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STUDENT WRITING SAMPLE

Sticky Fingers

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Elephants are one of the most vivid memories of my childhood. I had an alphabet book, and on the page for letter E there was a picture of a purple spotted elephant. Late into the night, my father and I would stay up practicing our elephant noises. I'm sure that by now, he has found someone else to giggle with. My time as his child is over. Another little girl has taken my place.

He took me to the zoo once. I was only five, and he was off work for the day – the first time in weeks. He had an appointment at the golf course that afternoon, I remember. Whenever my sticky fingers would press against the shiny metallic clubs, I could see him wince. But that morning, he was all mine and we spent a good twenty minutes visiting the elephants. I stared in awe at the enormous beasts, and my sticky fingers left little smears against the glass barrier when I attempted to clamber into the safari exhibit. I never got very far – his hands always held me back. When sticky fingers pressed against his cheek, my father couldn't bring himself to care about the residue they left.

My fingers have not been sticky in a long time, and the elephant alphabet book has long since been shoved into a forgotten drawer. He called me just last week, my dear father. He informed me that his new wife had just given birth to a baby girl, and they chose to name her Elizabeth. The revelation stung. Elizabeth was my father's first choice for my name, but my mother insisted upon Amelia. He then proceeded to ask me if I could possibly give her my old alphabet book for when she was old enough to read it.

"I think it would be nice," my father said. "Like a gift, from one sister to another." I made a strangled sound in my throat. She was NOT my sister. She was an imposter, an invader, nothing more.

"And I'm sure you don't really read it anymore," he continued with a snort, as if I hadn't even made a sound. "You're all grown up now."

I can't even remember how I responded to the phone call. All I know is that he hasn't attempted to contact me since then. He told me, though, just before he hung up, that he and his wife had decided to decorate the baby's room in an elephant theme. The bottom of my stomach dropped, my heart swooped low, and I've never hated anyone as much as I hated Elizabeth at that moment. It didn't matter that she was only a baby: how dare she invade my life. How dare she take my father away. If only my fingers stayed sticky forever, then perhaps he would have stayed. Then, perhaps, he wouldn't have left.

Every night this week, I've looked in the mirror, and every night, I have been horrified by my reflection. I haven't spent a single evening tear-free since I was first told about Elizabeth. I have become a child again, tear-stained, sticky-fingered, and all. My father's words echo in my head. "You're all grown up now." Not quite. I go looking for a book with a bright blue cover and a worn spine. As soon as I open it, the pages automatically flip to the correct page. The corners are dog-eared and creased – I cannot count how many times I have read this page in the past.

Sticky fingers press against a purple spotted elephant, just below the letter E, but this time, there is no one here to care. 🐘