

The Art of Midnight Fort Construction
by Ashley Andrews

Four chairs, six pillows, two comforters, and three throw blankets make for a sturdy fortress. With one flap open, it's perfect for guarding against approaching monsters. Dad suggested we build a fort tonight. Since my brother and I have been building forts for as long as I can remember, it's nothing unusual. The sound of my mother crying penetrates our fortress, and my little brother's eyes water in response. I hand him one of the last pieces of my Halloween candy; he finished his two weeks ago.

He makes a face as he pulls it into his mouth, disappointed it's not chocolate but his tears stall. As I lay down next to him, he snuggles into my side, still working the sugary treat around in his mouth, and I rub circles on his back. I hear the shuffle of feet and the creak of the front door. I push to my knees and peek my head out. My dad stands in the doorway with his suitcase, and I watch the arrival of a car.

He glances back, and for a moment, I think he sees me. Then, I see my mom standing in the kitchen. He gives her a sad smile and walks out the door. My mom turns and spots me, and my cheeks flame. I worry she's about to yell, but instead, she climbs into the fort between us. She spares a kiss to each of our foreheads. *What a great night*, I think—before I know better.

END