The Prodigal Son

by John Wentworth Chapin

The invisible line reached over and tickled Eddie, taunted him. Eddie could stand it no longer and poked Thomas' knee. When he moved it, Eddie poked his elbow.

“MOM! Eddie's on my side.”

“*Eddie*.”

“He was saying mean stuff!”

“I didn't say ANYTHING, doofus. You poked me.”

“You were thinking it.”

“BOTH OF YOU! Cut it out. Eddie, move against the door. Thomas, stop provoking him.”

“I didn't do ANYTHING and you should yell at EDDIE and not ME.”

“Not another word out of either of you.”

Thomas went back to his graphic novel. A minute later, a shadow appeared across the left-hand page of the book; Eddie was straining to sit as tall as he could, his head now craned against the rear window, reading. Thomas turned the page and heard a slight gasp from his brother; Eddie hadn't finished reading yet. Although he was older, it seemed to Thomas like Eddie was slower at everything. He wasn't retarded or anything, just slower than Thomas.

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In the mirror, Thomas watched his brother's lips move as he read. Thomas caught his mother checking their silence in the rear-view mirror; a calmed smile broke across her face.

Thomas scooted across the seat and read with his back to the door. Eddie scowled and slumped on his side, eyeing again the invisible line.