

It was the quintessential winter day. It was spectacular. Perfect. And everyone was out enjoying it. There were people in the street having snowball fights, kids off to the park to go sledding, neighbors in their yards building forts and snowmen, friends chatting merrily on the sidewalk – in short, it seemed like not a child *wasn't* outside taking advantage of the day. Except for one. One girl lounged lazily, daydreaming on her bed and taking no notice of any of the festivities. Her precious golden retriever snoozed next to her, comforted under the girl's idle hand.

“Ding dong!!” The doorbell rang – the girl hardly noticed, too deep in thought. A moment later, her mom knocked on her bedroom door and entered.

“Sandy, your friend Lily is at the door. She's wondering if you wanted to come outside and go sledding with her. What do think?”

Sandy looked up, startled, only now fully registering that something was happening. “Oh, I'm okay. Tell her I'll do it some other time.” Then, seeing that her Mom looked puzzled, she added nonchalantly, “I'm just busy.”

Her mother looked at her, a trace of concern in her otherwise sunny face. “Busy doing what?”

“Just thinking,” Sandy responded, her eyes fixed absentmindedly on a spot on the wall. “You know, just going over what happened in school today...”

The touch of concern on her mother's face now entering her voice, she said, “Sandy, it's a wonderful day out. Enjoy it! It's not every day you can go sledding. It'll be fu-un...” she said in a sing-songy voice, smiling hopefully. Then, sighing, she said, “Look, school was earlier today; focus on right now!”

Sandy just wanted to be left in peace, so she looked up and smiled in what she hoped was a reassuring way. “Mom, I'll go out later today. Really. I'm just tired.”

Her mom sighed and left the room, and Sandy regressed into daydreaming again. Her mind hopped from one thing to another; she went from that day's school to thinking about the fieldtrip to the science center her class had taken last week. . . from that she started re-watching (in her mind's eye) snippets of the movie she had seen the night before. . . after that she replayed a conversation she had had a few days ago with her friend. . . she continued to daydream in circles, but every time she replayed a certain conversation, her memory faltered as she tried to remember what was said next. Furrowing her brow, she racked her brains, but it just wouldn't come to her. She became obsessed with trying to figure out what exactly her friend had said, but she just couldn't remember.

Suddenly, she had an inspiration. What if people could store memories? What if, whenever you wanted to replay or remember something, you could just flick through your memory files? And then they'd all be accessible at the blink of an eye. Or a click of a brain cell. Or, or... or however you wanted to access them – Sandy hadn't explored the finer details yet. But this was brilliant! Sandy rushed downstairs to tell her parents.

"Mom! Dad!" she squealed, "I just thought of the coolest thing. Listen to this." And she told them all about her new idea. "In fact, I think I'm going to start working on my idea this evening. Wouldn't that be amazing if it worked?" She finished proudly. She waited for them to humor her like they always did, saying something like, "Very cool, Sandy," or "Wow, that *would* be amazing!" But instead, she found more concern in her parents' faces. Then her mother murmured to her father,

"Your turn."

Her father nodded. "Sit down, Sandy," he said gently, "We have something to discuss."

Sandy did as she was told, feeling resentful. She had been expecting, "Oh, Sandy, that's a brilliant idea! Where did you get that stroke of inspiration?" or something to that dramatic effect. But no, instead she had to receive a solemn lecture on who-knew-what.

“Sandy, every one of your siblings has come to a similar conclusion when they reached your age.”

Oh, great. Now she was being told that this ingenious idea of hers had been thought up by both of her brothers, too, and that she really wasn't as original as she had thought she was. She was NOT going to be telling her parents any more of her ideas in the future.

“You were bound to think of something like this someday,” Her father continued, “It's in your nature. You see, we – your mother and I – aren't really from here. We're kind from, em...” he paused, trying to think how to phrase it, “from a different dimension.”

Sandy snorted. Was her dad going crazy? Then she decided that to raise her eyebrow would create a nice effect of intelligent and dignified disbelief. She was going to remain stony-faced and skeptical throughout the entire conversation to show her dad that she did not appreciate his psycho ideas.

“But we... escaped... in a way,” her dad's voice was strained as he went on, “In this other dimension, we had that very ability that you just invented.”

Sandy sat up straight, “Wow, really?” Then she caught herself. What was she saying? This whole thing was ludicrous! Deciding to keep the doubtful outlook, she said, “Hold on, do you honestly think I'm going to just believe you about this alternate dimension thingy?”

“It's real, Sandy. We can show you.”

Here Sandy decided that this must be their idea of a funny joke. She hastened to forgive them for taking her on this tangent, because she wanted to get back to where they left off: congratulating her on her fabulous idea! “Ok, ok, cool ending, great story,” she said impatiently, “Now let's talk for real. Tell me – just tell me! – that this isn't the coolest idea ever.”

“I know it sounds cool, Sandy, but that wasn't just a story or a joke. This is real, and it's not as great as it sounds. Before we take you to the other dimension, can't you think of any

problematic consequences to being able to store your memories and flick through them at will?"

Sandy was taken aback, but after thinking for a moment, she replied flatly, "No." Then she added, exasperated, "And by the way, you're not taking me anywhere, because there's *nowhere to go*," How long was this story going to take?

Her father sighed resignedly, and said "Well, the only way for you to find out is to see for yourself. We did the same thing for your brothers."

"Wait, what? Jerry and Denis? They *did* go somewhere. A while ago -- you sent them somewhere, I remember it," Sandy was speaking very quickly now. Was her dad actually telling the truth? "They were only gone for less than a day. But when they came back, they had... changed." And then, in a panicky voice she added, "I don't want to change!"

Now her mother spoke for the first time, understanding etched in her kind face. "It seems scary, but don't worry, you'll change for the bet--" But Sandy interrupted,

"What about my dog, T-bone? Who will feed him when I'm gone? Who will pet him and play with him and... he gets lonely, you know," she said defiantly.

"Sandy, your dog will be fine. Remember, you'll only be gone for a day. We'll take care of him."

"But he's very sensitive. Make sure you pay attention to him. Oh, and he's very particular about the kibble versus the --"

"We know! T-bone will be fine." Her mom interjected, sharply. "We need to get going because the sooner you learn about this, the better. Trust me; you'll be glad this happened." Motioning for Sandy to follow her, she started off.

Sandy had no idea what her mom meant by "you'll be glad this happened," but she grudgingly allowed herself to be lead off to the basement. The basement was dusty, as no one

had been down there since, Sandy guessed, her brothers had been sent off. Following in her parents' footsteps, which were visible as their feet scattered the dust, Sandy found herself staring at a blank wall.

"Uh, what are we doing here?"

Then, with a snap of her mom's fingers, a door appeared. "This is the door to our other dimension. Bye for now," her mom said, smiling dryly.

Just then, T-bone trotted up and nuzzled against Sandy's leg.

"T-bone! There you are! Who's a good boy? Are you a good boy? Yes you're a very good boy, yes you are," Sandy went off a little in garbled dog-talk, then went on, "I'm going to go, now okay boy?" She hugged him around the middle. "But I'll be back. I promise." T-bone wagged his tail happily.

Sandy stood up, squared her shoulders, opened the door, and stepped over the threshold. Had she done it right? Confused, she looked around -- this was serious *déjà vu*. She was back on her home street, and she could see her house at the end. Everything looked the same: the houses, the snow, the sky, the trees... but there was one thing missing – the people. Where was everyone? Glancing behind her, she saw that not only was the door gone, but so were the people on the street in that direction, too. Had something happened? Were they all inside?

Hesitantly, the girl walked up the deserted road to her house, and knocked on the door. No answer. She rang the bell. No answer. Slowly, Sandy pushed open the door. Everything inside seemed the same, too, except that there was a man on the couch. It wasn't anyone she knew, but she waved and said hello. The man nodded almost imperceptibly, not looking at her. Walking closer, Sandy saw that his eyes looked strangely glazed-over. The man didn't seem to care that Sandy was standing directly in front of him, or that she had just barged into his house. By now Sandy was feeling a little unsettled, so she pushed on into the kitchen.

There, a lady was cooking dinner. Sandy was glad that there was finally someone doing something, although on closer inspection, the woman wasn't doing it with much care. When she filled up a cup measure, the liquid would slop over the side. When she sprinkled some seasoning over the meat, almost half of the spice landed outside the pan. Ignoring this, however, Sandy introduced herself to the woman. The lady merely lolled her head over to look at Sandy and then lolled it back to look at her cooking. She didn't speak a word. Sandy noticed with unease that she had the same glazed-over expression as the man had had. Sandy moved on hurriedly and checked upstairs.

In her own bedroom, she found a boy lounging lazily on the bed, hardly noticing when Sandy entered. He looked like he was totally zoned-out. Sandy once again said hello, trying desperately to get some sort of response out of this boy. Finally, after much arm-flailing and whistling, Sandy rested her palms on her knees, catching her breath. Then she heard him murmur,

“Hey.”

“Hi!” said Sandy, overwhelming relief sweeping over her. Still panting, she continued, “Why – why aren't you outside? It's a wonderful day out...”

He said, flatly, “I'm busy.”

“Oh. Umm... Okay.” Sandy cast around for a conversation starter. “Wait a second,” she stopped in her tracks, and idea coming to her. “Are you... you're watching memories aren't you? Whoa, way cool! I bet your parents are too, huh?”

The boy nodded minutely, but didn't look at her – he seemed otherwise engaged, and now Sandy knew why. This was so cool! Just then a golden Labrador entered the room.

“Ooooh!” Sandy squealed, “You have a dog!! He looks a little like my dog at home, did you know? What a coincidence, huh?” Sandy looked at the boy for a response. Finally realizing

that she probably wouldn't get one (he seemed too preoccupied), she looked back at the dog. "Oh, em... is – is he okay?" Sandy looked closer at the dog.

He looked like he was all fur and bones. The dog's ribs were clearly outlined through the matted fur, and his tail was in between his weak-looking legs. Sunken and sad, the animal's face gazed pleadingly at Sandy. Her heart reached out for this creature that looked so much like T-bone.

"Oh, you poor, poor dear! When were you last fed, huh sweetie?" Sandy asked gently, before rounding angrily on the apathetic boy on the bed and demanding, "When was this dog last fed?" No response. "Hey! Answer me! This dog is starving! How can you just lie there – do something!"

"Shhh," the boy moaned, flapping his hand at Sandy, "this is a good part."

"Oh, a good part? In your memory?" she said sardonically, "and that's more important than your starving dog?" She was staring at the boy as if she had never seen anything like him before. "You don't care, do you? You're too busy watching your past – you and your parents too!"

And in that moment, she knew. She knew why she had had to come here. These people in this dimension were absorbed in the past, constantly replaying things. Their life was slipping away. Now she knew why her mom had seemed concerned earlier. Sandy had been engrossed in things that had already happened instead of the things that were happening at the time! Sandy promised to herself that from that moment on she would cling to the present – she wouldn't let any opportunity slip by her, because she understood that she couldn't just re-watch the past and that she had to make *now* the happy memory. Suddenly, she couldn't stand watching this boy, knowing he was what she could have become.

"Come on," she said to the dog.

With the dog loping alongside her, Sandy hurried back out the door, leapt down the stairs, flew out the front, sprinted down the street, and stopped in front of where she knew the portal must be. Hesitantly, she snapped her fingers. There was the door. Flinging it open, she saw her parents.

“Thanks guys. You were right. Now if you could take this dog and give him as much food as he will eat, I have something I need to do.” Dodging past her beaming parents, she ran up the steps two-at-a-time, hurled herself through the door, and pounded out of the house. Amidst the whirl of merry faces frolicking in the snow, she finally spotted her friend, Lily. Catching her breath, Sandy said, “Hey! I would *love* to go sledding!”