

The Day That Changed Everything

“Honey, you know those kids we just met?” Mom says. Her face is anxious and filled with hope. “Yeah,” I say. How can I not? Their pale faces, twisted with hunger and fear. “You know how the lady Erica said they were foster children?” I nod. “Like I was?” Mom sighs and nods too. “Like you were.” She says, “They’re like you, Ava. Like you were. That’s why I’m asking you to help me welcome them into our home.” I gasp. I feel as though a forty ton train rammed me in the stomach. “Wha- what?” Mom’s face droops. “You’re not okay with it?” My face breaks into a grin. “Of course I am.” I say. Mom smiles and we laugh together.

I wait anxiously for Mom’s car to pull up in the driveway. I peer through the window and bite my nails. What will this new arrangement be like? Two new kids. Ever since my Dad died last year in a fire Mom hasn’t been the same. She’s been lonely. More kids is just what she needs to help her out. Suddenly I see it; a light blue mini-van pulling into our driveway. And after that, everything’s a blur.

They’re like I remember them. Both with brown hair and chestnut skin. One of them is a boy, the other a girl. They have brown eyes and are wearing well worn clothes. They look scared. Mom comes in the door. Her face is wet with sweat and she’s biting her lip so hard blood is pouring out. She’s scared like me and the twins. “Ava, I would like you to meet Alisha and Jason. Alisha is five and Jason is seven.” I nod, and give a smile. Alisha tugs on Mom’s skirt and Jason fumbles with his fingers. “I’m Ava.” I point to myself as I say this, as though they are dumb. They aren’t, and they give me a weird look when I do it.

Wonderful, just what I need for their first impression on me. They probably think I’m some kind of wacko who can’t think straight. Suddenly, out of the blue, Alisha starts crying. She grabs her stomach and falls weakly to the ground. She coughs and after a minute, throws up all over the floor. Mom is surprised and sprints to the paper towels. Jason, who is still calm, kneels beside his sister and mumbles a few things. She nods and her crying simmers down to a whimper. Suddenly Mom is back, paper towels and cleaning spray in each hand. She cleans up the mess while I am being dumb, standing there, waiting, still recovering from the shock. Now Alisha is fine, begging for food. “Ava will get you two some food. Go see her while I clean up this mess.”

Soon I am in the kitchen, Alisha and Jason on the counter, eating popsicles and granola bars. Both their mouths are stained red and purple and they are smiling, giddy with excitement. I help myself to a popsicle too; one mission is complete. If only I knew there were so many more to come.