

"I can't see you anymore!" I cried, as I ran around my best friend, Christina's backyard. "I'm so going to get you back for this."

"Just remember, I'm armed," Chris holds up a HUGE water gun in which she had used to blind me earlier.

I smear the back of my hand across my eyes and blink rapidly.

"You blinded me! You blinded me!" I fall to the grass in fake despair. "You wouldn't blind your best friend would you?"

"Of course not, Summer!" and Chris squirts me in the face again.

"I can't SEE!" I joke. I grope for my own water gun which should be lying around here somewhere. Christina the traitor is kind enough to hand it to me. I squirt her back.

"Now *I* can't see!" she squeals. But, of course, it's all fun and games with us and soon we're sprawled out on her lawn, water guns abandoned.

"Is that what it's like to be a blind person, you know, with water in your face all the time?" Chris asks twirling a piece of grass around one finger.

"Probably. I've never met one. Maybe they act all goofy like we were," I respond. I mimic what we were just doing. Chris laughs.

"Summer! Time to come in!" I twist around to see mom calling me from next door.

"Aww... see ya later!" I call to Chris. She waves and I enter the house. I sniff the air and something warm and welcoming greets me.

"Oooh, yum! Are you baking something?" I ask Mom.

"Cookies," she responds. She stirs some spaghetti. "But they're for after dinner."

"What's the occasion?" I ask her suspiciously. Mom, aside from the fact that she CANNOT bake, is not a huge fan of big desserts after meal time. Plus, she was acting strange, quiet maybe, and almost...nervous? I don't know.

"You'll see." She continues stirring. "Why don't you go sit with your dad?"

"Are you sure I shouldn't stay here and make sure the cookies don't burn?" I half-joke just to try and see if I can make her smile. She grins a tiny bit.

When I wander into the dining room I'm surprised to see it so decorated. Dad's already there. He's smiling.

"Um, hi daddy," I'm personally starting to feel uncomfortable with all this weirdness that's going around. "What's going on?"

"What do you mean?" More smiles from him.

I push my glasses up my nose and start counting things off on my fingers.

"Mom's acting strange, you're randomly smiling for no reason, there are cookies baking in the oven, the table is completely decorated." I twirl my auburn hair around my finger. "What's up?"

"You'll see," Dad says, still smiling. I think maybe someone permanently pasted a smile on his face with super glue.

I groan and rest my head on the table. "Just one hint? Pretty please? For your one and only beautiful daughter?"

When I say that last part he gets a funny look on his face but he does give me a hint, “I think you’ll like it.”

“Oh, sure that helps a lot!” But as soon as I say it, possibilities start to race through my mind. A kitten? I’ve always wanted one. No, my Dad’s allergic. We’re moving? I hope not. A new bike? I don’t think my parent’s would get this excited about that. Hmmm.

Mom enters with the spaghetti and sets it on the table. As soon as she dishes it out, I burst out, “Can someone PLEASE tell me what’s going on?”

“Well...” Mom says as about as slow as a turtle.

“We are going to...” Dad joins in.

“Adopt a little boy!” they cry in unison.

My jaw drops open. I have no idea how to feel about this. I’ve always wanted a sibling but now that it’s happening...I guess maybe I’m scared. I don’t know what to think.

Both parents are grinning.

“Excited?” Mom asks. She’s always wanted another child.

“You’ve always wanted a sibling,” dad says, reading my thoughts.

Thankfully the smoke alarm from the kitchen beeps just then.

“The cookies!” Mom says, running in to take them out while Dad temporarily disconnects the alarm so our ears are not permanently damaged. I simply push away my plate because now I have no appetite.

I run into the kitchen and yell over the noise, “I’m going next door!”

“Okay!”

I race out the door. Chris is still on the lawn but when she sees me she sits bolt upright.

“Summer? Why are you crying? You okay?”

I didn’t even notice I was crying. I wipe away the tears, then spill the whole story.

“You’re adopting? Summer, that’s cool! What’s to be upset about?”

“Doesn’t *anyone* get it?” I ask. Then I realize that really I’m crying over something I don’t even want to share with Chris. I want to stay an only child. I don’t want to share my parents. So after that I suggest we pretend we’re blind people again for fun and we do. Then we lie on the grass to chat.

“Blind people are weird,” I comment.

“Yeah,” Chris agrees.

We talk about how weird it would be to be blind until it starts to get dark. Then I have to go home and face my parents.

“See you tomorrow!” I call out as Chris walks into her house for dinner.

“Sure. And I can’t wait to meet your new brother!” Chris yells back.

I groan. My new “brother.” He’s NEVER going to be my brother.

I walk into the stinky house. My parents are spraying air freshener everywhere. They stop when they see me.

“You’re back! Perfect!” Dad exclaims. “Now let’s talk some more about Alex.”

Alex. That must be his name. I sigh.

“Can we talk about this tomorrow? I’m kinda tired.” I fake a yawn. I turn on my heel and walk away before anymore questions are asked. That night I cried myself to sleep.

Over the next few days my parents kept trying to talk to me about Alex and I kept making excuses. Three weeks after the Alex-announcement, I’m arriving home from my day camp with Chris’s Mom when I sense something isn’t right.

I walk into the house and it’s quiet. When I call out, no one answers. That’s when my instincts take over. I race into the guest room down the hall and there sits a little boy of about seven. He’s Chinese-American so he doesn’t look like anyone else in the family, but I don’t care. He’s so cute I fall head-over-heels with love.

“Alex? Hi, I’m Summer, your new sister,” I say gently bending down to his height. Alex whips his head around toward me and I can see his eyes are very glazed over and cloudy.

“You can stop crying,” I tell him. But he shakes his head vigorously.

“I’m not crying,” he says in a tiny voice. “I’m blind.”

I gasp, and then notice a little boy’s cane in the corner of the room. I perch on the bed beside him and put my arms around him. All of the sudden I realize what Chris and I were doing. We were making fun of people... KIDS...just like Alex. But I can’t think about that now.

“Well, Alex!” I grin. “Tell me about yourself!”

Alex perks up.

“Can you hand me my bag?” he asks eagerly.

“Oookaay...” I say slowly not knowing what he could possibly want in there. Alex opens it and pulls out a photo album. I’m confused, but he seems happy, so I let him continue at whatever it is he’s about to do.

“See that’s mommy, daddy, and me before I got blinded,” he points to a picture and sure enough it’s a photo of a very happy family posing at a bowling alley. Alex looks like he might have been five.

“I got two strikes that day!” Alex announces proudly, and then adds, “You’re looking right?”

I’m looking alright. I’m just too busy gawking to say anything. I nod, then feel silly.

“Of course! It’s just...how did you know which picture was the one of your family?”

“I memorized them before I got blinded. I was six,” he bites his lower lip. “I always knew it could happen ‘cause I have diabetes. I heard it by accident at the doctor’s office...Sunshine, what do you look like?”

I don’t even bother to correct him on my name, I feel so sorry for the poor little guy. But then things start looking up as I tell him every detail about me down to the last freckle on my nose. As he listens and talks he’s normal, not blind. It’s like he can see me! I don’t even care that sometimes while we’re talking he will randomly stare at the ceiling.

Mom and Dad walk in right when we’re in the middle of a laugh fest.

“Glad to see you two have gotten acquainted.” Dad grins.

“We’re more than acquainted, Oliver! We’re friends!” Alex says to Dad.

“Yeah!” I chime in.

“That was fast,” Mom comments.

“Hey, Alex,” I say to him once he’s finished hopping around the room like a jack-rabbit from excitement. “You want to meet one of *my* friends, Christina? Is that okay Mom, Dad?”

“If she’s as nice as you, yes. I haven’t had *real* friends since I was blinded,” he hugs me around the waist like a baby koala. “But I love you.”

“He hasn’t said that to anyone since his parent’s death,” Mom whispers to me while Dad helps Alex with his shoes. “You’re incredible, Summer.”

I shrug. “If you just give him a chance he can be like any other kid.”

“C’m on Alex, let’s go!” I say louder. We run out the door. Our parents sit on the front stoop since it’s Alex’s first time at Chris’s.

I grab his hand till we reach the front door. I knock.

Chris’s mom answers the door. “Oh! Hi, Summer. I wasn’t expecting to see you here so soon. And who’s this cute boy?”

“Alex,” he says in that quiet, meek way he said it when I first met him.

“He’s my new brother,” I inform Chris’s mom.

She smiles. “I’m happy you’re here.”

“Really?!”

“Really. Chris’s in her room.”

I hold Alex’s hand and we gingerly walk up the stairs.

“This is Chris’s room.” I put his hand on the door so he’ll know. “Do you feel the big C on there?”

“Yup! I do! Let’s go!”

We both knock together. When there’s no response, I tell Alex that we should just go in.

Chris is on her bed reading a book with her ear buds in. When she sees us she takes them out. And then she does the last thing I’d expect her to do. She bursts out LAUGHING.

“What’s funny?” Alex asks me quietly, tugging at my sleeve.

“Nothing,” I say even though in my heart I know why she’s laughing. It’s because Alex is blind.

“This is Alex. You said you wanted to meet my new brother as soon as he got here and here he is,” I tell her.

“You’ve got to be kidding me! I thought you were getting a normal brother, not a blind one!” she collapses into more laughter.

I feel immediately protective. “Just because he’s blind doesn’t mean he’s deaf. And he is normal!”

“Uh-huh. Blind people are weird just like *we* said.”

“We?” Alex turns to me with wounded eyes. “I want to go home. I don’t love you anymore.”

“Alex, it isn’t like that...” but at this point I know there’s no changing his mind.

Chris has stuck the ear buds back in and waves us off. I hang my head. How do I get myself into these messes? On the way home Alex only holds my hand when he has to. Otherwise he uses his cane.

“Where’s my room?” he asks Dad, not me, as soon as we hit the front door. He shows Alex who stomps in and slams the door.

“Whoa, what was all that about?” Mom wonders aloud.

I can’t lie to my parents. “Chris and I have this game where basically we squirt water in our faces so we can’t see and then pretend we’re blind. We make fun of blind people but that was before I knew Alex. Then Chris told him...” my voice trails off.

I think I get the worst punishment possible: the sad looks on my parent’s faces.

“Why, Summer, why?” Mom asks.

Dad just looks at me sadly.

“I’m really sorry! Please don’t punish me! The looks are enough!”

“What looks?” Mom says, confused.

“You know.” I try and make my eyes all sad. I obviously do a terrible job at it, though because my dad starts laughing.

“By not lying to us you won’t be punished, but NO MORE OF THAT GAME,” Mom says.

We stop talking when we hear a small voice say, “What’s so funny?”

We glance at each other.

“Alex, can you make it down the stairs?” Mom asks.

“Yes.”

Soon he’s sitting in front of us while I’m forced to tell the whole story.

“I’m REALLY sorry, Alex,” I conclude. “I just didn’t know how normal you could be. Please love me again.”

“Okay!” And I’m loved with an Alex-special koala bear hug.

But Chris is a different story.

“Chris, we have to stop playing that blind person game,” I tell her one afternoon.

“Why?”

“Blind people are people just like us!”

She didn’t get it.

“We’re making fun of them!” I exclaim.

“So? It doesn’t matter that much.” She shrugs.

The next day I told her about how Alex could memorize things *and* walk and talk like us. She didn’t care. At that point I decided to give her one more chance or I was going to give her up as a friend.

“I don’t want to talk to her,” Alex whines when I tell him where we’re going.

“It’ll be fine, I promise,” I say, even though I’m nervous. When we reach Chris’s house her face pales and I can feel mine get hot with anger.

“Summer, can I talk to you for a minute alone?” she asks quietly.

“Alex, will you be okay if I go talk to Chris for a second?” I ask him, and he nods.

“Listen, I’ve been thinking hard about what you said and I realized you were right so I told my mom what happened. She got super mad! Soooo... I’m sorry.” Chris looks at the ground.

“Don’t apologize to me. You need to apologize to him.” I wave a hand toward Alex.

She draws in a deep breath and marches over to Alex.

“Hi, little dude.”

He shrinks back.

“I just have to say that I’m really sorry for everything I said. Your Sis told me about your album. I’d love to see it sometime, okay?”

His response? A big koala bear hug.