

Gathering of Sisters

By Debra Taylor

The dream was always the same, and it haunted me day after day. I'm standing in front of a mirror, staring at myself while searching every inch of my face and then it happens: Another face appears... but it's me.

It's early in the morning and the streets are densely covered with people walking in a hurried manner in downtown Atlanta, Georgia. I cannot remember a February being as cold as this one. I flitter from store to store gazing at all the displays. I am on a mission to finish and go home to a nice bubble bath and a cup of hot chocolate. I need a restful night's sleep before heading off to my sister, Sue's house to celebrate Valentine's Day with my two older sisters Jean and Ann and myself, the baby of the family. All of us girls are single and in our twenties so we always celebrate special holidays together. That is, until one of us should ever find 'the one'.

Sue loves having the parties at her home: the decorating, cooking, party favors and she even wears a shirt or sweater with hearts and insists we do the same. I, on the other hand, would buy a cake from the local bakery and that would be the extent of it. I like the simplistic side of things, especially this year. The last couple of weeks I have been feeling run down and suffering from back pain.

I'll just show up to enjoy the day, watch everyone open their gifts among all the chattering and laughter...ah, the laughter... the best part for me. There was a time when the laughter stopped and I'll never forget that day.

I was attending Clemson University in South Carolina when the administrator came into the classroom and motioned for me to come with him. He said to call my sister, Jean. I hung up the phone, "Mr. Kossen, I have to go home right away."

"Anything I can do?" he asked.

"No thank you," I replied.

When I arrived home, Jean and Ann were standing outside the house. I could see they were crying and I knew then, something bad had happened.

I slowly got out of the car and walked just as slow to where they were. Ann approached me first. She stopped crying long enough to tell me what happened. "Lynn, Mom and Dad were killed in a car accident today."

You could hear a pin drop. Ann began to speak again and I saw her mouth moving but heard nothing.

So now you understand why we are such a close-knit family. I feel lucky to have them as my sisters. I never told them but they are my lifeline.

Driving into the driveway, I can see them through the window. Sue is wearing a bright red sweater with little white hearts, Jean a red blouse, and Ann red and white stripe shirt. I open the car door and my cell phone rings. Fumbling through my purse I catch it on the last ring. The caller ID reads: Dr. Tribbey. "Hello." I can feel the blood draining from my face. "Are you sure? Okay, I'll see you then." I hang up the phone and compose myself before entering the house. Ruining this celebration was not an option.

The gathering of sisters begins: first the hugs, then the compliments of each other's outfit, and finally the most exciting part of all...exchanging of the gifts. We exchange in the order we were born -- Jean, Ann, Sue, and me -- which meant I was always last.

Jean hands a present to each of us, and all the boxes are the same size. In unison we open the beautifully wrapped boxes. Inside is a gold chain with four little circles which are engraved with our names. We look at one another before glancing back at Jean, who reaches into her sweater and pulls out the exact necklace.

I stand to hug her, and that is the last thing I remember.

My eyes open and the surroundings are not Sue's house but a hospital room. My sisters are gathered around my bed. Jean takes hold of my hand. Concern covers her face. "You really scared us.

How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine. There is no need to worry, I promise." I shift my eyes so they won't see that I am lying. They always knew when I wasn't telling the truth and used it against me as a child when we got into trouble.

"What happened?" Ann asks.

"I'm not sure." I reply with a smile.

Ann sits down on the bed, "Well, we'll get to the bottom of this, and you will be out of here in no time."

The door swings open. It's the doctor. She has a somber look on her face. *Not good*, I thought. I knew then I would no longer be able to hide my secret. "Good morning, Lynn. How are you feeling today? Any pain or nausea?" Before I can answer, she turns to my sisters and asks if they will step out for just a moment. I can see the confusion blanketing their faces, but without hesitation they leave the room.

Dr. Tribbey a.k.a. Dr. T places her hand on my stomach and pushes gently and then asks for me to sit up. Placing the stethoscope she says, "Take a deep breath. One more please." As I take in each deep breath, I feel a sharp pain in my back and flinch. She clears her throat as she places the stethoscope back into the pocket of her bright white jacket. "Lynn, as I told you on the phone the other day, we need to move quickly. Your right kidney has shut down, and your left one is deteriorating as well. You need a kidney transplant, and we need to test your sisters as soon as possible. Shall we call in your sisters and tell them the news? I know you're not ready for them to know, but we cannot delay this any longer." My eyes fill with tears as I nod, yes. I hate the fact I am ruining the holiday.

Dr. T walks to the door and motions for them to come in. They enter with puzzled looks and glance her way. Jean speaks, "What is wrong with Lynn?"

"Your sister, Lynn, is very ill. She has renal failure. We have been treating her for a while, but it's been aggressive and has progressed to end-stage renal disease. She needs a kidney transplant. I want each of you to be tested to see if we can make a match."

My sisters are shocked as they glance at one another and then at me. Sue is the first to speak, "When do we start?"

"Today, if you can. First, we will do a biopsy on Lynn." Dr. T places her hand on mine as she continues, "Then we will draw blood from each of you for a blood type and do some tissue typing. Those tests will tell me if any of you are a match."

I spent the next few days anticipating which sister would be a match. The day arrives and it isn't good news: none of them match. I go on the transplant list and tolerate dialysis to eliminate toxins until a match is found. My sisters take turns staying at the hospital. Day after day, night after night, they watched over me. I spend most of my time thinking more and more about death and how I would miss my sisters.

I wake up to the morning light casting rays of sunshine through the window, and I knew it was going to be a good day. And a good day it was...

Dr. T enters my room and her face exudes radiant joy as she speaks, "They found a donor. And I have something else to tell you. Not only does she have your blood type but also shares your DNA."

I look at Ann and she too displays the same expression as I, our eyes furrowed with a questionable look. I ask, "How could that be?"

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