

## Letters to Julia

My sneakers hit the solid wooden stairs as I ran up them, going as fast as I could with a heavy, wheeled suitcase crashing along behind me. "No fair!" I yelled as I ran. "I called it!"

"Too bad, so sad!" She called back. I could hear sounds upstairs, probably her unpacking in the room. *My* room. She was being loud on purpose, trying to make me angry, and it worked.

I reached the hallway and sprinted down it, my suitcase clattering behind me, throwing open the door at the end of the hall. Emma was sitting on the bed, her legs crossed, a smug little smirk on her cute little eight-year-old face. I could see her clothes thrown haphazardly into the dresser, and her toys were spread out on the floor. I crossed my arms. "That doesn't count as unpacking." I growled.

"Yes it does!" She told me, uncrossing her legs and swinging them back and forth, knocking her heels against the wooden bedframe.

I crossed the room, took out all the clothes and threw them on the floor. "Now you're not."

Now I was the one smirking. Emma screwed up her face in an angry scowl and began to wail. "Mo-m! Mommy!"

"What's going on, you two?" I spun around. My mom was standing behind me, her arms crossed the same way I crossed mine when I was angry. Her blond hair, the same color as Emma's but the polar opposite of mine, was still pulled up in a ponytail from when she left our old home, but now it was crooked and strands were escaping. It had obviously been a long drive. My mother was usually such a neat freak. "Well?" She tapped her foot. "I'm waiting, Lillian!"

"Me?" I cried, affronted. "Why do you always assume it's my fault? Emma stole my room!"

My mother sighed. "The deal was that whatever room you unpacked in, as long as it wasn't the master bedroom, would be yours, and it looks like Emma's claimed this one."

“But...I...!” I could tell by my mother’s face that she’d made up her mind, despite the fact that this was the room I’d had my eyes on ever since I’d first seen pictures of the house. I’d even picked exactly where all of my stuff would go. It was the only thing that made planning for a move to a town I’d never even heard of before bearable, the thought of having a nice, new, big room that I wouldn’t have to share with my sister. But now even that was being taken away, and I could tell by my mother’s face that arguing was useless. Emma was only eight, and since I was six years older I was supposed to be the “mature” one, which usually meant giving something up. “Fine.” I hissed, stomping off. I yanked open the door of the room adjacent to my – wait, no- my sister’s room, and pulled my suitcase inside with me. Then I slammed the door.

Shoving my suitcase over angrily (It created a satisfying crash, I might add), I ran over to the bed and flopped down onto it. Then I scanned the room. The bed was wooden, like in the other room, with a colorful quilt on it, and the walls were cream. The quilt was very pretty, and I had to admire it despite myself. It was nice of the last owners to leave so much of their furniture for us, especially since the stuff was so nice. The pattern on the quilt looked like a flock of birds, and I traced it quietly, calming down a bit. Then I looked up and got angry all over again. This room was much smaller than the other one, and the cream walls were boring, though I supposed I could put up a few of my old movie posters to add some color. Standing up, I stalked over to my suitcase and threw it open. “Better unpack before someone takes this room away from me too.” I mumbled sullenly.

As I pulled things out and threw them onto the floor, I find a picture of my best friends, Stacy and Marcy, and I, our arms around each other’s shoulders, laughing. Marcy’s so happy that her glasses are completely crooked, and Stacy, Marcy’s fraternal twin, is giving her bunny ears. I sigh. I had to leave all that, a perfect life, though I didn’t realize it at the time, to come here, to a place where I was alone and friendless.

After I finish sorting my clothes, I begin to pick them up and put them in the drawers of the big, light-colored wooden dresser. As I pick up my favorite shirt, a faded band shirt from the 60’s, it catches on something. I yank on it, hard, and it

comes free, yanking a piece of the floorboard loose. Curious, I lean down to look at what's happened. A piece of the floor, nearly identical to the rest, is actually hiding some kind of opening!

I move the wood, and in the small space underneath there is a box, a white, shoebox with initials carefully lettered on. "S.M. + J.L." I read aloud. "Best friends forever."

Now I'm really curious. I carefully pull the box out of the hole, wiping away the dust with my fingertips, leaving long, clean streaks like markings in wet sand. Opening it, I find a pile of paper, yellowed with age, and littered with small objects. Lying on top is a snapshot of two girls, one with long, curly blond hair and the other with short black hair a lot like mine. They look about my age. The one with black hair is sitting on top of the monkey bars, her legs dangling over the edge, while the other girl is standing below, looking up at her and grinning. I turn the photo over. Written the back in the same neat print as the letters on the box are the words "My best friend, Julia, and I". Thumbing through the rest of the papers, I notice a stack of envelopes. On each is written a date and "To Julia". The first one is dated March third. I open it, pull out the letter inside, and begin to read.

*Dear Julia,*

*How are you? Do you like your new home? Is the house nice? Are the other children at your new school nice? These are some of the many things I would love to ask you. I would have called you by now, but the phone is down and Mother hasn't gotten around to having anyone fix it yet. I also lost your address (like usual), and until I find it I will be unable to actually send you any of the letters I write. However, I will continue to write them anyway. Today Mrs. Wright gave us a math test. You would have passed easily, but I worry that I didn't do as well as I would have liked without your tutoring.*

*It also felt very strange to walk home alone. I miss you so much.*

*Your friend,*

*Samantha Myers*

I frown sadly. I used to walk to school with Stacy and Marcy every day. I wondered if they missed me as much as this girl obviously missed her friend. I open the next one, this one dated March fifth.

*Dear Julia,*

*Is it stupid to write letters that you will never read? I don't think so. I just need someone to talk to, and I think that writing letters to you is a lot less stupid than writing in a diary. Today wasn't a very good day. I walked into Daniel at school, and when I said hi, he ignored me, as usual. Maybe you're right. Maybe he is wrong for me.*

*Then, when I got home, I found Laura in my room, messing with my things. She knocked over a glass of juice onto my copy of "All Things Great and Small" and now the book is ruined. Mother took her side, as usual. Now I am in trouble for yelling at Laura, and I'll probably never find out the ending. I wish you were here.*

*Your Friend,*

*Samantha*

This time I grin. It seems like this girl, whoever she was, also had sibling trouble. The third was dated March seventh.

*Dear Julia,*

*I have given up on Daniel. Today he was so rude to Mrs. Wright, I think that he might be expelled. I don't even want to repeat what he said, though you would find it funny. I finally see him for what he is: a rude, egotistical idiot. I told him off in the hallway. You should have seen his face! You would have been proud.*

*Your friend,*

*Samantha*

*P.S. A new family moved in next door, where you used to live. They have a daughter about my age, named Claudia. So far, she seems kind but very shy. She goes to our school. Don't worry, she'll never replace you! Miss you!*

Although I don't even know Samantha, I feel happy for her for telling that boy off. I hope things turned out all right for her, in the end. There was only one letter left, dated March tenth. I pulled it out, and another piece of paper fell out with it. I picked it up and looked at it. It was a quickly drawn sketch of a girl with big eyes and a round, pretty face. In the sketch, she was looking down slightly, as if avoiding eye contact. I unfolded the letter.

*Dear Julia,*

*My mother finally called a handyman to fix the phone. Soon I will be able to actually speak to you! Also, more good news! She says that, if you want, you may come and visit for a while during spring break! I can't wait, and I really hope you will be able to. We could do all of our traditional things, like go to the lake or play at the park (Which, by the way, is getting new equipment soon, including a whole new sports field!) I also want you to meet Claudia. I've been spending time with her, and she's really nice. I included a sketch, so you can see what she looks like. She has black hair, like yours but a bit lighter, and lots of freckles. She and I have been spending a lot of time together. Turns out she likes to read as much as I do, and she has lots of great jokes you would love. Have you made any new friends? I hope you have, but never forget to stay in*

*touch with me!*

*See you soon,*

*Samantha*

For a moment, I just sit still on the ground, wondering. Did Samantha see Julia again? Did she and Claudia become good friends? I pause for a moment, then stand, rising up off the floor, the letters and photo clutched in my hand. I placed the letters in my new desk, then placed the photo in the place of honor next to the photo of my friends and I. Looking at them together, I think about how amazing it is that I could have so much in common with a girl I'd never met. Then I pull my laptop out of its sleeve and turn it on, opening my email and starting a new one.

*"Dear Stacy and Marcy..."* I begin.