took her, her mother, his hands on her smelling of oil, and he took her to the sofa under the bulls-eye window in the front room. he always did it this way, and the girl crept out of the bed, and peeked in, the butterfly in the jar going into a hot, panicky dance, and there in the shadow of the window's wooden crosshairs, in the light of the street lamp like the shine off an artificial moon, she saw him find his spot, and she listened to her mother groan under the weight, and the last thing Sissy heard from under her bedcovers was the screen door closing like lips on a whisper, the man and her mother gone once again.

bam!

the bag makes an angry noise as she unzips it. she puts her hand in, and weaves it through the cool green, when her hand bumps into the cold, quiet metal of the gun.

bam! bam!

she then picks up the bag like to test its weight for all it's got to offer, and her hand trembles, but not so much from the weight. if anything, it feels too light, too light for what this girl and her little brother need, and she sets it back down on the bed. she sits down again, closes her eyes, and she puts her cheek against the oily canvas, and she can smell the barber shop stink of the man, and she gives the bag the rough, angry shake of love. why? why haven't you given us enough to make it on, she asks. but then she asks herself, how do you know he hasn't? you haven't finished counting it. but she can't finish, 'cause Sissy keeps telling her, no matter how much there is when you start, there will never be enough to finish it. stay, she tells her.

she looks up when she hears her brother speak. he's twisting that curlicue of hair with one finger like to ring it out.

'stop that. how many times you gotta be told?'

'Sissy?'

'what?'

‘what’re we doing?’ he asks.

and she thinks about this for a moment. she thinks, what she’s doing is waiting to hear the phone ring, the doorbell to chime, the sharp, warm rap of knuckles on the door ... the sound of their voices outside, telling her that they are home.

but they are not home. even when they are here, they are not here for us, not for her and Sissy and the curly-q boy, so they might as well stay away.

and telling her brother that he has to be cotton quiet, she reaches deep into the bag, and lifts out the gun, and she sets it under her leg where he can’t see it, but he starts again with his questions about this and that and what nobody knows, and facing the door, she starts all over, counting the money for that sum that will let them walk away from zero.

‘Sissy?’

‘now, shh,’ she tells him. ‘I’m counting,’ she says, and she pulls out a handful of money. she makes a pile of 10’s, a pile of 20’s and 50’s, when, deep into the count, she hears the screen door slam, and this time, little brother hears it, he hears it too.

‘Sissy!’ he says. ‘it’s them! Sissy, they’re home!’ he says.

and he scrambles off the bed, but in a flash she’s up and a step behind him, the gun, like the butterfly come up out of the jar, in her hands as she runs, and she hisses at little brother, weaving a finger through his deep tangle of hair, ‘get down! I said, down!’ and she’s gotta trip him up to make him hear real good, and she kneels beside him, the gun at-ready.

‘now, let’s play some serious no one’s home!’

The End

.....
This is a work of fiction: the characters and the story itself are figments of my imagination. The location, the residence, however, is modeled on the basement apartment one of my sisters and her husband lived in for several years. I moved in with them for a span of time, and I remember well the layout: the one bedroom, the sofa bed, the cubby hole off the kitchen where I slept, the windows and the stingy light they offered, and the concrete stairs to ground level.

Lastly, the word “Sissy”, as used here, is the informal version of *Sister*. I had a childhood friend who addressed his big sister as “Sissy”, and I immediately understood the first time I heard him use it, that he was using it as a term of endearment.

M. Bettridge