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Disappointments

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Soon Lee Hotaling *Disappointments*

"I can't believe my parents lied to me!"

I stared at my best friend, Maria, in surprise. "What do you mean?"

She collapsed beside me on our tattered khaki couch. "Did you know that I'm adopted?" she laughed. "You look how I felt when I found out."

"H-how did you find out? Did they tell you?"

"That's the funny thing. I was looking for Scotch tape in my Dad's desk and I came across these papers. I opened them and I couldn't believe what I was seeing." She sounded exasperated. "They were my adoption papers. They never told me!"

I hesitated, knowing it sounded absurd because they were so close of a family. "Maybe they were afraid."

"I can't understand their fright because I thought we were close and honest with each other." She turned to stare at me with her deep blue eyes surrounded by jet black hair. "They always talked about honesty, but what hypocrites!" She covered her face and said, "I will never be able to trust them. I hate them for that."

I stared at her for a long time before I finally reached over and let her cry on my shoulder.

"I h-hate them."



A voice interrupted my train of thought. "Ko....Ko?" I turned toward the voice as the radio announcer blared in my ears. I turned the volume down. "What are you thinking about? You've been silent for the past ten minutes or so."

"I was, ah, thinking about how you've changed in the past six months." I stared out the passenger window as the mountains passed on Route 80 East through Pennsylvania.

"Have I changed?" she mused. "You know, I've had to do a lot of thinking about my relationship with my parents, where you had a lifetime."

I laughed half heartily. "What, of twelve years?"

"You know what I mean."

"What difference does twelve years and six months make in finding answers to questions that have no answers," I snapped. "At least you can hopefully have some answers to your questions from the woman we're meeting in Connecticut. I will be wondering for the rest of my life."

We sat in silence as Bette Midler's "Wind Beneath My Wings" came on. I sighed and turned to Maria. "Look, I'm sorry for snapping, but don't think that my life has been any easier, even though I've had to deal with my adoption since day one. I hated being stared at, and I still do, to a point."

"Will you always?"

"We all hate to be stared at," I stated matter-of-factly. "Look, I just don't want you to get your hopes up too high, 'cause you may be disappointed."

"Why do you keep bringing that up?" She gritted her teeth. "Don't I have to right to dream? You're jealous!"

Was I? I wondered in confusion as I watched the electrifying yellow and purple blossoms dispersed in large clumps along the mountainside. This is what I miss from the Midwest—the mountains and hills, and especially the sun. I smiled into the warm sun rays.

I felt a hand on my shoulder and turned. "Do you need to go to the bathroom?" I glanced around as I got out and I saw rows of out-of-state cars. "You're not angry are you?"

I shook my head no. "Look, I just don't want you to get hurt."

I know. It's just so hard not to dream. Don't you ever?" she asked as we stepped into our separate gray stalls.

I told her that we all dream, whether we're adopted or not, about our parents being rich or well known or not even our parents, but in the end we always learn to accept the ones we have.

We ate our pizza and bread sticks as we talked about what college would be like. We also talked about movies and books and music, and whatever really came to mind, as I drove the rest of the way to my grandfather's house in Connecticut.



We finally arrived at the white house with black shutters on Roland Street. We got out of the car and my grandfather and his girlfriend, Margaret, greeted us. I gave each of them a hug and kiss. I introduced them to Maria who smiled shyly. They asked about the drive, and we told them as we grabbed our bags from the trunk. We walked into the kitchen to be welcomed by the smell of pizza.

"Now this is what I call pizza. Is it McBridges?" I turned to Maria and nodded toward the table. "This is real Italian pizza." I inhaled as my mouth began to water. "Look, sit and I'll bring our bags." I disappeared up the stairs, dropped our bags off, and quickly used the bathroom. As I walked out, I heard laughter and bounded down. "What are we laughing about?"

"Come and eat," Margaret said as she handed me a paper plate.

I grabbed a slice of sausage pizza, and bit into it. "What were you laughing at?" I repeated.

Maria reminded me about the last day of school where we had a huge shaving cream fight, and where a group of students got our Dean. She and I went to a small, non-traditional high school with only 350 students and about a hundred staff and faculty, so we got to know the majority. The smallness of our school gave us a tight student body, but after a year and a half I got bored because it was the same group of people all the time. I had begun to feel confined and suffocated, so I was definitely ready for college.

We laughed and talked a little longer, then Margaret had to leave. Maria and I bid her good-bye and then climbed the stairs to our bedroom.

"I like your grandfather. He's a real neat guy," she said as she began to change. "His girlfriend isn't as bad as you made her to be."

"I know. As long as she keeps him happy, that's all that matters." I acknowledged as I turned the lights out and hit the sack.



Two days later, after showing Maria Waterbury and going to the mall, the day came when she was going to meet her biological mother for the first time. We each dressed carefully and drove to Hamden, a half hour from my grandfather's house. We rode in silence, each of us in our own world.

"Now look for 1590," I broke the silence.

"We're already here?" She looked around frantically. "She said she lived on a court."

I noticed her legs shook. "Relax, man." I pulled up in the driveway and got out. "Nice house." I scanned Maria's face to watch her reaction as she nodded in agreement. "C'mon," I said, and walked up to the front door. She trailed behind. I rang the doorbell and stepped aside, leaving her exposed.

The creaking of the front door opened and the two women stared silently for about five minutes before the older one spoke. "I'm sorry, please do come in and we'll go out in back."

We followed the woman through. Everything was so prim and proper that it felt like a large-size doll house where nothing was meant to be touched. I couldn't see how people lived in such an environment and it made me nervous just being there. I relaxed once we were out in the back patio.

"Who's your friend?" She sounded so snotty, and the way she carried herself made me feel like she was false. I instantly disliked her.

"This is, ah, my best friend Ko, Mrs. Roberts."

"Oh please don't call me that. It makes me feel so old," she laughed.

But you're a mother of three. I wanted to say. I'd seen a family portrait in a library or study as we passed. So what *do* people call you, I wanted to ask, but instead I just nodded. I wondered why she detested being called Mrs.

"Come have some lemonade," she said as she poured daintily into a crystal glass.

I took it hesitantly because I knew I was a klutz. I sipped and walked around her well groomed garden. Everything was green and the flowers were beautiful. They were arranged by colors and species from Tulips to Snapdragons to Roses, Daisies, Hyacinths, and others I did not know. I knew she had to have lawn care services because her hands were elegant with a French manicure.

"Why?" caught my attention. I turned and saw a defeated look in Maria's eyes. Mrs. Roberts sat so erect that it made her appear unapproachable. Maybe that was what she wanted.

"I thought I told you in my letter," she said as she waved her hand. I stared and listened, not wanting to interfere, yet wanting to help Maria.

"No you didn't, but I get the feeling that your case was like every other case you hear about, am I correct?"

Mrs. Roberts sighed and I had the feeling she was one of those who dreaded the day when her child would come and seek her eighteen years later.

"Is your husband..." I felt Maria struggle to control her voice.

Mrs. Roberts stared at me pleadingly. "She doesn't understand."

"I don't think I do either," I said. I was feeling pity for her, instead of the anger I had felt earlier.

"Please, tell her I'm sorry."

I stared blankly at her, not believing she was asking for forgiveness after her behavior. "Maybe some day you will be able to tell her yourself," I said, knowing the day would never come.

I walked to Maria's white Honda, climbed into the driver's side, and backed out of the driveway. I watched the house fade in the rearview mirror. I glanced at Maria, knowing she had cried some more while I was talking with Mrs. Roberts. Her face was still damp, and she had a wad of used tissues beside her. I reached over to comfort her, and then drove silently into the night.