Family Happenings

by Kate Brown

Saturday afternoons: tartan blanket spread on the pebble beach, transistor radio hissing static, fish paste sandwiches and seagulls. Why fish paste, Mum? She didn't dare ask.

“Dom, we're on a happening.” She shielded a sandwich from a hungry gull and looked up at the sun, squinting. “A happening is a new and special thing. Attended by new and special people.” Her brother laughed, his eyes too bright, just like the sun. On the way home, he pinched her. His fingers left an ugly rainbow mark. Rainbows were supposed to be beautiful.

Seagulls had sharp beaks. She threw them her crusts, but it wasn't the crusts they wanted, it was the soft centre part. Men came and sat on the edge of their blanket to chat. Her Mum started to call their trips “happenings.” Dominic hated the trips, he hated the men who talked to their mother. He sat as far away from everyone as he could, without leaving the blanket. He never left the blanket. The day the seagull grabbed a fish paste sandwich, whole, out of his hand, was the first time she saw her brother look surprised.

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