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Where We Begin

Welcome to the small town of Bakersville, the wallflower of America, where no one knows anyone, but pretends they do. I think about all the other parents I could've had and all the other cities I could've lived in. No. I was born here in deadville. Was it destined for me to suffer? So how does one spend a summer here? Lisa and I spent our summer praying to break free. Lisa and I have been friends for a long time. Since we were three to be exact. We met in daycare. She was the only one who'd let me play with her Barbie dolls and didn't shun me away. I knew we'd be friends for a long time after that. She is the only person in this dried town that gets me. I know that I am not alone. Sometimes I think I'll marry her because she's the only one I can stand to spend twenty minutes with.

I saved up my artistic earnings and bought her a promise ring, just in case. Doesn't hurt to dream.

I didn't see her as much as I would've liked to this summer because she discovered a boy named Mark, so I focused on my art. It's the only thing that keeps me going when I feel like sitting in a dark room and waiting for the end of the world to happen. I seen Lisa about two

days out of a week and she respected my feelings enough not to talk about Mark all the time. She knows how that makes me feel. And I'd rather not think about it.

I think I love her. Or at least I love to draw her portrait. Each time I draw one, it's always better than the last one I drew. She has the prettiest green eyes and the perfect pink lips. I keep drawing her because I want to bring that perfection to the page.

I cannot do her justice.

I keep trying though and she allows me to make mistakes.

I wished for Mark to disappear so I could have my friend back. And then I felt bad for wishing that because he broke up with her at the end of July and I didn't have the same Lisa. I had a heart broken Lisa and I didn't know what to do for her. It hurts to admit it, but I think I was jealous because I didn't have anyone to spend time with. I'm not a very good friend.

Now it's August and she hopes not to see him around at school. They only dated for two months, so I don't know why she is so upset. I guess I wouldn't understand because I've never dated anyone. I'm seventeen and I've never. I'm beginning to think that it's hopeless.

We're back at school on an August

Wednesday. Summer is officially over. It's kind of sad that for the entire summer I looked forward to coming back to school just so I'd have something to do.

Lisa and I stand in a long line in the gym waiting to get the errors on our junior class schedules corrected. She has two Chemistry classes, as if one isn't enough, and they assigned me P.E. instead of Art III. Apparently there are a lot of schedule screw ups because two lines stretch out into the hallway. I have no idea how long this will take and I'm tired of standing so I throw my messenger bag on the polished floor and sit down. Lisa sits down beside me, looking at her schedule. She sighs. "This calls for meditation." She crosses her legs, closes her eyes, sits up straight, and concentrates on achieving inner peace. I glance across the room and I see this guy who's in the very back of the other line and he's staring at me.

Lisa's elbow nudges me. "Come on, join me," she says.

My head swivels back to our area. "Like this is really going to help," I say and pose with her.

I open my eyes and turn my head. He's still looking. I quickly look away.

The line moves and we stand. When it's

my turn, I lay my schedule on the table and explain to the guidance counselor, "I'm supposed to have Art III first period, not P.E."

She says, "Sir, you're in the wrong line. This is the A-L line. Your last name is Picote." Her pointed finger directs me across the room to the other line. Lisa follows because her last name is Palatino. She slaps her forehead when she sees her brother Pete in the line we should be in. Now we have to wait in a long line again.

"Just breathe," she says, sensing my frustration.

My anger dissipates a little when I see him again. He's wearing a black jacket and he's standing in front of Lisa. I can tell he's new here because he's looking at everything like he hasn't seen it before, he's the least impatient, and he isn't talking to anyone. Plus, I've never seen him. If he'd been here last year I'm almost sure I would recognize him. I want to talk to him. I don't know why. Maybe it's because he's so quiet, or because he's new. Or maybe because he just turned around and looked at me again.

"I can't believe we're in the back of the line," Lisa says. As she says this, the guy in front of her walks past us and disappears down the hallway. He returns a few minutes later and stands behind me.

He taps me on my shoulder. When I turn

around, he's smiling.

"Is it usually like this around here?"

Now I know for sure that he's new.

"Yeah. You kinda have to learn to deal."

"It's great here," he says. "I hate the predictable."

"Where are you from?"

"Two cities over. I transferred. Had to get out of there."

"Was it worse than this?"

"Not by far," he says, laughing. "I just want a new experience."

"Well this is the perfect place to get one."

We keep talking. I learn that he used to live with his mother, but now he's staying with his father who lives here, and he is terrible at science. When Lisa hears this, she turns around and says, "I know and they gave me *two* Chemistry classes. Can you believe it?"

He laughs. "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. I'm Colton Maraschino."

Maraschino. Why does that sound so familiar?

"Well I'm David Picote and she's Lisa Palatino."

We've been talking so much that I haven't noticed that the line has moved until I look forward and see there's only one person in

front of Lisa. I'm relieved. Lisa explains her problem and it is easily corrected. She turns around, smiles, and tells me she'll wait for me in the hallway.

I tell the counselor, "I signed up for Art III and someone gave me P.E. instead."

"I know, Mr. Picote. We can no longer offer art classes here."

Colton looks over my shoulder and says to her, "You've got to be kidding, right?"

She shakes her head. "No"

"This sucks," I say and he says, "Yeah it does."

He must've signed up for the same class.

"Another budget cut?" Lisa says when I tell her. He follows us into the auditorium for the welcome back speech like we really want to hear it.

"They're seriously squeezing sponge here."

We file into the broken fold down seats in the overly large auditorium built to seat thousands, but is only filled with a few hundred. Everyone disperses themselves at random. I decide to sit in the very back and so does Lisa and Colton. I sit between them. The principal springs to the microphone to read a revised list of hackneyed lies about the wonderful year that lies ahead. Now I know

how the school administration spends summer break.

"I'm supposed to have art first period," I say.

"Me too. But it looks like we're both in P.E. together," Colton says.

"Are we?"

"Yeah. That's what they assigned me."

I look over at Lisa. "Hey Lisa, what class did you decide to take?"

"French I."

"Really?" Colton says, "What hour and who's the teacher?"

"Last class and the teacher is Bruni."

"So we have a class together, too," Colton says.

"Let me see your schedule," I tell Lisa and take it before she hands it to me. I compare mine to hers. "Lisa, we have World History together!"

"Are you serious?" This is the first time we've ever had a class together. She looks at our schedules. "You're right, we do." She takes her schedule back. When the principal starts talking about how he is going to reinforce the dress code this year, Colton leans over and whispers to me, "We don't have to attend P.E. you know. We can drop the class and spend the hour doing art stuff. That's always an option."

“You can’t drop classes here,” I explain to him.

“You’re not allowed to drop any classes?” he asks me, making sure he heard correctly.

I shake my head, “No.”

“Time for plan B,” he says.

I look at him, curious to know, “What’s plan B?”

After It All Goes By

Carrying a basket full of letters and an apple cinnamon candle, she glides past me into the blue classroom, her brown pleated skirt catching wind. She's wearing eclectic beads around her neck. She sits the basket and candle on her desk and pushes her glasses upon the brim of her nose. She strikes a match, bringing the candle to life, and then she waves it out. She hasn't spoken a word yet and I can already tell that this is going to be a fun class. She turns to the chalkboard and writes her name on it. Mrs. Davenport, My English teacher.

"I collect letters from my students," she says. "Some of them still write me even after they've graduated and moved on. I want each of you, in your spare time, to hand write me a letter and after I receive all of your letters, I will write each of you a letter. I don't want you to introduce yourself to the class. I want you to introduce yourself to me. In a letter." She indicates the basket on her desk. She sits upon the desk, close to the candle, and she doesn't lecture us about the rules and she doesn't tell us what we're going to study this year. Instead she tells us, "I do, however, want you to tell me your name and either a class you enjoy, a hobby you have, a place you'd like to visit, or a place

you have gone.”

I could tell her all of these things. I think this is going to be the class that I enjoy, art happens to be my life, I'd like to visit the world, and I've ventured to nowhere.

She tells us, “I have traveled to Europe on several occasions and I love English and writing.” She points to the last person in the last row. His name is Roger and he went to Kentucky this summer to visit his family. Big Whoop. Everyone says the same thing. Their name and whatever it was that they did over the summer. When she gets to me, I want to be distinguished. I'm the last to speak because I am sitting in the first row in the first desk. Saving the best for last. I tell her, “I want to set up my own art gallery.”

She talks to me. “Somewhere in town, perhaps?”

“No. Somewhere where they have an appreciation for it.”

“And what is your name?”

“David Picote.”

“David, I think that is wonderful that you have an appreciation for the arts. Me too. Me too. You should show me your work sometime.” And she can tell that I am an artist. Even though I want to be in that art class, maybe this year won't be so bad after all.

Maybe this class can save me.

Pete tells me after class that he is thankful that I am in his English class this year because I am good at English and more than likely he will need my help again. This makes me happy. I feel intelligent and needed.

Colton and I do not have any classes together except for P.E., but everyone missed first period this morning because of the schedule corrections and the meeting in the auditorium, so that means I didn't get to go.

During third period, Lisa and I decide to sit together in the back because we can watch everyone and no one can see what we're doing. We watch the people as they enter. Lisa's face drops when this one guy walks into the room. She turns and looks at me. I catch on and ask her, "Is that him? Is that Mark?" She nods. I've never met him. He walks to the back of the classroom and sits beside Kelley Peterson. He pretends he doesn't know Lisa and begins flirting with Kelley. He's a jerk.

"Let's move to the front," Lisa says.

I don't need to ask her why. I get it. Is she stays back here with them she won't be able to pay attention in class and her grades will slip. She sits up front so she can listen to what the teacher says and not see what Mark and Kelley do.

Our teacher enters the room just as the bell sounds. He has Einstein's hair and he doesn't speak. He writes his name on the board, which is Mr. Anderson, and page numbers 225-249.

"Open your books and get busy," he says, scanning the room with his sharp, dark eyes. He drops into his chair at his desk and begins shuffling through papers. He doesn't even call roll.

I decide that the best thing for me to do is read the chapter he just assigned.

I open the book. It has no pictures. It's as dull as the white classroom. I hate the color white. It reminds me of mental facilities. There's no way I can read this chapter. All the words run together. I can't make sense of them. I look over at Lisa who is reading avidly. Her eyes scan across the page. She's a word nerd. She'll read anything. Even if she doesn't understand it, she'll read it.

I'm feeling depressed. Ironically, I try to cheer Lisa by leaning over and whispering, "You're prettier than Kelley Peterson."

"I don't want to talk about it. It doesn't matter," she says. Her eyes never leave the page.

I look forward to lunch, which is next, then I go to Economics. After it all goes by, I go

home. But the thought of that is dry. Why do I want to go home today? No. I wanted to leave home to come here. I need a life. This becomes my mission. If I had a life, what would I do after school today? Who would be with me? Where would I go? I cannot answer any of these questions. I know what is going to happen today. It is what Colton said he hated. The predictable. I wish *I* could leave here and get a new experience.

I drive home after school today. Parents tend to think that things change. Things do not change here. So when they ask me how school was today I can honestly say, "Like it was last year and the year before that. It's how it will be everyday until I no longer go there."

I pass them by and climb the stairs to my room. I need to go someplace else for a while. I lie on my bed, stare at the ceiling, and wonder why Colton, of all places, moved here. Maybe we should've just swapped lives. Even the ceiling in my room has patterns. I hate patterns and shapes. For once in my life I want something random to happen. I want a patternless day. I want adventure and spontaneity in my life. I don't want to wake up and know who I will be tomorrow. I want something to change. This is my life and today I decide that I want a whimsical room. I'm going to free myself of

order. I am going to make my room haphazard, chaotic, and disorganized. I'll like it better that way. It will be a start.

I turn my bed diagonally across the room. I turn the pictures and art on my wall at random and crooked angles. I open my closet and throw all my clothes on my bed and mix them up. Why was my closet color coordinated in the first place? So I could find items easier? That's crazy. I want to be late because I couldn't find the right shirt. I want variety in my life. I mix the colors and the textures. I turn my room upside down and sideways. I move my desk from against the wall and sit it crossways the center of my room. I'm sweating. My sister Chrissie stands in the doorway of my room, watching me.

"David, what are you doing?"

"Rearranging my life," I tell her as I move a bookcase.

When I'm finished I stand back and look at my new room—my creation.

"I love it. See, this suits me more."

"You're so strange." She lingers in the doorway, leaning against the frame, wondering what I am going to do next. I move my stereo beside my bed and put my T.V. and its stand in the corner.

I lie across my bed and look up at the

patterned ceiling. It's not so bad anymore.

"Get ready for church," Chrissie says.

This is how it always is on Wednesdays. I get ready for church an hour after I get home from school. But today I made a difference in my routine. An unexpected change happened. I made my room reflect me.

Chrissie disappears down the hallway. I breathe. I like the feeling of this; the exhilarating feeling of not knowing what's going to happen next.

My mom walks past my room and backs up when she realizes it has changed.

"David, what did you do?"

"You like it?"

"Its... Well, it's definitely different."

"Yeah. I like it. That's all that counts."

"Well, get dressed for church."

"I don't need to be reminded a thousand times, mom."

Finding my church clothes will be more of a challenge.

When I arrive at church the first person I see is Colton and he sees me too when I enter. He smiles and walks over to where I am.

"You go here?" I ask.

"Yeah," he says. "I heard word."

I nod.

"Sit with me."

We sit in the back. I don't see Lisa anywhere. Chrissie and my parents sit up front.

"So why did you move here? The real reason."

"The *real* reason? I told you."

"Yeah, but there must be something else. Why would you choose to move here? I hate this town."

"I think I have a remedy for that."

"No. Nothing can change how I feel about this place."

"Don't be so sure," he says, smiling. I've noticed that one side of his mouth crinkles up a little higher than the other when he smiles.

"So exactly what is plan B? You never told me earlier." Everyone else files into the church.

"Well, I kinda noticed that the school has no order and they're not very organized either."

"So?"

"The faculty seems laid back. It's a *cupcake* school." His brown eyes glisten with excitement. "No one will miss us if we ditch P.E."

"We can't ditch P.E."

"Why not? It's not a major class or anything. We can spend the entire hour and a half doing art stuff, like I said. You want the art class or don't you?"

The church service begins. I think I really want that art class.

During the service he leans over and whispers to me, "Just think about it."

After church is over, he stands and leaves without saying goodbye. I find Lisa out in the lobby. She sees me first and walks to where I am.

"Why didn't you sit with me?" Her dazzling green eyes look into mine.

"I didn't see you."

"What a reason," she says, smiling.

My parents and Chrissie walk up behind us. Mom looks at me and asks, "Who was that boy you were sitting with?"

"Colton. He just moved here," I tell her. Lisa looks at me.

"Well, I've invited Susan and her husband over for dinner tonight. Chrissie wanted Stacey to come over, so you can invite Lisa too."

"Okay," I say and look at Lisa. "Do you want to come over?"

"Sure. I'm not doing anything else. I'll have to check with my mother first and see if she'll let Stacey come over. Be right back."

I glance around to see if Colton's anywhere. He isn't.

"So tell me more about this new boy.

Where's he from?"

"Mom, I told you everything I know."

Chrissie appears around the corner with Stacey, laughing. Next, I see Lisa.

"Yeah, she said it was fine," Lisa says.

At home, Lisa and I go upstairs. "Wow," Lisa says. "You've changed everything."

"Yeah."

"I like it." She walks over and sits on my bed. I sit at my desk.

"So, Lisa, what was that history chapter about?"

"I can't tell you that. You should've read it."

"Lisa?"

"What?" she says, half laughing. I stand and go sit beside her on my bed.

"Tell me. Help me out. It's only been one day and I can already tell that I am going to fail that class if you don't help me."

"Just read the chapter."

"But I can't," I say, smiling. "It's so dull."

"It's really not that bad, David." She smiles and I can see her teeth. I scoot over to her and lean my head on her shoulder.

"Help me," I say. "We're going to have a test soon."

"Would you like me to read it to you?"

I nod. She stands to go get the book but

my hand reaches out and pulls her back down. I don't know what happens, but she falls on top of me and I kiss her.

When our lips part, she looks at me and asks, "Why did you do that?"

I can't look at her. I mumble, "I don't know. It just sort of happened."

"David, it's okay. I'm not mad or anything. I just want to know why."

I look up at her.

"I guess it's because I like you. A lot."

"Well, I like you too, but not in that way. So can we just forget that this happened and be friends again?"

"Yeah," I say, nodding. My heart sinks.

"Let's go downstairs," she suggests.

"Okay, you go ahead. I'll be down there in a minute."

She leaves my room and I try to keep the tears from falling. I wipe my eyes. I think that I will be able to draw her now. Really draw her. Perfectly. Now that I know how her lips taste and how I feel about her. I give myself a few more seconds before I go downstairs. I pass by Chrissie's room and stop to look in. She and Stacey are playing the board game LIFE. I am reminded of my mission. I enter the kitchen and the first words I hear are from my mother, who is talking to Susan. My father and Stan are in

the living room watching TV.

"I know, and did you see what she was wearing? It was awful. She looked like a hooker," my mom says to Susan, who nods in agreement.

I interrupt their gossiping session.

"Where's Lisa?"

My mom turns around from stirring a pot and says, "Oh, she stepped out for a minute."

I open the front door and step out onto the porch. Lisa's sitting in the swing. I hesitate and then I sit down beside her. We stay that way for a few minutes and then she says, "So what do you think of Colton?"

"He's okay."

"I think he's different."

I look at her. "Do you like him?" I ask.

"I think I could like him. He's really cute." She looks at me, not knowing what she's doing.

"I guess that would be okay if you did," I lie. I place my hands into my coat pocket and surreptitiously fumble with the ring, imagining her allowing me to place it on her finger.

"I can't say at the moment. I've only known him for a day."

"And you've known me for a lifetime." I cross my arms.

“David...”

“Lisa, it’s okay. We can just be friends if that’s how you really want it to be. But I always thought it would be different.”

“I don’t want things to change between us. I like things just the way they are.”

“I guess I’d have to say that I’m used to them, too.”

She smiles.

“Can you at least give me a hug?” I say.

“Of course.” I hug her and we stay that way, gently swinging back and forth until my mother steps out on the porch and says, “Dinner’s ready.”

The First Five Seconds

Thursday morning. 8 a.m. sharp. I'm sitting in my blue car, aware that my gym bag is in the back seat. I have possibilities, but I am hesitant. What should I do? What direction should I take?

I recall that I need spontaneity in my life and when I see Colton across the campus I decide I'm going to take the opportunity that's been given to me. I grab my messenger bag and exit the car. In the first five seconds I've decided what I want.

At 8:01 a.m. I am bounding up the parking lot, passing cars. Colton is standing on the side of the brick building, waiting on me. We should already be in class by now, but we're not. We're doing things differently. Our way. We're making a class of our own. His eyes stay focused on me as I walk toward him. A smile spreads across his face. For once in my life I am doing something that I want to do. The feeling is exhilarating, but scary at the same time. I am both nervous and excited, but what's the worst that could happen?

This is all very new to me.

"You made it," Colton says, smiling.

"Yeah," I breathe. "I can't believe I am actually going through with this."

"How long did you think about it?"

"The first five seconds this morning. I realized what I wanted." Everyone is in class but us. We're together, lingering outside the school.

"I found us a place. The old soccer field."

"We're ditching P.E. to hang out on a soccer field? We're going to get caught."

"No. We're not. Soccer was budget cut. Besides, they'll use the football field."

"You're sure about this?"

"Definitely. So what if we get caught? It doesn't matter. For today, we are doing this. Let's go."

I follow behind him. I glance around to see if anyone is watching us. It's really great that there aren't any windows on this side of the building.

"We're going to sit under the bleachers. If anyone comes out, they won't see us there so fast."

He seems to have it all figured out. I wonder how long he has thought about this. We walk a half mile to the soccer field.

I sit under the bleachers and shuffle through my bag to find my sketchbook. I look over at Colton who is sitting only a few feet away. He has brought watercolor paints with

him. He has opened a pad of paper. He reaches into his bag and pulls out a paper cup and a bottle of water. He pours the water into the cup. Next, he dips a paint brush into the water and wets the colors on his paint palate. He looks up at me when he notices I am watching him and smiles.

I look back at my sketchbook and I think about last night. I think about how Lisa said she could like Colton because he's so cute. I flip past all the pages of Lisa until I find an empty sheet. I am going to really draw her this time. The way she really is. Beautiful. I have brought colors with me. Colors that match her jet black hair, bubble gum pink lips, and sea green eyes. I am going to define her on paper.

I begin sketching. I remember her from how I seen her last night. Before I kissed her. The way her eyes sparkled. My hand moves in lines and curves. I put my heart into drawing this picture. I think of Mark and how he broke her heart. And I think of how stupid I was to think I could fix it. How crazy I was to think that she could possibly, maybe, someday be mine. I think about how my heart skips beats when I look at her. And I remember when I started feeling this way. It happened over the summer when I didn't see her as much. I really missed her and I couldn't stand the thought of

her being with any guy other than me. I thought we'd grown close enough that we could seal the friendship we had and move past that. I fooled myself. And she has no idea what she does to me with just one glance. When I kissed her I felt everything. She must have felt nothing at all.

I have completely drawn her face. I've drawn it so many times that it comes natural. She is imprinted in my mind and stamped on my heart.

"What are you drawing?" Colton asks, standing to walk over to where I am. I do not reply to him. I am too focused. He sits down beside me and looks at the picture of Lisa.

"Do you like her?"

"Yeah," I say.

"Is she your girlfriend?"

"Unfortunately, no. We're just friends."

"Her idea or yours?"

"Mutual, I guess. I think she likes you instead."

Colton lets out a small laugh. I look at him. His eyelashes are a little long for a guy. "She's very pretty, but she really isn't my type. I like those with brown hair, the color of yours."

I don't know why, but my heart dances. I look back at the picture of Lisa and thumb through my colors, trying to find the right

shade of the lips I kissed.

“How long have you known her?”

“My life.”

“And she doesn’t like you the same way you like her?”

I shade in her lips. “Something like that.”

“I think you’ll be okay.”

“Yeah. I’ll be all right. So what did you make?”

“Oh. I’m working on something. It isn’t finished, so you can’t see it yet. Sorry.”

“That’s fine, but I want to see it when you’re finished.”

“Definitely.”

The bell sounds. I gather my materials and I’m off to English. After lighting her candle, our English teacher says that we will explore literature written in the 1930s. She assigns us to read two novels this semester: *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner and *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck.

Today I will have to visit a bookstore. I haven’t been in a while. The first book we’re going to read is *The Good Earth*, so I am going to buy it first and wait on the other one until it is time to read it.

Our English teacher is nice. She says, “Since it’s a short week, we’re not going to

discuss anything. I'm giving you this time to be acquainted with one another. You all have free time today. Just make sure you have *The Good Earth* by next week."

She sits at her desk for a moment, and then stands again. She picks up a piece of chalk and writes *Assignment One* on the board. She tells us as she writes, "If there is someone in this class whom you do not know, go meet them today." I look around the room. I think I know everyone. Maybe not personally, but I've seen them around. She adds, "I also want everyone to have a composition journal."

I make note of that in my mind as I pull out my sketchbook to finish Lisa's portrait. As I'm shading in her jet black hair, I glance around the room. Pete is the only one standing. He walks around the room, speaking briefly to everyone. By the time I'm shading in Lisa's green eyes, Pete's sitting by this girl named Natasha and they're carrying on a full conversation.

When class is over, I walk to World History with my sketchbook in hand. I want to show Lisa the final portrait, but when I get to class, I see a sheet of paper on my desk. I look down at it. On the top it reads *Quiz No. 1 The American Revolution*. So that's what the chapter was about. Shit.

Mr. Anderson glides through the door carrying a stack of papers. He throws them on the desk and looks at us and says, "You have exactly ten minutes to complete the quiz. No talking." He then turns and writes page numbers 250-275 on the chalk board. The first question: *Name four of the main reasons for colonization.* I have no idea. I look at the clock. Eight minutes left. Second Question: *Name the first English colonies and who founded them.* Still no clue. Wasn't one of them Jamestown or something? I write that. I skip down to the last question. *The American Revolution was also referred to as what?* I have completely failed this quiz. I jump back up to question eight. *What was the Navigation Act, who passed it, and when was it passed?* I lay my head on the desk and sigh. I should've read the damn chapter. The teacher calls time.

As he collects our quizzes, he replaces them with a packet of paper.

"What I am handing you now is study guide questions. In case you didn't do so well on the quiz, it would be to your advantage to go back and re-read the chapter and answer these questions thoroughly. Our first test will be on Wednesday of next week."

I raise my hand.

"Yes?" he says, pointing to me.

“What are the numbers on the board?”

“That’s the next chapter.” He continues passing out the packet of papers. “Begin it as soon as possible.”

I decide to open my book to the American Revolution and attempt to answer the packet of questions. I look at Lisa, who’s already started. I write the page numbers of the next chapter on top of my study guide. I flip to those pages. It’s about The French Revolution. I think I am going to have a fast paced year in here.

At Lunch, Lisa and I sit outside together. She sits across from me. She has brought her lunch because she hates school food. She pops a grape into her mouth.

I reach down into my messenger bag and pull out my sketchbook. When I look up, Colton has arrived at the table and he sits beside Lisa.

I flip through the sketchbook and find the last drawing of her.

“Look,” I say, passing it over to her.

“It’s perfect,” she says, smiling. “And when did you draw this?”

“Last night,” I say. Colton and I exchange glances. He doesn’t say anything at all. The art class remains our secret.

Colton says to Lisa, “Let me see.” She

passes the sketchbook to him. He looks at the picture as though he's seeing it for the first time. He looks at me, his eyes glistening, and says, "You're a great artist, David. It looks just like her."

"It's the last one," I say.

"It's the best one," Lisa says.

"Thank you," I say. I put the sketchbook back into my bag.

"How do you think you did on that history quiz?" Lisa asks.

"How do you think? I never read the chapter."

"Why not?" Colton asks.

"'Cuz I didn't feel like it," I say, swabbing a fry through some ketchup.

"Your grade may reflect that," Colton says.

"So, I'll read next time. It's only the second day of school."

Lisa stands and says, "Well I've gotta go."

"Bye, Lisa," Colton says, and then looks at me as he stands. "See ya around."