

IF SADNESS HAD A TASTE

Prologue

It all started with her.

I looked out my window one day and saw a moving van pull up at the house next door. The house was vacant. The previous owner had passed away several years ago.

I watched as furniture was unloaded and carried into the house. It was a nice brick house with a cheerful red door. The setting sun glinted on the stained glass window in the attic.

I remembered, years ago, going over to visit the kind, elderly woman. The woman's name was Ruth, but she let me call her Mimi like all her grandchildren. She always had a fresh baked treat waiting for me when I came over. Whenever my parents needed a babysitter I would say, "Call Mimi! Call Mimi!"

When she passed away it was truly the worst day of my life. I had never had a close family member die and this felt like a piece had been torn from my heart. The sadness I felt that day might never compare to any other.

As I watched the furniture being carried into the house that day, I thought that maybe a new friend would move in to fill that empty place in my heart.

I was wrong.

The first time I saw the new girl was the first day after winter break. It had only been a couple of days since they moved in and I was chatting quietly with my friends at my desk when she walked in. She was tall with a long, brown ponytail sprouting from the top of her head. She had a blue t-shirt with *stay cool* printed on the front. She set down her books at the desk next to mine.

I introduced myself. "Hi, my name is Abby."

"I'm Jennifer."

I extended my hand in a friendly manner. She smiled, but did not shake it. I quickly retracted my hand as if it had never been there.

All my friends were gathered around the new girl. What if they liked the new girl more than they liked me? What if they didn't want to be friends with me anymore? I stayed at my desk until the bell rang.

At lunch recess, I sat alone on a swing watching my friends play with the new girl. My stomach was tied in knots.

Later that day, Jennifer came up to me and said, 'Hey, I'm sorry if it seems like I stole your friends during recess. Would you like to hang out tomorrow? We should get each other's phone numbers.' She smiled sweetly and looked down at me. I smiled back but for some reason I had a knot in my stomach bigger than the one I had before.

The next day at recess, my friends were playing tag with Jennifer again so I walked over to Sally and asked if she wanted to play ball with me. We bounced the ball back and forth to each other a couple times and then I saw Jennifer coming over. I thought she might want to play with us but she grabbed my arm and pulled me to the side. She looked angry. I thought I had offended her somehow.

Her voice was sharp as she said, "If you keep playing with Sally then I won't hang out with you." She walked away as though nothing had happened. Of course I went back to playing with Sally but I couldn't believe Jennifer had said that.

After school I waited for my mom to come and pick me up. Jennifer handed me a piece of paper and a pencil and her number and I reluctantly wrote down mine. When I got home of course there was no one there. My mom had dropped me off and hurried back to work. I grabbed a snack and ran up to my room to text Jennifer.

I threw myself on the bed and pulled out my phone. It was then that I saw on the top of the dresser a picture frame I had forgotten was there, face down. I walked over to the dresser and picked up the picture. It was a picture of me with Mimi. I was coated in flour, wearing a red apron, holding a whisk. I had a big smile, missing my two front teeth. Tucked in the corner of the picture frame was a little slip of folded up paper. It looked old. The handwriting was scrawled but I was still able to read it. It was Mimi's handwriting, a recipe for Lemon-lime Cake. That was what we had been baking in that picture. I completely forgot about Jennifer. I grabbed the recipe and hurried downstairs to the kitchen. I pulled out a big bowl and a whisk and the necessary ingredients. Then I remembered all the tricks Mimi had taught me. How to crack the eggs in a container before you put them in to avoid pouring shells into the batter. That you could add a little bit of extra lemon and lime juice to make it zesty.

Before I knew it, the cake was out of the oven and cooled. I made a frosty lemon-lime glaze and drizzled it on top. I added a sprinkle of lemon zest and a dash of lime. It looked exactly as I remembered it. Then I realized that I had forgotten about the day entirely as my hands had mixed the batter and poured it into the pans. It felt good, like I wasn't in the real world anymore. In a place far far away where nothing could hurt me and I was with Mimi again.

The next day my music teacher announced that we were going to do a school play of Romeo and Juliet and that the auditions were tomorrow. When I got home I was so excited that I could hardly eat. Late that night my dad had to tell me for the fifth time to turn off my light and go to sleep, but even when I did turn off the light and lay down I still couldn't go to sleep. I woke up with excitement and nervousness swirling around inside me. I jumped out of bed and put on clothes as fast as I could. My mom had put a Pop Tart out for me before she went to work. I grabbed my bag and ran to the bus stop with the Pop Tart clenched between my teeth. I ran into the classroom at full tilt which caused my teacher to ask, "Where's the fire?"

I could hardly wait for music class. I was going to audition for the part of Juliet. When we got to the music room my teacher said that the people who wanted to audition should line up at the front of the classroom. I was second in line.

When it was my turn I said, "Hi, my name is Abby, and I want the part of Juliet." I read the lines as if they were very familiar to me. I walked back to my seat thinking that I was sure to get the part.

The next day the cast list was taped to the music room door. I ran up the stairs at lunch time to check. I looked for Juliet and my name was not there. I searched the whole list but my name was nowhere on it. My heart sank as I walked back to the lunch room. It felt like someone had punched me in the stomach.

When I got home, as usual, the house was empty. I ran up to my room and opened my little bedside table and pulled out a small box. Inside were small slips of paper. Every one of them had Mimi's writing scribbled on them. I remembered yesterday how I had felt so happy when I had been baking. And I now remembered Mimi telling me to bake how I felt, so I picked a Chocolate Lava Cake from her recipes. I ran down the stairs and began melting the butter and chocolate. For the next few hours, I lost all touch with the real world. My sadness vanished like the last bits of snow on the first day of Spring.

The next day, I packed a thick slice of Chocolate Lava Cake with its moist cake and gooey chocolate lava. It made me smile to remember making that exact recipe with Mimi. That day was pretty uneventful but all day I was looking forward to getting home to bake a recipe that I remembered Mimi baking only on very

special occasions. It was a Love Cake. Mimi made it with me on her mom's birthday. Her mom had died many years before I was born. She would always say that you can't make a cake without love but especially not this one. She would add a drop of salt water to symbolize a tear and a sprinkle of orange zest to symbolize happiness.

After school I dumped the little box of recipes out on the counter. I searched through the slips of paper but could not find what I was looking for. I put my head in my hands and then all of a sudden a memory flashed in the back of my mind. I thought hard about the Love Cake and I could remember being with Mimi and she was talking to me as she pulled down flour and sugar and baking powder and salt. She pulled out a bowl and put 5 dashes of salt in it and added warm water.

Then it all came back to me. I remembered. I mixed ingredients together, added water and oil. At the very end I zested an orange and sprinkled a little bit into the batter. Then I dropped one drop of salt water into the bowl. Then I poured it into pans and placed them in the oven. The sweet smell of the baking cake reminded me of the spring afternoons that I would spend on the porch with Mimi sipping iced lemonade and the smell of cake wafting out the open window and catching on a warm breeze. She told me that one day I would be the best baker in the world and that she was proud of how far I had come. A tear ran down my cheek as I remembered all the fun memories that I had with her.

At that moment I realized that I didn't need a recipe to make one of Mimi's cakes. I just needed the memory of all the fun times we had had together baking. This made me smile.

The oven timer beeped and I pulled the perfectly browned cakes out of the oven. I iced the cakes with that feeling of happiness still hovering around me. I cut a slice and it tasted perfect, exactly like the Love Cakes I made with Mimi.

Epilogue

I remember that Mimi always made a little treat for the grouchy old woman who lived across the street. She used to say, "That woman has never been nice to me, but sometimes you just have to kill 'em with kindness." I thought about the unkindness that Jennifer had shown me and I decided to do something about it. I found Mimi's old recipe for Angel Food Cake. While the cakes were baking, I made a fluffy white vanilla frosting. For the finishing touch I topped it with a handful of chopped berries. I put it on a nice plate and carried it over to Jennifer's house. I knocked on the door and Jennifer opened it.

“Oh. Hi.” She looked surprised to see me.

“I made you a cake.” I handed her the cake.

I turned to walk away, but she called after me. “I am sorry for those things I said to you at school. Maybe we could hang out sometime? Could you teach me how to bake?”

I turned around. “I would love to.”