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Written by

Kathryn Erskine

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One
Devon's Chest

It looks like a one-winged bird crouching in the corner of our living room. Hurt. Trying to fly every time the heat pump turns on with a click and a groan and blows cold air onto the sheet and lifts it up and it flutters for just a moment and then falls down again. Still. Dead.

Dad covered it with the grey sheet so I can't see it, but I know it's there. And I can still draw it. I take my charcoal pencil and copy what I see. A greyish squarish thing that's almost as tall as me. With only one wing.

Underneath the sheet is Devon's Eagle Scout project. It's the chest Dad and Devon are making so he'll be ready to teach other Boy Scouts how to build a chest. I feel all around the sheet just to be sure his chest is underneath. It's cold and hard and stiff on the outside and cavernous on the inside. My Dictionary says CAVernous means filled with cavities or hollow areas. That's what's on the inside of Devon's chest. Hollow areas. On the outside is the part that looks like the bird's broken wing because the sheet hangs off it loosely. Under the sheet is a piece of wood that's going to be the door once Dad and Devon finish the chest. Except now I don't know how they can. Now that Devon is gone. The bird will be trying to fly but never getting anywhere. Just floating and falling. Floating and falling.

The grey of outside is inside. Inside the living room. Inside the chest. Inside me. It's so grey that turning on a lamp is too sharp and it hurts. So the lamps are off. But it's still too bright. It should be black inside and that's what I want so I put my head under the sofa cushion where the green plaid fabric smells like Dad's sweat and Devon's socks and my popcorn and the cushion feels soft and heavy on my head and I push deeper so my

shoulders and chest can get under it too and there's a weight on me that holds me down and keeps me from floating and falling and floating and falling like the bird.

Two
Look at the Person

Caitlin, Dad says. *The whole town is upset by what happened. They want to help.*

How?

They want to be with you. Talk to you. Take you places.

I don't want to be with them or talk to them or go places with them.

He sighs. *They want to help you deal with life, Caitlin… without Devon.*

I don't know what this means but the people come to

our house. I wish I could hide in Devon's room but I'm not allowed in there now. Not since The Day Our Life Fell Apart and Dad slammed Devon's door shut and put his head against it and cried and said, *No no no no no.* So I can't go to my hidey-hole in Devon's room any more and I miss it.

I try to hide in my room and draw but Dad comes and gets me.

There are so many voices in our house. Voices from Devon's Boy Scout troop. I recognize their green shorts. And the nice things they say about Devon.

Voices of relatives. Dad introduces me to them. He says, *You remember*…and then he says a name.

I say, *No,* because I don't remember.

Dad says to Look At The Person so I look quickly at a nose or a mouth or an ear but I still don't remember.

One voice says, *I'm your second cousin.*

Another says, *Wasn't it a beautiful memorial service?*

Another says, *I love your drawings. You're a very talented artist. Will you draw something for me?*

One even says, *Aren't you lucky to have so many relatives?*

I don't feel lucky but they keep coming.

Relatives we hardly saw when Devon was here so how can they help?

Neighbours like the man who yelled at Devon to get off his lawn. How can he help?

People from school. Mrs. Brook my counsellor. Miss Harper the principal. All my teachers since kindergarten except my real fifth-grade teacher because she left after what happened at Devon's school. I don't Get It because nothing bad happened at James Madison Elementary School so why did she have to leave? Now Mrs. Johnson is my teacher. She didn't even know Devon except she watched him play basketball, she says. Twice. I've watched the LA Lakers play more than twice. I don't try to help them.

Caitlin. If you ever want to talk about what happened you just let me know, Mrs. Johnson says.

That's what Mrs. Brook is for, I tell her.

Maybe we could all sit down together.

Why?

So we know where you're coming from.

I look around the living room and stare at the sheet-covered chest. *I come from here.*

I'm sorry. I meant so we all know how you're feeling.

Oh. Mrs. Brook knows how I'm feeling so you can find out from her. I would be superfluous. My Dictionary says suPERfluous means exceeding what is sufficient or necessary.

I just thought it would be nice to take some time to sit and chat.

I shake my head. *SuPERfluous also means marked by wastefulness.*

Well…okay then, she says. *I suppose I can talk with Mrs. Brook.*

Mrs. Brook says you can talk with her anytime because her door is always open, I tell Mrs. Johnson. *Actually it's almost always closed. But if you knock then she remembers to open it.*

Thank you, Caitlin.

She doesn't move. This means she is waiting for me to say something. I hate that. It makes my underarms prickle and get wet. I almost start sucking my sleeve like I do at recess but then I remember. *You're welcome,* I say.

She moves away.

I got it right! I go to the refrigerator and put a smiley face sticker on my chart under YOUR MANNERS.

Seven more and I get to watch a video.

When I turn away from the fridge I see a puffy blue marshmallow wall in front of me. It smells of apple cinnamon Pop-Tarts and breathes noisily. It's another neighbour or relative I don't know which. Her hands are shaking. One hand has a tissue and the other hand she holds out to me. There is a white circle in it. *Would you like this candy?*

I don't know. I have never had her candy before so I don't know if I'll like it. But I like just about every candy in the galaxy. I don't like being trapped by the puffy blue wall like this though.

Take it, she says, and pushes it into my hand.

So I take it just to get her hand off mine because her hand is squishy and flabby and makes me feel sick.

Have another, she says.

I take it quickly so I won't have to feel her hand again.

She tries to pat my head with the candy hand but I duck.

I run and hide behind Dad. And eat the candy. They are mints. I wish they were gummy worms because that's my favourite but I Deal With It. The good thing is I

can't talk when my mouth is full because that's rude so if I keep my mouth full I can be in my own Caitlin world.

When I finish the candy I still don't want to talk so I push my head under Dad's sweater and feel the warmth of his chest as he breathes up and down and I smell his Gillette Cool Wave Antiperspirant and Deodorant. He doesn't even say, *No, Caitlin,* and pull me out. He lets me stay there and pats my head through the sweater. If it's through the sweater I don't mind. Otherwise I don't like anyone to touch me. Dad talks to the world outside the sweater and his voice makes a low hummy-vibratey feel. I close my eyes and wish I could stay here for ever.