

After that test Mary Lou and I would never have to think about chemistry again. We started a relieved joyous walk home down Lester Rd., on the east end of our little town. Ever since we met in 2nd grade we walked home together, and would grab a pop at Teddy's corner store on the way.

"Why do you do that Sandra! You know what happened to me last Halloween up there!" Mary Lou yelled, pushing my finger away from pointing out the rickety old house up on the hill to the left. "I still have nightmares about that basement," she said in her high-pitched voice she uses when she is frustrated.

For the rest of the walk we reminisced of old times, and when we reached Cain Hill, where she lived down the hill and I lived up, we said our goodbyes until tomorrow morning. Right as I turned my head back around, looking back up the road, James McGuhnty, the town clown and my best friend, came running towards me. We had been friends since the beginning, but lately he had been acting odd, as if he was hiding something from me.

"Sandra!" he screamed, almost slipping in the mud. "Boy am I happy to see you, come quick there's a problem at your house," he said in one breath, stopping to take a few more, "Dr. Hatch is there, I saw his car."

My mama had been sick for a while, with some unnamed virus. Dr. Hatch was the town doctor that no one liked, because if he came to your house that meant that something was really wrong. When I had left that morning, after getting up before the sun to help my brothers and sisters, mama seemed fine, just tired as she always was lately. Once I reached the house I could just sense something was wrong. My brothers and sisters were all sitting quiet on the front porch, which was not usually the case at all. I went inside and crept up

the old stairs to my mama's room. Dr. Hatch had our winter comforter over her, and a thermometer under her tongue.

The most surprising part of it all was my dad, sitting by her side in tears, holding her hand. He had been almost non-existent the past year. He woke up and went to work, and returned home to eat, and to sleep. I nodded Dr. Hatch and took a seat by the door.

I woke up and was very confused. I looked at the bed and no one was in it. I looked around the room and no one was in it.

"Hello!" I yelled walking out into the hallway. No one responded. I ran down stairs to find an empty house, and outside to see an empty yard.

"Saundra!" a familiar voice shouted from the road. I could see James's tattered old Yankees hat and I knew it was going to be okay.

"What happened James?" I asked running towards him. I could feel tears coming but I tried my hardest to hold them back.

"Come with me Saundra, the doctor tried to wake you, everyone did, but you wouldn't wake up. Your mama passed, everyone is down at the Hanson's." James said as calmly as he could. I could tell he had been crying by the red under his eyes.

We walked to the Hanson's and I saw, what seemed to be, the whole town out on the front lawn. As I walked up everyone made way for me, and when I reached the house all my brothers and sisters were playing outside the front door. When I walked in the house Dr. Hatch pulled me aside.

"I don't know how not to be frank so here I go." He said taking in a deep breath. "Your mother died of something, we just don't know what, and your father left after she passed, he didn't know what else to do." Dr. Hatch said placing his hand on my shoulder.

I didn't know what to do, in that instant I had just lost my mother, and my father had left me because he didn't know any better. I turned around and walked right back out, and right back to our house. I realized it was me now,

just me and my 4 brothers, and 2 sisters. The church ladies brought the kids back that night, and told me the lord was with me. I thought about that a lot that night, how the lord was showing his support in an odd way.

The next morning I got the kids up and off to school, they went about their days, as it was normal, just missing a good-bye kiss to mama in her bed. James came by on his way to the school, as he did every morning.

"I was thinking we could just not go today and clean up the house today, " James said placing his book bag by the door.

I smiled and turned on our favorite radio station and got out chocolate chips to make cookies. When we were younger we skipped school, and this same thing, telling ourselves we were doing it for a good reason. "You know I've always felt as if we were related," I said putting the butter in a bowl to warm over the stove.

"I know exactly what you mean," James said biting his raw thumb. "Long lost siblings or something I swear!" he said with a little too much enthusiasm for me not to notice something was wrong.

After a long day of cooking, cleaning, eating, tree climbing, and napping, we said our good byes to meet up the next morning in the same place. That night after I got the kids to bed, I looked at an old family album. Something peculiar I noticed was that there was only one baby picture of me in the whole house. It was a picture of me and a random lady, that not even my mama knew whom it was. My other siblings had lots, all over town, in Disney land, and some at our grandparents 20 miles east. When I finally fell asleep, I dreamt that I was in a different family, a different name and everything. I woke up to find myself yelling and my sister Paulie standing at the end of the bed with a face that looked as if she had just seen a ghost. I thought about that all day, but didn't tell a soul. I felt as if that if you didn't say it out loud then it wasn't true, and didn't hurt anyone but yourself.

Mary Lou came to stay with me and help out over the weekend. It was nice to have someone else there, and she as as sweet as they come. James came by too but ever since the other day he had kept his distance. I called him

up to come play cards on Saturday with some of us and he finally came out of his cave.

"James why don't you come help me get the table from the attic," I said motioning towards the back room. When we got back to the room and got the table I looked at him and asked what was going on. " Ever since mama passed you have been off, did I do something?" I asked standing in the way of the doorway so he had to answer me.

"I just can't tell you," he said pushing past me and joining the rest of our friends.

I let it go but couldn't focus on cards all night, and kept losing over and over again. When everyone was leaving I pulled him back and demanded he tell me.

"Tell me what is up James, I can't just sit here and keep wondering," I said looking him directly in the eyes, the one thing he absolutely hates.

"You're going to hate me," he said, looking down at the ground.

"I could never," I said in a reassuring voice.

"You won't believe me," he responded quickly.

"James come on!" I said, getting a little impatient.

"Well, we are related," he said, a quiver in his voice.

"Yeah we wish we were," I said, laughing a little bit.

"No Sandra, we are actually related," he said turning and heading for the door.

"James you can't leave now, what are you talking about," I said grabbing the collar on his shirt.

"I've known since we were little. My mom and dad had you a year after me and didn't know what to do with another baby so your mom and dad took you in as their own," he said without making eye contact.

"I don't know what to say," I said feeling as if my stomach had dropped to the floor and my heart was pounding out of my chest.

"Don't say anything, I have wanted to tell you, but I just couldn't because you were so happy," he said with tears in his eyes.

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"I'm so happy but so confused," I said as strong as I could, "I'd like just a bit alone I guess, I'm glad you told me."

James left, and I sat, for hours. Everything was a lie. I went through all my memories, and how they were still my memories, but no one had told me. It all made sense now, little things that hadn't clicked before. It made sense why daddy ran away. He didn't want to tell me, but just leave me with a family of his own.

I didn't tell the young ones, and James still came at the same time the next morning.

"Hi.... sister," he said walking into the kitchen.

"Who else knows?" is all I could get out.

"Me and my parents, and you and your parents are the only ones," he said.

I didn't go to school that day either, I let James go along without me and bring me back the work. This was 5 years ago and now James and me are living, sister and brother along side, raising my little brothers and sisters in my mama's house. Daddy comes back every once and a while, but he still doesn't know I know. I like to keep things to myself, a way to feel as if I have control of something in this world that I think I know but I don't.