

# The Gap in the Porch Boards

By C. Jade Wyton

*Isabel hides under the porch while her sister, Barbra, takes the blame for something she didn't do.*

***Contains descriptions of child abuse and violence.***

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The sound of her mother's furious yelling and her sister's fearful shrieks was unbearable, and Isabel just couldn't take it any more.

She couldn't *take* it!

She sat under the back porch, wedged in tight where she barely fit, and covered her ears with her hands in an attempt to muffle the sound of the beating.

It was her fault.

She'd taken one of her mother's beautiful crystal animals out of the cabinet —just wanting to get a better look at it— and dropped it, shattering it to pieces.

She didn't understand why Barbra would lie about it. Why she would take the blame onto herself instead of being like Sharon and telling their mother who had *really* broken it.

But when their mother had stormed in furious and Isabel had hesitated too much to stammer out that she was sorry, Barbra had done it instead. Convincingly.

And so their mother had taken out her anger on the wrong daughter; beating her until she screamed and wailed for it to stop.

But she still didn't tell....

Isabel swallowed as the screaming quieted down. Though she didn't dare remove her hands from her ears or creep out from the tight corner she had jammed herself into.

She didn't dare move.

Not even when everything was silent.

She couldn't hear a thing. Nor could she see, with her eyes squeezed tight.

The only thing she could smell was the rosemary bush by the back door, and the only thing she could taste was the salt of her tears that rolled down her thin cheeks to the corners of her lips.

She didn't dare move.

Especially when she heard the squeak and creak of the back door as it was roughly opened.

Footsteps clomped onto the back step, heavy and angry. And Isabel bit her lip to keep herself quiet as she watched her father light a cigarette.

He huffed it once.

Twice.

Five times, before he flicked it into the rosemary bush's pot and went back inside.

Sharon slipped past him as he did, washing basket in hand, and waited for

him to close the door before she retrieved his half-finished smoke and shoved it between her lips.

*She'll get in trouble if she's caught!* Isabel thought; covering her mouth so she didn't gasp or whimper as her sister finished their father's cigarette and then headed for the clothesline.

She hung the washing in silence before making her way back to the back door— And pausing.

Isabel flinched down as sharp eyes met hers through the gap in the porch boards, and she shielded her face from falling dirt as Sharon stomped a heavy foot.

'*Coward!*' she growled. Then she lent down, her voice barely a whisper as she hissed. '*Don't you dare tell on me!*'

'*I-I-I won't!*' Isabel stammered. '*I-I promise!*'

Another stomp, and Sharon vanished into the house.

Isabel wasn't sure how long she sat in silence. But it was a while.

All she could bring herself to do was rock gently and scuff her feet in the dirt.

Then the back door opened again (quietly, this time) and Isabel glanced up to see Barbra carefully shutting it behind her.

The girl made her way down the porch steps and, rounding to the left side where the loose board was, clambered underneath the porch to sit beside her sister.

It was an even tighter fit with Barbra there. She, unlike Isabel, was fat (a bad thing, according to their mother) and so took up a lot of room. They had to sit squashed up against each other to fit.

But Isabel didn't mind brushing shoulders with her sister— Not this one, anyway. And not right now.

'You're shaking,' Barbra said, simply, as she put an arm around Isabel. 'It's okay.'

The forming bruises along her sister's arms, face, and neck told Isabel otherwise, and all she could do was whimper.

'I'm fine, Bel,' it was clearly a lie. And when Isabel didn't act like she believed it Barbra just sighed and rolled her eyes and moved to climb out from under the porch. 'Hey. So. I took five bucks from Sharon's piggy bank. I'm gonna get some gum and sherbet. You wanna come?'

'You *stole* from Sharon?' Isabel squeaked.

'She steals from Dad,' was the simple reply. 'Now move your butt! I don't have all day!'

Isabel hesitated as Barbra rose to her feet and brushed herself down. But then, when a hand was offered through the hole in the porch, Isabel took it and let herself be pulled out and up.

Barbra replaced the loose board and gave a loud sniff before jerking her head in a beckoning motion. 'C'mon. Let's get out of here.'

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