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Love
Lust
Longing

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SAUDADE

My sister insisted we stay up till midnight to celebrate my twenty-first birthday. I'd forgotten about this long-ago incident until recently, when I celebrated another milestone birthday.

In the living room of our childhood home in Kirkwood, Missouri late that summer night, Janet was sprawled across a blue loveseat. I sat across from her at the Steinway Grand, silently stroking the keys to avoid waking our sleeping parents. Both of us were petite, different timestamps of the same person: long, dark brown hair and brown eyes, lounging in matching pastel cotton pajamas.

Waiting, counting down, we talked and laughed and reminisced, mostly about summertime activities we'd shared during our childhood. We talked about visiting our grandparents in Bronxville, New York each year. About sandy days at Long Island's Jones Beach, drinking Nehi Orange soda and eating deviled ham sandwiches our grandmother prepared. About going to the New York World's Fair in 1964 and hearing Dave Brubeck play "Take Five." About going to Daddy Michael's for ice cream in White Plains, New York. About singing "Gary, Indiana" at the top of our voices on our long car rides to New York, about using a comb and tissue paper to create makeshift kazoo's for the trip.

We talked about summer evenings back in Kirkwood: collecting lightning bugs in jars, playing "Mother-May-I" on the back sidewalk, or tag with neighborhood kids. About going to the swimming club with our mother, eating hamburgers and french fries for lunch, topping it off with a frozen Zero candy bar. About Janet copying me by wearing a nose plug when she swam. De-

spite being five years younger, she remembered nearly as much from those years as I did.

We reminisced about my efforts to entertain her by making shadow puppets on the wall when she was only four. We shared a room then, and I used light cast from our night light as the backdrop for my show. Teaching her to spell short words those same sleepless nights: cat, dog, mom, dad. Both of us lying in our twin beds with white, chenille bedspreads, careful not to let our parents hear us giggling and talking past our bedtime.

I told her how crazy it was, staying up instead of going to bed. Waiting for a birthday. “What difference do a few hours make?” I asked her, half seriously, half in jest. “We won’t miss anything if we wait till tomorrow morning to celebrate!” But she was adamant we greet my twenty-first birthday together, at midnight, and so our reminiscing continued.

* * *

That birthday is now a distant memory, along with my little sister, who died suddenly nearly ten years ago. When I search for the word that best describes the loss I feel, what comes to mind is a Portuguese word: *saudade*.

A lifelong student of languages, I’m obsessed with the meaning of words, how untranslatable many are. But people like to simplify life and, to that end, they strive to simplify language. It’s as though they visualize words on a vast spread sheet. In Column A is a word in one language. Column B is next to it with its exact meaning in a second language. The same thing in Column C, and so on. In theory, more than 6,000-mile-high columns representing every word in every language rise up to the sky, graphed mathematically, logically.... erroneously. Thankfully, the world is more complex than that.

Dictionaries translate *saudade* as “longing.” That’s partly accurate, but it doesn’t capture the depth and

physicality of the word. So, not a bull's eye, but maybe it hits the circle *next* to the bull's eye. *Saudade* is deeper and wider than "longing," the difference between being nicked with a pocketknife and stabbed with a dagger.

Saudade is a pendulum. One minute it swings back to the past, transporting you to memories of times together, staying up till midnight to reminisce and celebrate a birthday, for instance. Then it swings forward to a future without your loved one, those rips in the fabric of the universe where your lives will no longer intersect: birthdays, trips, family gatherings.

"What difference do a few years make?" you may ask yourself.

Quite a lot, as it turns out.

- *Linda Murphy Marshall*