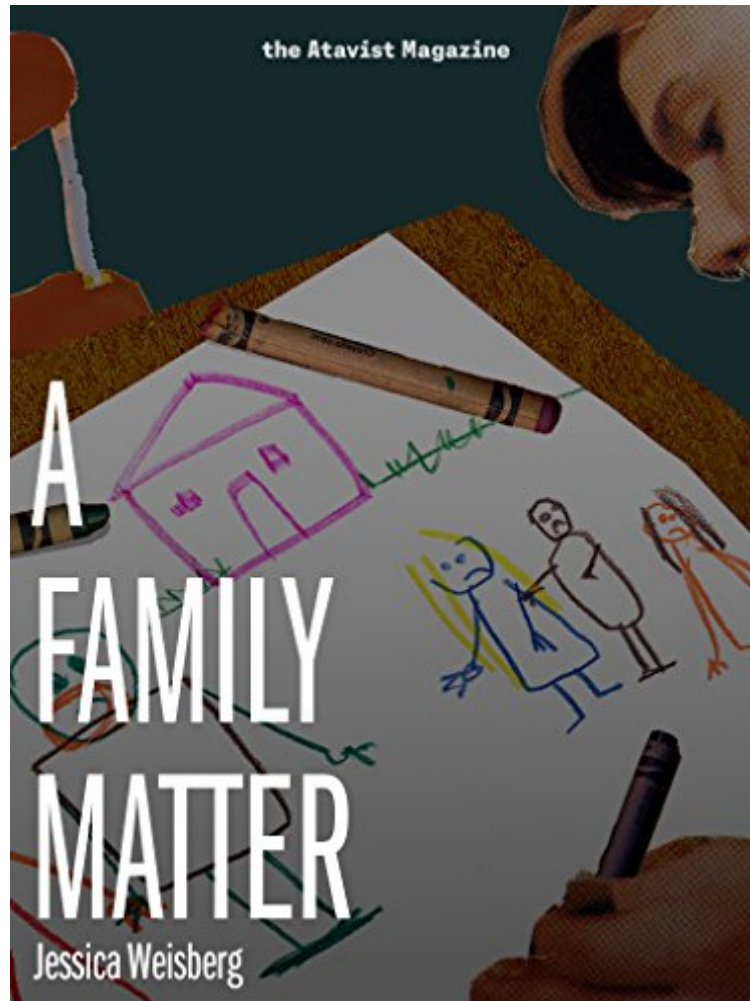




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A Family Matter (Kindle Single)



Synopsis

It was any parent's nightmare: a police officer at the front door with a social worker trailing behind. The night before, Randy and Danyelle Branning had caught their eldest daughter, Amber, smoking pot and lying. The fight that followed was loud, but nothing could prepare the Brannings for what the officer was about to tell them: Amber had accused them of physical abuse. They were even less prepared for what happened next: The social worker would place Amber and her two younger siblings in foster care, effective immediately. What followed was a grueling battle with a Kafkaesque bureaucracy to understand why their children were taken from them and to get them back. Eventually, their paths would cross with a San Diego lawyer named Shawn McMillan. In 2014, McMillan had noticed a strange pattern among his cases: Many of his clients were like the Brannings, parents whose children were taken from them by child protective service agencies. Federal guidelines require that social workers obtain warrants before they remove kids from homes unless there is an emergency, but McMillan found that many of his clients' kids were in no immediate danger and were taken without a warrant anyway. Last summer, McMillan filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of 80,000 California families, including the Brannings, for inappropriate removal of their children. In "A Family Matter," reporter Jessica Weisberg juxtaposes the Brannings' fight to get their children back with McMillan's quest to reform a badly broken system. In an environment fraught with difficult risk calculations, Weisberg's is a fascinating account of why an agency charged with protecting children has torn so many families apart.

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