This is a Sample of the Book Proposal we create for $299

A Book Proposal For

Coming Back from Invisible

(working title)

By: Sally Sample

Middle Grade Drama
Words: 37,500

Sally Sample

SELL SHEET

Working Title: ***Coming Back from Invisible***

Word Count: 37,500 words

Genre: Middle Grade - Drama
Back Cover Copy:

"Good Night Moon" and morning hugs. Kite flying and wheelbarrow walking. Laughter. Church on Sundays. Happiness. Love. Then, poof! Gone.

Twelve year old, Jessa, might forgive her Dad if she didn't hate him so much for wrecking her family. Everything changed when he got himself thrown in the slammer more than five years ago. Her once patient Mom turned into a stress case. Her uncle took off. Money ran out. And God stopped answering prayers.

When Jessa has to move from Pennsylvania to Cape Cod to live with her Grandpa, it feels like a death sentence. Moving means saying goodbye to her best friend and leaving her treasured cat behind.

Furious with the adults in her life, Jessa bounds with her Grandpa's goofy dog. She also develops a special relationship with her quirky, young neighbor and his tough (but very cute) older brother. When the boys are able to forgive their abusive father for his mistake, Jessa must take a closer look at what it truly means to be a family.

Primary Audience:

Middle Grade Children (ages 11-15)

Issues of Unique Interest:

- Loss of parents
- Transitions
- Forgiveness
- Love/support of grandparent
- Friendship

Short Author Bio:

Susan Atterstrom has sold inspirational essays to magazines, such as, American Baby, Listen for teens, and Guideposts Sweet 16. As a long time speech-language pathologist in both private and public school settings, she has met a lot of middle grade readers, which have inspired her stories.

SYNOPSIS

Twelve year old Jessa used to have a happy life. That is, until her Dad ruined it by losing his temper and accidently killing a man when she was in the first grade. Everything changed when he went to jail. Her loving Mom turned bitter. Her live-in uncle took off without a goodbye.

Even her Grandpa stopped caring. Jessa can't forgive her Dad for what he did. And she's pretty mad at God, too, for allowing it all happen. Fortunately, Jessa has her best friend, Emily. She also has her cat, Clawdia, who is the only one who knows how much she secretly misses her Dad. Things go from bad to worse when Jessa's Mom loses her job and they have to move from Pennsylvania to Cape Cod…without Clawdia!

Jessa is steaming mad when she arrives on Cape Cod to live with her Dad's father, the Grandpa she hasn't seen since she was six. She deals with her anger by escaping into her wacky imagination. She is comforted by her Grandpa's weird dog, Doug the Pug. He helps Jessa cope while her Mom sneaks cigarettes, her Grandpa sneaks junk food, and the two of them fight all the time.

When Jessa meets her sweet, young neighbor, Lou, who can't say his "L" sounds and loves to eat pickles, she finds she is not the only one with problems. Lou has a dead mother, an abusive father, and an older brother, Tino, who has anger issues of his own. Jessa's relationship with Tino is rocky at first. When he does mean things, Jessa finds ways to get back at him (like putting dog poop in his Reeboks!)

The truth about Jessa's family unfolds when her Grandpa leads her to letters written by her Dad. In them, she finds out her Dad killed the man to protect his brother. Jessa is too furious with her Dad to care about his excuses. She is also devastated to find out how many secrets her Mom kept

from her about her family.

Lou falls on a bee's nest and almost dies from an allergic reaction. His father goes after Tino for not watching his brother more closely, which leads to a frightening moment of abuse. Jessa is suddenly faced with the same decision her Dad once had: *How far do I go to protect someone I care about?* She picks up a huge rock, has a clear shot at Tino's father's head, gets ready to hurl it, but then stops herself.

Lou's near death brings Jessa and Tino closer, resulting in a unique friendship and first crush. When Tino and Lou's father apologizes to them and makes a promise to get help, the boys forgive him. This makes Jessa take a closer look at what it means to be a family. And maybe, just maybe, she doesn't have to stay so made at her Dad…and God… after all.

MARKET ANALYSIS

Target Market (niche-markets, affinity groups, etc.):

- Christian Youth Groups
- Middle Grader readers
- Those who subscribe to publications such as: *Focus On The Family Clubhouse, Sisterhood Magazine and* other inspirational publications for Middle Graders.
- Readers who follow blogs such as:
  - Ink Splot 26 – blog.scholastic.com
  - School Family – www.schoolfamily.com

Fiction Imitates Real Life:

- Approximately 744,200 fathers were held in the nations prisons at midyear 2007
- According to the U.S. Census Bureau in November 2009, there are approximately 13.7 million single parents in the United States.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Love Aubrey
Author: Suzanne LaFleur
Hardcover: 272 pages
Publisher: Yearling (kindle edition)
Release Date: February 8, 2011
ISBN-10: 0375851593
ISBN-13: 978-0375851599

Retail Price: $6.29
Love Aubry is a deeply moving middle-grade novel that deals with tragedy. Aubrey has suffered an unbelievable loss, and goes to live with her grandmother in Vermont to heal. There she makes new friends, learns to cope with what has happened, and begins to figure out how to move on. *Coming Back from Invisible* has Jessa moving to a new place and forming a bond with her grandfather. She, too, deals with the loss of a parent – emotionally. Although, this story is more geared for a Christian audience, it has humorous elements despite the "heavy" topics.

Moon Over Manifest
Author: Clare Vanderpool
Hardcover: 368 pages
Publisher: Yearling (paperback)
Release Date: reprint edition December 27, 2011
ISBN-10: 0375858296
ISBN-13: 978-0375858291
Retail Price: $7.19

Moon Over Manifest is the journey of Abilene Tucker. Abilene feels abandon when her father sends her off to stay with an old friend for the summer. She jumps off the train in her father's childhood town of Manifest, Kansas. She makes friends and discovers that weave her own story into the history of the town.

Coming Back from Invisible is also a journey of a young girl who goes through similar trails of feeling the loss of a father in her life. She too, discovers truths from the past, and makes new friends in a new town.

The Humming Room
Author: Ellen Potter
Hardcover: 192 pages
Publisher: Feiwel & Friends (paperback)
Release Date: February 28, 2012
ISBN-10: 0312644388
ISBN-13: 978-0312644383
Retail Price: $12.46

When Roo becomes an orphan she is taken to live with her uncle in *The Humming Room*, she is must adjust to living on an island far from the main land. She never sees her uncle and soon discovers a hidden past about her family. She makes friends with a folklore legend and her cousin. While unlocking the secrets of the humming room, she finds peace and acceptance of a new family.

Coming Back from Invisible unveils a family mystery to allow Jessa to understand her father's imprisonment and find peace through God. Her new friend Lou helps and his family help her realize that other families have problems and give her the opportunity for forgiveness.

MARKET STRATAGIES

Blog Tour

- Arrange for guest posts on blogs on parenting, middle grade, and homeschooling sites along with author blogs and book promo blogs.

Book Club

- Questions at the end of the book
- A book curriculum kit will be created to provide teachers with group discussion resources. Classes and groups will be offered a Webcam, speakerphone or Skype phone call with the author to interact with school classrooms and youth group attendees.
- Will provide opportunities for bulk sales to book clubs and schools.
- Online book club through Facebook
- Contest for book giveaway and appearances

Chapter Excerpts

- Pediatrician Offices
- Churches – provided copies to youth leaders
- Coffee Shops
- Information-Brochure walls in mall food courts near restrooms

Pre-teen and Teen Magazines (query articles with *Coming Back from Invisible* mentioned in author bio)

- *Discovery Girls*
- *American Girl*
- *Focus on the Family Clubhouse*

<u>Other Promotional Plans Include:</u>

- Customized media kit designed and sent to reviewers, interviewers, media, organizations and more. This kit will include: press release and/or one-sheet brochure, book for review, and other customized press materials. A professional, individualized follow-up will be made to each media outlet and organization that receives a press kit.
- E-blasts will be created to go to media, organizations, and target audiences. These e-blasts will be creatively designed with professional layouts, full-color photos of the book cover and authors, and will use current promotional methods for novels, to create buzz.
- Media hits will be secured on local, regional and national levels. Will target near home base, near speaking engagements and book signings, as well as other travels to maximize book exposure during travels.
- Will tie in this book to current events and hot topics to create popular interest.
- Find appropriate venues to serve as expert (such as speaking at youth group gatherings, women's groups, and youth camps).
- Book campaign and author campaign to target television, radio, print and Internet.

- Will offer unique programs with selling opportunities for In-store and in-church events.
- Vertical marketing strategies will be implemented to target niche markets.

Social Networking and Online Presence:

- Customization of a website or flash page specifically for this book project.
- Podcasts, YouTube and tangle.com will be created for book trailers and author interviews.
- A blog will be designed to discuss the issues in this book. Guest writers/experts will be invited to participate to broaden exposure.
- Social networking will create a buzz via facebook, twitter, linked-in, and more
- Author to create and maintain a social presence in networks mentioned above.
- Internet exposure will abound in the form of: book reviews, author interviews, feature articles about the authors, and blog tours.

MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Atterstrom
As a long time speech-language pathologist in both private and public school settings, she has access to middle grade readers, teachers, and librarians to support the promotion of her book.

Life Experience:

Susan moved out of state when she entered middle school. She knows firsthand how hard it is to adjust to a new life, especially one that was nothing like the one left behind. It was a sad and painful time, which allowed her to develop and bring to life her main character who faces many similar changes.

Published Works:
Has sold articles for venues such as:

- American Baby
- Listen for teens
- Guideposts Sweet 16

Memberships:

- Society of Children Book Writers and Illustrators
- Graduate of Institute of Children's Literature

Awards and Honors:

- Past runner-up winner of picture book contest sponsored by Scholastic Books and Woman's Day Magazine.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 – Jessa and her mother move from Pennsylvania to Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Not only does Jessa have to say goodbye to her best friend Emily, but her beloved cat Clawdia, as well.

Chapter 2 – Jessa arrives at Grandpa's house. She meets Lou, who throws stones at her window at night.

Chapter 3 –Grandpa insist they attend church, and Jessa wonders if God is invisible just like her dad.

Chapter 4 –Jessa meets Tino, Lou's fourteen year-old brother. He tells her to go back where she came from, and she'd really like to.

Chapter 5 –Lou spends all day in a little shed hiding from his alcoholic father. Jessa confesses to Lou that her dad killed someone.

Chapter 6 –Jessa discovers a stack of letters from her dad on her grandfather's dresser while getting a candy bar from his hidden stash. Grandpa gives Jessa permission to read the letters.

Chapter 7 –Clawdia is missing from Emily's house and now Jessa's mom wants her to go to some lame fair. She agrees to go if Grandpa and Mom will stop arguing.

Chapter 8 –She invites Lou to the fair. Tino packs Lou's things and shows Jessa how to use Lou's EpiPen in case he gets stung by a bee. All the while, the boys' father is passed out on the couch inside their house.

Chapter 9 –While at the fair Jessa loses sight of Lou. She fears she has lost him just like she has lost her father and her cat Clawdia.

Chapter 10 –Back from the fair, Jessa goes in Grandpa's room to get her dad's letters. Mom comes home and catches Jessa in Grandpa's room. Grandpa covers for her and the letters are left for another time.

Chapter 11 –Jessa goes to the beach with Tino and Lou. It brings back memories of when she visited here with her dad.

Chapter 12 –Grandpa and Jess go to the group home to visit Uncle Jason. She hasn't seen Uncle Jason since her dad left for prison five years ago. Jessa faints after discovering that Mom sent Uncle Jason away after her dad left.

Chapter 13 –Jessa finds Tino in Grandpa's room. He's Grandpa's junk food supplier. Tino tries to apologize, but they both end up insulting each other. Then Tino reminds her that her dad is a murder.

Chapter 14 –Jessa finds a letter for her from her dad in Grandpa's room. She reads the letter and knows the truth. Her dad never meant to kill a man. He lost his temper defending Uncle Jason and hit a man. The man fell back, hit his head, and died later.

Chapter 15 –Tino tosses Lou into a bee's nest while playing around in the backyard. The boys' father comes out in a drunken rage and Jessa picks up a rock. Her mom takes the rock and Lou is taken to the hospital. Just like her dad, Jessa realizes she could have killed someone by accident.

Chapter 16 –Lou stays over-night at the hospital. Jessa and her mom argue about her father and her mom slaps her. Grandpa tells her mom to leave.

Chapter 17 –Jessa's mom confesses to Jessa that her dad hurt her mom when he left. So, her mom wanted to hurt her dad by not letting him have contact with Jessa while he is in prison. Mom apologizes.

Chapter 18 –Tino and Lou's father apologizes, too. They're more forgiving than Jessa. Even after their father hurt them, they still love their father. But Jessa isn't sure if she can do the same.

Chapter 19 –Jessa is surprised when her best friend, Emily's, mother shows up at Grandpa's house with Clawdia. Emily's parents are getting a divorce. Jessa always thought Emily's family was so perfect.

Chapter 20 –Jessa writes her dad a letter. He's getting out in a few months, and she wants him to know that she can't wait to see him when he comes home.

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

Chapter One

~Saying Goodbye~

My life was scheduled to end on June 30th. That's how it felt anyway.

"Oh Clawdia," I said, flopping down on my bed. "I don't want to go!"

Clawdia purred, bumped her furry head against my cheek, and then did what she did best. She listened.

I had been talking to my cat for five years. Ever since the end of first grade when Dad went to jail. She was the only one who knew how much I hated him for wrecking our family. And the only one who knew how much I prayed he'd come back.

So there I was on the night of June 29th telling her my life was officially over, when Mom barged in my room and saw the suitcases and boxes still empty on the floor.

"We're leaving tomorrow, Jessa!" she said, in her usual frustrated voice. "What are you waiting for?"

"To wake up from this nightmare."

Mom closed her eyes and pinched the top of her nose. That's what she always does to keep herself from snapping. She took a deep breath and told me in a calmer voice to finish packing. Then she asked me what I wanted for supper.

"For my last meal?" I asked. "How 'bout lobster or prime rib?"

I'd heard about these fancy meals for prisoners on death row. They're the people who've done really bad things and have to die because of their mistakes. Yet, before they're put to

sleep forever, they get to ask for something yummy. I still don't get that. What could possibly taste good to someone about to be dead? Even though Dad did something really bad, he didn't have to die. He just had to stay locked up until he learned his lesson.

"Hmmm…let's see, Clawdia," I said, rubbing my chin. "What should my last meal be?"

"Stop being ridiculous," Mom said. "You can't possibly compare *moving* to *dying*!"

It didn't feel ridiculous to me. I couldn't stand the thought of never again sharing homework answers with my best friend, Emily. Or never hearing her little sister giggle when I made goofy faces at her. Or never smelling the oak logs her father burned in their fireplace, even when it wasn't cold outside. What would I do without her mother's homemade lasagna that she made especially for me because she knew it was my favorite? I couldn't imagine never again feeling like I belonged somewhere.

I wanted to freeze time in the same way I could freeze the kids in my neighborhood when we played flashlight tag at night. But, even after I smeared glue all over the back of May to keep the calendar page from turning, Mom managed to pry the paper apart. May remained the same, like how I looked on the outside. June was all torn up.

"Things don't always work out the way we plan," Mom said. "You'll just have to get used to it."

How could I ever get used to *anything* when my life was such a mess? Before I fell asleep that night, I told Clawdia I wished my family could go back to the way it was when I was little. When Dad wasn't in jail and his brother, Uncle Jason, still lived with us. When Mom wasn't mad all the time. Clawdia had heard all that before, but still, she listened.

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Emily's entire family came to say goodbye the next afternoon. We stood in front of my house in silence for a few minutes while Mom packed the last of our things in the car, then got in herself. It was time to go.

Emily's father balanced her little sister on his shoulders with one hand and shook my hand with the other.

"Good luck, Jessa," he said, in a serious voice I'd never heard him use before.

Her mother hugged me and whispered, "You're special and I'll miss you so much."

Or maybe she just hugged me and I pretended the rest. Either way, I didn't want her to let go of me.

"Take care, everyone," Mom shouted, revving the car engine. "Come on, Jessa!"

Emily's mother stepped away. I looked at Emily.

"See ya," she mumbled, staring down at her feet.

I didn't know what to do. I wanted to tell her to never forget me. I wanted to thank her for being my best friend. I wanted to say so many things, but my voice was trapped under a lump in my throat the size of a grenade. Finally, I reached out and touched Emily's hand for about a second. Anything longer than that might have made me look as pathetic as I felt. I just had to touch her so I'd always remember that she was real.

I scooped Clawdia up off the grass and rushed into the backseat of the car. Then I buried my face in her fur so no one would see my tears.

"Don't hate me, Jessa," Mom said, resting her head on the steering wheel. "But the cat is staying."

At first, I thought she was joking. We wouldn't possibly leave Clawdia behind.

"What?" I asked, praying she *was* joking.

"I didn't mention it sooner because I knew you'd flip out. With everything I've had to do to get ready for this move, I couldn't listen to you complain about leaving the cat. Your grandfather made it clear that when we move in with him, there are no pets allowed."

She wasn't joking.

The grenade in my throat started to explode. Not only couldn't I speak, I was having trouble breathing. My head shook "no" over and over, like some broken toy doll.

"Emily and her family will take good care of her," Mom said. "They'll even send pictures."

The car door opened. I squeezed my kitty tighter. Emily's mother leaned in, wiped my cheeks, and said, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Then we played tug-o-war with Clawdia until she won. The last thing I felt was a soaking wet tail slip through my fingers. The last thing I saw was Emily waving Clawdia's paw up and down to say "goodbye". I wished I had never looked back.

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"I know what you're trying to do, Jessa, but it's not gonna work," Mom shouted, over the blaring radio. "We have a long ride ahead of us and you have to talk to me sometime. It's not my fault we can't afford to stay."

"Then whose fault is it?" I shouted back.

"I didn't ask to be laid off from work!"

"You could have found a new job!"

"I didn't go to college, remember? I have no skills! There's no job out there that will pay the bills your father stuck me with when he left. Do you know how expensive it is to own a home? Or a car? Or raise a child? I held it together for five years, but I can't do it on my own

anymore. Especially unemployed!"

Not to mention, nuts.

Mom turned the radio up even louder. End of conversation. I stared out the window and watched the Pennsylvania mountains turn into hills. As we drove further from home, even the hills faded away. Just like my life.

Seven hours later, I heard, "Wake up. Welcome to Cape Cod", as the car came to a stop. I sat up and rubbed my eyes. When I opened them, the lights inside the car and Mom's cigarette smoke made me squint. Not that she'd admit to smoking. She started that gross habit right after Dad left and thinks I don't know about it. Duh. Like I have no sense of smell?

"I could use some help," Mom said, popping open the trunk.

My arm felt like it was filled with concrete when I went to open the car door. It was like the dream I sometimes have where I'm trying to run away from something, but my feet are too heavy to move.

I finally got out and stepped into the foggy, dark night. My back ached from sitting for so long. My stomach growled from not eating anything since the cheeseburger kid meal we bought before getting on the highway. I imagined what Emily might be doing at that very moment. She was probably all comfortable on her couch underneath a handmade quilt. She was probably watching a movie while her mother served her popcorn from some fancy, antique bowl. She was probably cuddled up with Clawdia. For the first time in my life, I despised my best friend.

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Grandpa's house was bigger than I remember. So was Grandpa. Usually, it's the other way remember because you've grown so much. Yet, somehow, I felt very tiny. From a distance, he looked like a giant, grey haired football player standing in the doorway. I couldn't believe this was the man who needed my mother to take care of him. Once I got close enough to really see him, I realized two things: he leaned on a walker and he looked exactly like how I remembered Dad and Uncle Jason, only older.

Memories swirled in my head. Dad laughing and holding my ankles while I wheel-barrow walked across our front lawn. Dad reading me "Goodnight Moon" under our fake tent made of bed sheets. Blue lights flashing. My face in his hands. Him disappearing.

"Hello Sam," Mom shouted, stepping onto the front porch. "Long time no see."

"For Christ's Sake, Mary, you don't have to yell," Grandpa grumbled. "Just because I'm old, doesn't mean I'm deaf."

He propped the screen door open, then moved in baby steps out of the way so we could get by with our suitcases. The first thing that hit me when I walked inside his house was the smell. It was like a combination of roses and mildew. I didn't know whether to take a deep breath and enjoy it or block my nose and hope to pass out.

When Mom first told me we were moving, it didn't make any sense that we'd be going to live with Dad's father. Mom and Grandpa hadn't talked since Dad got put in the slammer. Why would this man suddenly want us around after all those years of ignoring us? I tried to ask Mom about it, but she said to stop badgering her with questions. That's what she always said when I asked about Dad or his family.

"Sam, remember Jessa?" Mom said. "Jessa, remember Grandpa Sam?"

"Hello," I said, forcing a small smile.

I waited for him to say all the things he should have said, like, "Gee, how you've grown since I last saw you," or "I'm glad you're here," or "I'm sorry I never cared enough to get to know you." Instead, he looked down at me and said, "You need a haircut!"

Nice to meet you, too, you old grump!

Then he did something I didn't expect. He reached out and brushed the bangs off my forehead with his long, shaky fingers.

"That's better," he said. "Now I can see your face."

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The walls of my new bedroom were the color of a Band-Aid. Sort of tan and sort of pink at the same time. They reminded me of the time I crashed my head into the sharp handle of Emily's garage door while I rode her skateboard. Before I could even say I was sorry for messing up, her mother rushed toward me with a towel and an ice pack. She didn't even care that there was blood all over her garage door or her pure white towel. By the time the bleeding stopped, Emily had stuck so many Band-Aids in my hair I couldn't even find the original cut.

WHACK!

Something hit the window. I froze for a second, then ran and turned off the light.

WHACK!

It sounded like a rock. My heart raced as I dropped to the floor. Bright. Dark. My room flickered, like a blinking traffic signal. Someone wanted my attention. I crawled to the window and slowly pushed back the lace curtain.

"Hi!" I heard a muffled voice say. "I'm right here!"

I looked across my bedroom into the next door neighbor's house. There was a shadow of

a small boy, around five or six years old, frantically waving his arms at me like I'd just arrived on a life boat to save him from a shipwreck. I opened the window and felt the damp, salty air hit my face.

"I'm right here!" he said again, shining a flashlight up to his face.

"I see you," I said.

"What's your name?"

"Jessa. What's yours?"

"You."

"Me?"

"No, You."

"I already told you my name."

"No, I'm *YOU*!"

"You're *me*?" I asked, completely confused.

"No!" he said, holding his left hand up to his flashlight in the shape of an "L".

I thought back to my old school when some boys got in trouble for making the "L" sign on the back of the bus. They were calling the people in the cars behind them *losers.*

"*You're* the loser!" I said, slamming the window shut and walking away.

"Wait!" I heard him shout desperately, as if the lifeboat had started to sink with the ship. "Wait!"

I sat on my new bed and closed my eyes.

WHACK!

Then I laid down and pretended I was on the soft grass in Emily's backyard staring up at the moon and stars like we used to do on warm nights. One time, when the sky was especially

twinkly, she asked me if I thought God was up there someplace. I told her I used to think He was, but I didn't think so anymore.

WHACK!

She asked me what had changed. Everything did when Dad left.

WHACK!

I sprang up, stomped back over to the window, and opened it again. The little kid smiled when he saw me return.

"What do you *want*?" I shouted.

"My name is…"

He held out his left hand and made the "L" again. Then he said, "Plus O and U."

L + O + U.

"Lou?"

"Yes!" he said. "Yes!"

I had unlocked the secret code.

"What were you throwing? Rocks?"

"No, Yegos," he said, holding up a bucket.

"Legos?"

His bedroom light went on.

"Bye Jessa!" he said, quickly closing his window and pulling down the shade.

The little guy surprised me. He remembered my name. Then I thought I heard him scream.

Chapter Two

~My Strange New Life~

Clawdia's gone. No she's not. She's here floating with me on a cloud in heaven. There's a castle in the distance. Hey, it's my old house! We're all in the bathroom. Dad's singing an old Beetles song while he shaves in front of the mirror. Mom's happy and smiling. She's braiding my hair, asking if I'm excited to go to Dad's company baseball game with Uncle Jason. Oh no! Her face is changing. She's turning into a dragon and flushing Clawdia down the toilet. "Daddy help!" I'm shouting, but he's handcuffed to the faucet. Clawdia's screaming, "Wait!" with the voice of the little kid, Lou, next door…

"Woof!"

My eyes opened fast. It took me a few seconds for my dream to be replaced by my Band-Aid colored reality. An ugly, wrinkled dog with a plastic cone that looked like a lampshade around his neck charged toward me on my bed. He jumped on my stomach and his slobbery tongue searched for my face.

"Get off," I said, pushing him away. "Your breath is disgusting!"

He wouldn't give up. The more I nudged him aside, the more attention he tried to get. He

pounced and pawed and bumped me in the head with his lampshade while I struggled to roll in the opposite direction. Finally, I gave up trying to fight with him. Once I gave him a few pats, he sat down next to me and stopped being so obnoxious.

I un-velcroed his lampshade and slid it off his neck. Then I scratched him under the chin. He stared at me with his bulged out, glassy brown eyes and panted more bad breath in my face while I tried not to puke.

"Where'd you come from, anyway?" I asked, holding my nose with my free hand.

I had heard barking the night before while I unloaded the car. The noise hadn't sounded close by, but maybe it was. Maybe it was just my thoughts that were farther away.

"Do you belong to cranky Grandpa Sam?"

The dog tilted his head to the side like he was thinking about my question. I read the tags that hung from his collar. One said he'd had his rabies shot. The other said his name was "Doug". What a stupid name for a dog, I thought at first. Then I realized Doug was a Pug. I couldn't help it, the rhyme cracked me up. But my smile vanished when I thought of something: My "no pets allowed" grandfather had a pet. And I didn't anymore.

Doug the Pug. Stupid name. Stupid old man. Stupid Cape Cod. Stupid criminal Dad!

Dishes and pans clanged in the distance, followed by loud angry voices.

"I shouldn't have to be paying you to see my own grandchild!" Grandpa said.

"You're *paying* me to take care of you!" Mom yelled. "And I wouldn't even need your money if your son hadn't screwed up my life!"

I stopped scratching the dog, then slowly, quietly, slipped out of bed and tiptoed halfway down the hall. Mom and Grandpa continued to argue in the kitchen. I flattened my body against the wall like they do in spy movies and inched my way toward the voices.

"I could have hired a real nurse to take care of me!" Grandpa said.

"Oh really? Like the last nurse who quit because you were so difficult to get along with?" Mom snapped back. "Let's face it, Sam, you need me as much as I need you!"

Doug the Pug found me again. He made weird grunting noises and head butted my shins.

"Shhh!" I whispered, gently kicking him away.

"Jessa?" Mom yelled out. "Is that you?"

When I heard her chair scrape against the kitchen floor, I ran quickly back to my room and pretended to be asleep. Her sandals tapped down the hall, followed by the click-click, click-click of Grandpa's walker.

"She was listening," Mom said, from outside my bedroom. "I heard her in the hallway."

"I didn't hear anything," Grandpa said.

"That's because you're deaf!"

"Just because I'm old, doesn't mean I'm *deaf*!"

"But, you *are* deaf!"

"No, I'm not!"

"Yes, you are!"

They were seriously getting on my nerves, so I escaped into my imagination. I figured that was better than getting out of bed and punching them. That would make me like Dad and I never, ever wanted to be like him. In my mind, I pictured Mom and Grandpa as dueling villains in a comic strip.

Sam-the-Wham gets so tired of listening to Scary Mary that he lifts her off the floor with his walker and flings her high in the air! She crashes through the roof, sails above the tree tops, and vanishes into space!"

The only problem with that little story was then I'd have *no* parents.

My door creaked open. If I'd been smart, I would have thought to face the wall. Instead, there I was faking sleep while Scary Mary and Sam-the-Wham hovered over me.

"I told you she wasn't listening," Grandpa said. "She's out cold."

"If you knew anything about Jessa, you'd know she wakes up at the crack of dawn. She thinks she's fooling us right now."

I held my breath and tried to keep my eyelids from twitching.

"Maybe I'd know something about Jessa if you hadn't…"

"It's time to get up now," Mom interrupted, shaking my shoulder.

Grandpa sighed. Then I heard, the click-click, click-click of his walker as he headed out of my room. Once he was gone, I figured Mom would go nuts on me about sneaking around and eavesdropping on her conversations and lying about being asleep. Instead, I felt the weight of her body sink down on my mattress. Then I felt her head squish down on my pillow. She smoothed out my hair and tucked a few strands behind my ear. For a second, I thought I must be dreaming again. That's what she used to do when I was little. Back when she was nice. I slowly opened my eyes. We were close enough that I could smell the last cigarette she smoked, along with the spearmint candy she used to cover it up. She had dark circles under her eyes.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Nothing," she said, taking a deep breath. "You just have to get up for church."

"Church? You've got to be kidding!"

We hadn't been to church since Dad left and Uncle Jason took off. I turned away from her and buried my head under my side of the pillow. That made her change back into my real mother. The one who would sit up, yank the pillow off my head, and throw it across the room.

"Just get up, Jessa, and stop giving me a hard time! I don't like it any more than you do, but going to church is one of your grandfather's rules."

Like no pets allowed? I wanted to scream. But, I didn't bother. She wouldn't have answered the question anyway. After she walked away, I slammed the door closed with my foot. Grandpa hollered to stop breaking his house and to come eat breakfast before it got cold. Like I could eat with my stomach all tied up in knots? But, I went anyway to shut him up.

"Good morning," he said, as I sat down at the kitchen table.

I ignored him and gazed down at my slimy eggs and burned bagel.

"The polite thing to say is 'good morning' back. Hasn't your mother taught you any manners?"

"Good morning," I mumbled.

"This breakfast your mother made certainly looks…interesting," he said, dangling the clear goo of his undercooked egg from his fork.

With his other hand, he picked up his bagel and studied it for a minute.

"It looks like a tire," he said. "Round and black and…"

He took a bite. After he did, it was the grossest thing. A mouthful of fake teeth came out, still attached to the bagel!

"Yup," he said, covering his mouth with his hand. "Even tastes like a tire, too."

Only it came out "Eben tashte like a tire, too" in gum language.

He seemed to be waiting for a response.

"My mother isn't a very good cook," I finally said.

"Weally?" he chuckled. "I would neber hab gueshed!"

I didn't know where to look, especially since his false teeth smile was right there on the table between us. How long were we going to pretend nothing just happened? I picked at a small hole in my nightgown, but each thin thread I pulled just made the hole bigger. From the corner of my eye, I saw him look around for Mom. I knew she was in her bedroom putting on make-up because I passed her on my way to breakfast, but I didn't say anything. When he saw she wasn't anywhere in sight, he put our plates on the floor for Doug the Pug to lick. Sadly for Doug, the lampshade was back on his neck. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't reach what he wanted. It was like Dad trying to lick frosting off a cake through the bars of his jail cell (though I doubt they serve cake to criminals unless it's their last meal.)

Grandpa leaned down and took the collar off Doug's neck. Wait, I thought. How did it get back *on* his neck? Mom wouldn't have cared enough to notice it. It must have been Grandpa. After replaying the past twenty minutes in my head, I realized he must have taken it off my bed before he left my room. He must have known all along I was awake when he was arguing with Mom about how asleep I looked.

"The vet says he needs to wear this thing," Grandpa said. "Unless he's eating, don't take it off or his skin problems will just get worse."

Hish shkin pwoblemsh wiw jush get worsh.

I looked down at Doug. His curly tail wiggled with happiness while he went to town on the egg yolk. When he had licked the plates clean, Grandpa told me to put the lampshade back on him. I knew there was no point in refusing so I did as I was told. Once it was fastened, Doug looked up at me and let out a long, sad whimper.

"I know, pal," I whispered. "You just wanna be free."

Grandpa began to fit his teeth back in his mouth while a thin line of drool dripped down his chin. Once they were secured in place, he said, "Psst…I have something to show you."

It took him about a year to stand up from his chair and shuffle over to the cabinet. He steadied himself with one hand and fished inside the cabinet with the other. Finally, he grinned and pulled out a box of strawberry Pop Tarts. He tossed me the silver package inside, winked, and said, "Now this is what I call a *real* breakfast!"

We ate in silence. When we were through, he leaned his head close to mine and whispered,

"You tell anyone else about this and I won't show you where my other secrets are hidden."

I didn't care about his dumb secrets. Besides, I had no one to tell anyway.

Chapter Three

~Diapers~

"You're letting Jessa go to church wearing *that?"* Grandpa asked Mom before we left his house.

"She looks fine, Sam. Let's just go."

"Don't you buy her dresses?"

"She isn't the dress type."

"Haven't you ever heard of an iron?"

"Leave me alone, Sam, or you can find your own ride to church."

They talked about me like I wasn't even there. The worst part was that Grandpa was right. I was a mess. My shirt was all wrinkled from being crammed in a box for so long. No matter how hard I tried to smooth it out, I couldn't get it back to the original shape. Then, there was the purple popsicle stain. That happened at Emily's house a few days before I moved. We had been drawing with chalk on her sidewalk when we heard a 'ding-ding-ding' in the distance.

"The ice cream man!" her little sister shrieked.

Emily ran inside her house and got money from her father. He gave us enough to buy something fancy, like the vanilla faces with gumball eyes or the small rainbow dots that melt in your mouth. I decided on a popsicle because it was the cheapest thing on the truck. I was afraid if I cost Emily's family too much money, they might not let me come over anymore.

"That's all you wanted, Jessa?" her father asked, when he saw what I had chosen.

It's perfect," I told him.

And it was perfect. Not just the popsicle, but being there with them.

"Earth to Jessa," Mom said, snapping her fingers in front of my face. "Time to go."

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Grandpa refused to bring his walker into church, so Mom and I had to each take an arm to support his weight. That was no easy task since he was heavy, and of course, insisted on sitting up front. Between the loud organ music, the heat, and the smoky incense that burned my nose, I felt a little nauseous. Grandpa stopped suddenly.

"Uh-oh," he said.

"What's wrong, Sam?" Mom asked.

His face went pale. A small tear leaked out the corner of his eye and fell like a raindrop onto my hand.

"Are you alright?" I whispered.

Before he could respond, a bunch of nosey old ladies wearing too much perfume scrambled from their pews and surrounded us. They said things like, "Poor Sam" and "Did you see what he just did? How embarrassing!" and "Who's the lady and the little girl with him?"

I wanted them to go away! In all the chaos, it was me he watched. Then I followed his eyes

down to the wet patch on the front of his pants.

"I want to go home," he said, to me.

"Me, too."

For a split second, I pictured my home as his house. Then I remembered my real home 300 miles away where Clawdia and I used to be together. Mom and I gently turned Grandpa around and headed back toward the gingerbread house doors of the church. All the way down the aisle, I tried to block out the staring faces, my wrinkled clothes with the popsicle stain, and the grenade in my throat that choked me again.

Please God, if you're here, let everything be okay.

The mass started just as we were making our escape. The sound of the priest's voice made me turn and look back. As I did, Lite-Brite colored sunrays filtered through the stained glass windows and sparkled on the wooden cross that hung above the alter. I wondered if that was a sign that God heard me. Then I knew how dumb I was being. God was as invisible to me as Dad was. And He never answered my prayers.

The entire ride back to the house, Mom lectured Grandpa about wearing 'protection' so he wouldn't pee his pants again.

"Just because I'm old, doesn't mean I need *diapers*!" he shouted.

"But you *do* need diapers!" she shouted back.

"No, I don't!"

"Yes, you do!"

"No, I don't!"

Sam-the-Wham was back in full force, but I didn't have enough energy to make up another

story about how he might defeat Scary Mary. As I slumped in the backseat, I just hoped he had enough super powers to keep his granddaughter from jumping out of a moving car.

"You're so stubborn, Sam!" Mom said.

Grandpa looked over his shoulder and raised an eyebrow at me.

"Who's the stubborn one, Jessa?" he said, motioning to Mom with his forehead.

"Who's the one with wet pants?" she pointed out.

"Who's the one who wants to move back to Pennsylvania and live in Emily's house?" I said, under my breath.

Mom met my eyes in the rear view mirror.

"Did you just say something?" she asked.

"No."

"I think you did."

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did."

"Fine! I said I think you're insane!"

Grandpa slapped his leg and let out a hoot, like I was some kind of comedian. And the sound of laughter kept me from jumping.