

SHE'S LIVING WITH HIS PAST

By Miss Angela Fox



ILLUSTRATED BY C. PITTS

A 'YOUNG ADULT' NOVEL

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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SHE'S LIVING WITH HIS PAST

By Miss Angela Fox

The eleven-year-old home run king had never been under so much pressure. His team, the Giants, were down by two runs in the bottom of the ninth. It was the seventh game of the Little League World Series.

Greg Parker had already hit 46 home runs this season. He had surpassed the old record of 42 in a season five games ago. That record had stood for 31 years, and had been owned by Jason Winters, now Greg's coach.

The inning's first hitter was Colin Armstrong whose mother, Kay Armstrong, was Greg's teacher. Colin got a bloop single into left-center field. The next batter walked. The Browns tapped their ace reliever, Randy Jefferson. Randy promptly struck out the next two hitters. Next up was Greg.

Greg represented the winning run at the plate. No pressure. Two down, two on, down by two runs. Greg stared down at the mound at Randy. Randy touched his cap, signaling the catcher that he was rejecting his signs. Randy wound up and pitched. The pitch was a curve, low. It came in around Greg's ankles. His bat never left his shoulder.

“Ball One!”, yelled the ump. Greg smiled. “Good eye, Greg!”, yelled his teammates. It was the only sound. The entire stadium was holding it's collective breath.

Greg called time and stepped out of the batter's box. He knocked nonexistent clumps of dirt from his cleats. He stepped back into the box and glared down at Randy. Randy threw a beautiful fastball, and Greg jumped on it. POW!! That ball was gone from the moment it left his bat, and Greg knew it.

The stadium erupted. His dugout cleared to greet him at home plate. Greg trotted around the bases, tears of joy in his eyes, his longish blond hair streaming behind. His teammates gave him high-fives and lifted him up on their shoulders to carry him to the clubhouse. Greg had just brought home Illinois School's first ever Little League World Series Championship.

James Parker, meanwhile, was in the stands with his wife, Tracy, and Greg's teacher, Mrs. Armstrong. While the rest of the stadium had gone up for grabs, the three of them were sitting there, trying to talk. “You must be awfully proud of him, Mr. Parker,” yelled Mrs. Armstrong. “We are,” yelled James and Tracy. They had to yell to be heard above the crowd.

The three of them got up and made their way out of the madhouse. Out in the parking lot, the conversation resumed. “Home run king, that's my boy!” exclaimed James. “Don't forget honor roll all year, too!”, added Tracy. Mrs. Armstrong smiled. “He's been an excellent student, and now he's brought home the championship!” “He'll

be going to summer camp, at Camp Hiawatha, in Kankakee,” said James. “They are letting him go for free in order to have him on the team.”

With that, the threesome split up. Greg's coach would be bringing Greg home later. It was the last time Mrs. Armstrong would ever see the Parkers alive. As for Greg, who was on top of the world, he had no idea that dark clouds were on the horizon.

The medium-sized, one story ranch house, which was in a nice section of South Austin, had been home to Lisa Kennedy for the past two years. She had moved here from Miami after she divorced her husband, Sam. She lived with her two daughters, Ashley, age 16, and Christine, age 13. She was a junior partner at the law firm of Smith & Johnston, a position she had held since moving to Austin two years ago. She was an accomplished attorney, having passed the Florida Bar Exam in 1977, one year after marrying Sam.

She divorced Sam in 1987, when Ashley was 12. She passed the Texas Bar Exam in 1989 and moved to Austin to start over, bringing with her Ashley and Christine. Both girls had fond memories of their father, but they were fading into the past now. Neither had seen their father since the divorce. Lisa, being a competent attorney, had represented herself and saw to it that she had sole custody of the children. Sam had no visitation rights.

Now, in 1991, she still had no luck finding a new mate. Sitting at the dinner table with her daughters, she said, “Girls, I have decided to adopt a child since I can't have any more children, and I've always wanted three.” “You mean we're gonna have another sister?!” exclaimed the girls, excitedly. “Yes,” confirmed Lisa, “as soon as I can get the paperwork filled out and processed. It should take about two months.”

“All right!”, yelled the girls, in unison. “Well, I'm glad to see that you're both happy about it,” continued Lisa, “now let's eat, and in the morning I will go to the courthouse to start the process.”

Two weeks later, in mid-June, Greg Parker hit his first home run for his new team, the Tigers. With four of his old teammates on this new team, they quickly went into first place in the Northern Illinois Division.

As summer progressed and Greg's home run count soared, he made lots of friends. He also began to play football, where he showed some promise as a running back. All the while, the dark clouds were coming closer. Greg didn't know then that he would never see his parents again.

He could recall lots of fond memories of his parents. He loved them dearly, and they, in turn, loved him and were proud of him. They took many vacations together, usually over the summer, and they were among Greg's fondest memories. He remembered in particular last year's trip to the Grand Canyon, and how they had descended to the bottom of the Canyon by mule. He also remembered the trip they had taken to Disneyland when he was six. They all had lots of fun on that trip, even though his fa-

ther had gotten sick on the Space Mountain roller coaster. He began to have more and more of these memories as the summer progressed. Anyone would have immediately ascribed them to homesickness, but were they a premonition?

Summer was almost over. Greg was glad, because he wanted to get back home. He was having a lot of fun at camp, but it was impossible at camp for him to indulge in his favorite activity, dressing up in his mother's clothes. Neither of his parents were aware of his secret activities. It was now mid-August, and the Tigers had won their division. Again he found himself on a team in the playoffs. It was one week before the end of the season. Greg was probably the most popular guy at Camp Hiawatha that year. If not, he was certainly one of them. He was the guy to be friends with.

Greg sat on his bunk, trying to write a letter home. He sat there, tapping the pen, trying to collect his thoughts. He wrote home once a week to let his parents know how he was doing. He was looking forward to hearing from them again, and to seeing them in a little over a week. He didn't know then that his parents would never read the letter he was now writing.

His counselor, Bruce, came into the cabin to find Greg on his bunk, writing the letter home. With him was Greg's new coach, Larry Sorrel. "What'cha doin' Greg?" asked Bruce, hesitantly. "Oh, just writing a letter home", answered Greg, breezily. "We've got to talk, Greg," said Larry, his voice shaking slightly. This caught Greg's attention.

"What is it, Larry?" asked Greg, apprehensively. The mood had instantly changed in the bunkhouse, as quickly as if someone had thrown a switch. Greg was suddenly overcome with an eerie feeling, one he could not explain.

"Would you please come to the office with us, Greg?" asked Bruce. "Okay," agreed Greg. He put his letter up on his pillow, intending to finish it later. He didn't like the way his coach and his counselor were looking at him. He couldn't put a finger on it, but the eerie feeling wouldn't go away.

The three of them walked in silence towards the office. Greg decided to break the silence. "We're gonna smear the Reds tonight, right, Larry?" Larry, who was walking with his face averted from Greg, did not respond. Greg, now feeling even more uncomfortable, lapsed into an uncharacteristic silence. He didn't know what the feeling in his gut meant, but it was stronger than ever.

The trio reached the office after another couple of minutes walking. The chief of Police for Kankakee, John Davis, was waiting for them. "Hello, Greg," greeted Chief Davis, as the trio entered the office. Positively alarmed now, Greg practically shouted, "What's the matter?!"

"Calm down, son," soothed Chief Davis. "I'm afraid I have some rather upsetting news for you. There's no easy way for me to tell you this, but your parents have been in a fatal car accident. They were hit by a drunk driver last night. They're both dead. I'm sorry, son."

Greg now understood the eerie feeling he had felt and lowered his head. Bruce, Larry, and Chief Davis, knowing what was about to happen, left Greg alone in the room. After the men left, Greg cried.

"He's a good kid," said Larry, shaking his head sadly. "It's a real shame to have this happen to anyone, but Greg..." He couldn't finish. Greg was to him like the son he never had. "He has no surviving relatives," said Chief Davis. "I hate to see a good kid like that in an orphanage, but we have no choice. You'll have to release him to our custody."

Disheartened by Greg's loss, and the loss of Greg, the Tigers would lose that night to the Reds, and lose the Series. But Greg couldn't have cared less, and who could blame him? Three hours later, after the paperwork had been processed, and Greg had packed his possessions and bid a tearful goodbye to his teammates, Greg left Camp Hiawatha with Chief Davis.

He drove Greg to the Boy's Shelter in Chicago, about fifty miles away. All the while, they had not spoken. Greg was sitting in the patrol car, not really seeing the scenery go by. Finally Chief Davis broke the silence. "I know it's hard to talk about now, son, but things will get better for you. This life isn't always easy. It's going to mean a lot of changes for you." He didn't know how right he was.

"We are gathered here today to lay to rest our dearly departed, James and Tracy Parker. While we are saddened by their passing, we must take comfort in the knowledge that these two kind, loving people are now in the company of the Lord. Sometimes the Lord works in mysterious ways. The two wonderful people were taken from us by one man's irresponsible act. In this lies a lesson: We must all accept responsibility for our actions and mistakes. We are reminded that the deepest pain of death is not for the dead, but rather for the living, who must now continue on without those who have passed. We are most deeply sorrowful for Greg Parker, their eleven-year-old son, who must now go through the rest of his life without the parents he loved so dearly."

The rest of it was a blur to Greg. In those words, his old life had ended. Just eleven years old, and he was now an orphan. He had been living at the Boy's Shelter in Chicago for a week now, when his old teacher, Mrs. Armstrong came for a visit.

"I'm glad you came, you're just in time," said Greg. "I'm leaving tomorrow."

"What do you mean, Greg?"

"I've been adopted. I'm leaving for Austin, Texas tomorrow," replied Greg, glumly.

"Well, that's wonderful, Greg!", exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong.

"No it's not! I don't want to go to Texas! I want to stay here where my friends are!" exploded Greg.

"Well, I'm sure you'll make lots of new friends in Austin. You were very popular here. It won't be long before you've started your new life, and made lots of friends. Every dark cloud has a silver lining, Greg." Mrs. Armstrong didn't know how right she was.

“But you said we were getting a sister!” complained Ashley. “Well I don't have any control over it anymore,” said Lisa, “the papers have already been signed.” “We don't want a brother!”, raged the girls. “You promised us a sister!”

“So I did,” conceded Lisa, and with that, a plan began to form in her mind. She had wanted a girl, anyway. “Don't worry about it girls,” said Lisa, “you will have a sister.”

Three days later, Lisa and the girls piled into their car to pick Greg up at the airport. The girls were talking excitedly amongst themselves in the back seat during the ride to the airport. They arrived there about half an hour before Greg's plane was scheduled to land and found a parking spot. They got through the security checkpoint, and were waited in the main area of the airport for them to announce Greg's flight.

“American Airlines Flight 153 from Chicago's O'Hare Airport has just arrived,” blared the loudspeaker. “Those wishing to meet passengers, please proceed to Gate 9.”

“Come on, girls,” urged Lisa, “that's the flight Greg's on.” They got to the gate just as the first passengers were deplaning. A stewardess came off the plane, holding a little boy's hand.

Lisa, recognizing the boy from pictures she had seen, waved the stewardess over. “Are you Lisa Kennedy?”, inquired the stewardess. “Yes, I am,” replied Lisa, “here's Greg's paperwork.” Lisa handed the stewardess a manila folder. “You'll have to follow us to the security desk,” explained the stewardess, taking the folder from Lisa with her free hand. She walked towards the security desk, leading Greg by the hand. Lisa, Ashley, and Christine followed.

At the security desk, the stewardess released Greg's hand. She bent down and whispered to the security chief. “Okay, you're Lisa Kennedy?” asked the officer. “I'll need some identification and Greg's paperwork.” The stewardess handed over the manila folder Lisa had given her, while Lisa dug in her purse. She produced her driver's license and social security card. She unclipped her employee ID from her purse and handed all three items to the security officer. Scanning them over briefly, the officer nodded and handed them back to Lisa. “Everything appears to be in order. Have a nice day, Ms. Kennedy.”

Greg stood frozen on the spot, not saying a word. Lisa came up to him and gave him a hug. “Welcome to Texas, Greg. These are your sisters, Ashley,” pointing to the taller one, “and Christine. You can call me Lisa. Come on, let's get something to eat, then we can get out of here.”

“Hi, Greg,” said the girls. Both girls had long, blond, curly hair, and blue eyes. They both looked like their mother, except that Lisa's hair was short.

After they had gotten something to eat and picked up Greg's bags, Greg seemed more at ease. He began talking and laughing with his new sisters. “I was an only child,” said Greg, “now I have two sisters. I'm eleven. How old are you guys?”

“I'm thirteen,” said Christine, “and you'll be going to my school, but you'll be in the sixth grade, while I'm in eighth.”

“I'm sixteen,” said Ashley, “and I'm going to high school this year, at Crockett.”

Christine, who attended Sunset Valley Elementary School, said, "Never mind her. She's only been bragging about it for the past two years." Lisa looked at Christine, exasperation in her eyes. "Now, girls, let's not start this again."

"We're not, Mom," chorused the girls. "Good," said Lisa, "because we've got a long ride home, and a lot to do when we get there, right, girls?"

"Right, Mom," they agreed, and giggled.

They were back in the car now, driving through town on their way home. Greg, Ashley, and Christine were all in the back seat, and Lisa had the front of the car all to herself. The girls and Lisa were pointing out things to Greg as they passed them on the way home.

They were on I-35 southbound. Ashley, pointing out her window, said, "See, Greg, that's the Capitol building. We'll be going past it on the way home. I love the color of it." The exit came up for 12th-15th Sts., and Lisa put on her blinker. "We don't ordinarily go home this way," explained Lisa, "but we are today so that you can see the Capitol building up close." They were now on 11th St., heading west. Greg could see a pink building up ahead, on the right. They turned left onto Congress Street, right in front of the Capitol building.

"It's made out of pink granite," said Lisa. "That's the tallest Capitol building in the country, it's even taller than the National Capitol in Washington."

"It almost wasn't though," Ashley interrupted. "When they took that statue off the top to restore it, back in 1987, they almost couldn't put it back up there. That's something you can use for school, but we were still living in Miami when that happened."

After about 20 minutes, they were heading southbound. Christine pointed down an intersecting street, to the right. "Our school is just down there a little way!"

"Your school, anyway," teased Ashley. "Now, girls, let's not start this again," pleaded Lisa.

"We're not, Mom," they answered, automatically.

Two minutes later, at the intersection of Stassney Lane, Ashley pointed off to the left. "Crockett is down there, about a mile!"

"There she goes again," sighed Christine, rolling her eyes. Lisa chose to ignore it.

Finally, Lisa turned the car into a driveway and shut off the engine. Greg looked out at the modest, one-story ranch house. "Welcome home, Greg. Do you like it?"

"Looks cool," said Greg, "do I get my own room?"

"You do," said Lisa, smiling. "All three of you have your own room." They got out of the car and went up to the front door, which Lisa opened, and they all went inside.

As they walked inside, Lisa put a hand on Christine's shoulder, stopping her. She bent down, and whispered in her ear. "Why don't you show Sherry her room?" Christine smiled.

“O.K. Mom. Greg, follow me, I'm going to show you your room.” Greg, not saying anything, followed Christine.

Greg was taking it all in. They were in the entrance area, which was connected to the living room. He could tell by the nice furnishings that this was a well-to-do family, much like the one he had left behind. They passed through the living room into the dining room. It was also very nicely furnished. They passed the kitchen on the left and entered a hallway.

“This is the bedroom area, Greg,” said Christine, now leading Greg by the hand. They passed a door on the left and one on the right. Both doors were closed. There was a closed door in front of him at the end of the hall. They kept walking and, when they reached another door on the left, Christine stopped. The door was closed. Christine said, “This is your room.” She released his hand and stepped aside, to allow him to open the door. When he opened the door, he couldn't believe his eyes.

Secretly he loved what he saw but, with the instincts of a crossdresser, knew he couldn't show that. “I thought you said this was my room, Christine,” said Greg. Greg thought for sure that Christine was playing a joke on him. He hardly even dared to hope that this room might really be his. He was sure that Christine had brought him into her room, just to be funny. The room was done in pink, with flowered wallpaper. There was a big double bed up against the corner in the far wall. The bed had a pink canopy. There was a soft-looking pink comforter on the bed. Peeking out from under it, Greg could see two lace-trimmed pink pillows. There was a full-length mirror in one corner. Against the other wall, there was a big dresser with a mirror on top of it.

Greg, totally absorbed in checking out his new room, said nothing. He didn't even notice that Christine hadn't answered his question. He walked over to the closet and opened it. His mouth dropped open; there were dozens of pretty dresses hanging there, some of them trimmed with lace, in all different colors. Along the top shelf, there were several pairs of little girl's sandals in many different colors.

Greg explored with growing satisfaction but was careful not to show his happiness to Christine. “I thought you said this was my room, Christine,” he repeated, in order to cover up his real feelings of happiness. Meanwhile, Lisa had entered the room silently while Greg was in the closet.

“It is your room, Greg,” began Lisa, “or should I say, Sherry.”

“What do you mean, Mom,” asked Greg, feigning apprehension. Ashley now walked into the room. She looked up at Lisa with excitement in her eyes. “You mean Sherry just found out she's gonna be out sister?”

“That's right, Ashley,” replied Lisa. Greg now had the confirmation right out of Lisa's mouth. He was going to be a girl! He was very happy but still was careful not to show it.

“Well, what are we waiting for, girls?” urged Lisa. “Let's get her ready!” Turning to Greg, she said, “Welcome to your new life, Sherry. You are going to be a girl!”

They all left the room, Ashley holding one of Sherry's hands and leading her. Christine was holding the other hand. They took her back into the hallway and walked a little further down it to the bathroom.

When they got to the bathroom, Lisa sent the other two girls away, saying there wasn't enough room for all of them. Greg, faking nervousness, asked, "What are you going to do?"

"Don't worry, Sherry, I'm just going to make your hair pretty." Lisa gave Greg a perm, which turned out well since Greg already had rather longish hair. When she was done, Greg looked just like a younger Christine.

Looking in the mirror, Greg was pleased with what he saw. Still being careful not to show it, he sucked in his breath. "What do you think, Sherry?" asked Lisa. "Do you like it?"

"But I look like a girl!" wailed Greg, strategically. "Not yet you don't, Sherry," said Lisa, "this is only the start." Greg's head was spinning. He felt as though he had died and gone to heaven.

Ashley and Christine came back down the hall at Lisa's call. Looking at Greg, they giggled. "She looks so pretty!" they both said, simultaneously. "Well, she's gonna look even better," replied Lisa. "Come on, girls, let's get her dressed." They led her back to her room. They made Sherry get undressed. Taking up Greg's old clothes and suitcase, Lisa said, "You won't be needing these anymore, Sherry."

They dressed her up in white tights and a beautiful pink dress, trimmed with lace. They gave her some pretty white sandals and a matching white purse.

Stepping back to admire their work, Lisa said, "That's much better. Why don't you go look at yourself in the mirror, Sherry?" Sherry walked over to the corner with the full-length mirror, her skirt swishing against her legs. She looked in the mirror. She could no longer contain her happiness, and a big smile broke out on her face. She looked at herself from both sides.

She was smiling big as life now, and Lisa saw it. So did Ashley and Christine. Sherry twirled around in front of the mirror. "Well, what do you think now, Sherry?" asked Lisa, smiling. Sherry exclaimed, "Oh, God, am I a beautiful girl, or what?" Lisa said, "I knew you'd like it. I'm so proud of you, Sherry. You are now my little girl. I'm so glad you like it!"

"Like it?" asked Sherry. "I love it! I'm a beautiful girl, and I'm so happy!"

Sherry knew at this point that she really was starting a new life, one that she had wanted for so long that she couldn't remember. She knew this was so right, and that this girl had been in her all along. She now knew it wasn't just liking the clothes; she loved being a girl, and now knew that she had really wanted to be a girl all along.

Lisa, Ashley, and Christine spent the rest of the day showing Sherry how to be a girl. She was a quick learner. They taught her how to dress herself, 'As if I need to be shown,' she thought to herself. They taught her how to sit like a girl, how to walk like a girl, and the things girls talk about. They also reminded her to use the bathroom

correctly. "Most importantly," stressed Ashley, "don't talk about anything girls wouldn't talk about. You have to remember that you are now a girl and must act like one." Sherry agreed with her and begged to go over the lessons again. "I want to be the most beautiful girl in school," she said, happily, "and I want you and Christine to help me!"

Sherry spent the rest of the day trying on new dresses and practicing all the things she had learned. She was thrilled to be a girl. Lisa knew Sherry loved being a girl because Sherry would squeal with pure delight every time she put on a new dress and looked at herself in the mirror. "Am I a beautiful little girl, or what?" Sherry kept asking her sisters each time she put on a new dress. Lisa watched with growing satisfaction. Here was the third little girl she had always wanted.

It was becoming clear to Lisa that Sherry had always wanted to be a girl, but had never known it until that day. She knew she was right when, towards bedtime, Sherry came up to her and said, "Mommy, I love you for showing me the right way! I always thought I wanted to be a baseball player, but now I know what I really want!" Lisa smiled at her. "And what's that, Sherry?" Sherry looked back at Lisa, with twinkles in her eyes. "I want to be Miss America! I want to be a beautiful girl, and I'm so glad you got me started!" Lisa, with tears of joy in her eyes, looked at her youngest daughter. "You are a beautiful girl, and with the right training, you may well realize your dreams. Sleep well, my little princess."

The next day, Sherry Kennedy began her new life. She never looked back to the days when she had been Greg Parker; and if she had, she knew she certainly wouldn't be looking back with any regrets. When she woke up that morning, she put on a pretty blue dress. Lisa had already told her the night before to dress nicely today, because they were going downtown.

After she got dressed, she went to the kitchen for breakfast. "Good morning, Sherry, did you sleep well?" greeted Lisa. "Yes, Mommy," Sherry replied. "You look very pretty today, Sherry," complimented Lisa.

Over breakfast, with Ashley and Christine having come to the kitchen as well, Lisa filled Sherry in on their plans for the day. First on the schedule was to go to the courthouse at the Capitol. There they would take care of Sherry's identification, all of her documents, having them legally changed from Greg Parker to Sherry Kennedy, and from male to female.

Then they had to go register Sherry for school, over at Sunset Valley Elementary. Lisa looked at Sherry, and you could see the love in her eyes for her little girl. She said, "After all that's done, Sherry, honey, Mommy's got a little surprise for you!"

Ashley and Christine did not go with them when they left. After taking care of Sherry's legal documents and records, they went to the school. Sherry was registered as a girl. Then Lisa and Sherry stopped off to have lunch.

After lunch, Lisa said, "Sherry, honey, Mommy's got a little surprise for you now!" Sherry's eyes lit up. "What's that, Mommy?"

"Were going shopping for some more new clothes for you, princess."

Sherry could barely contain her excitement. They got to the store, and for the next two hours, Sherry was trying on lots of dresses and shoes. Finally, Sherry picked out a pretty red dress, a pair of white sandals, and some lace trimmed tights.

Lisa looked approvingly at Sherry's choices. "You have picked out the prettiest dress I've seen today, honey", complimented Lisa. "We'll get that wrapped up then, so you'll have a nice new outfit to wear your first day at school."

School was still a week away from starting. Sherry spent the time learning more and more about how to dress, look, and act like a girl. She also met a few of Christine's friends, who immediately liked Sherry as well. Sherry had never felt so comfortable as a girl before. She was no longer nervous that her actions might betray her. She knew she could easily be a girl now.

Ashley, meanwhile, had taken to going out with her friends, and suddenly seemed not to want to hang around with Sherry or Christine. "It's just her age," sighed Lisa. "She thinks she is just so cool, since she's in high school."

The night before the first day of school came quickly. For once, Ashley was on time for dinner, having previously been warned by Lisa. Later, as Sherry was getting ready for bed, she heard Lisa coming down the hall. She opened Sherry's door. "Are you ready for school tomorrow, princess?"

"Oh, yes," replied Sherry, happily. "I can't wait to meet some of the other girls my age and make some friends!"

"Oh, I'm sure you'll do just fine, Sherry," said Lisa. "Good night, sweetheart." Lisa bent over, and gave Sherry a kiss on the forehead, and smoothed her hair. Then she tucked Sherry in. Now, she straightened up, and walked across the room. "Good night, honey." Lisa turned off the light. "Good night, Mommy." Lisa smiled and closed the door.

Sherry woke up at the break of dawn. She had been too excited to sleep much that night and had tossed and turned a lot. She yawned, stretched, and then got up. She was excited. This was going to be her first day at her new school. She went to the bathroom and took a shower. Drying herself off, she again thought about how school was starting today. She was excited. She went back to her room to dress for school. She got her tights out of the dresser and put them on. She walked over to the closet to get her red dress.

Just then, her door opened. Lisa was in the doorway. "My, you're up early, Sherry! Are you ready for school today?"

"Oh, yes, Mommy!" There was that little sparkle of excitement in Sherry's eyes. "Well, you just get dressed, then, and I'll fix you and your sisters some breakfast, okay, sweetheart?"

"Okay, Mommy," said Sherry, putting her dress on. Lisa smiled, and went back up the hallway to wake up the other girls. Sherry could hear Lisa as she woke her sisters up. She had put on her dress now and was putting on her shoes.

Her sisters groaned, sleepily, about having to get up so early. She couldn't imagine why anyone wouldn't be thrilled to be getting up for school.

Now that she had gotten her shoes on and gotten her purse, she left her room, closing the door behind her, and went to the kitchen. Sherry sat at the table and waited. Five minutes later, Lisa came into the kitchen. Sherry could hear her sisters arguing over who would get first dibs at the bathroom.

Lisa began cooking breakfast, and soon the sounds of arguing were drowned out by the sizzle of bacon and eggs. "My, Sherry, don't we look pretty this morning?" Lisa returned her attention to the stove. "Thanks, Mommy," replied Sherry, "but you know I couldn't have done it without you."

Lisa was very touched by this, and a small tear escaped her right eye. It went down her cheek before she brushed it away. She came over to Sherry. "I want you to know I'm very proud of you, Sherry. You're my little princess, and I love you."

"I love you, too, Mommy." Sherry gave Lisa a hug. Lisa went back to preparing breakfast.

Ashley and Christine came into the kitchen just as Lisa was finishing cooking. "Good morning, girls." Lisa started getting plates ready. "Mornin', Mom," sleepily replied the two girls. "Hi, Sherry." They sat down at the table. Lisa put a plate down in front of Sherry, and one in front of Christine. Then she went back to the counter for Ashley's and her own.

Sitting down, she asked, "Are you girls ready for school?" Ashley spoke excitedly now, "Oh, yes, I can't wait, no longer a freshman!" Christine just shrugged, and Sherry smiled. They all ate breakfast, then the three girls got up. "C'mon, Sherry, we gotta go catch the bus!" Christine headed for the door. "Bye, Mom," yelled Ashley, running out the door.

Ashley was already out of sight as Sherry and Christine went outside. They got to the corner, and waited for their bus. About five minutes later, it came, and they got on it.

Ten minutes later, they were at Sunset Valley Elementary School. "See ya after school, Sherry!" Christine got off the bus. Sherry got off after Christine and went to the office to find out which classroom to go to.

Sherry entered the office and went up to the desk. "Can I help you, little girl?", asked the woman behind the desk. "Yes," began Sherry, "I'm Sherry Kennedy, and I need to know which class I'm in." The woman looked at a book. "You're in Miss Ship's class, room 12, Sherry. Can you find it okay?" Sherry remembered passing it on the way to the office. "I'll find it." Sherry left the office, and went back down the hall. Room 12 was four doors down.

She opened the door and went in. A couple of the boys gave her eyes, but she acted like she didn't see it. Privately, though, she enjoyed it. "And you must be Sherry," said Miss Ship. "Have a seat at any desk that's open." Sherry sat down at a desk that was between a short haired blond girl and one of the boys who had looked at her.

The girl's name was Amy Freeman, and she and Sherry became friends quickly. "You want to watch out for that boy on the other side of you," said Amy, at recess. "What's his name?" asked Sherry. "His name is Josh, and I think he likes you."

After school, Amy went with Sherry to meet Christine. "How was your first day, sis?", asked Christine. "Oh, it was great!" Sherry smiled. "Oh, Christine, I want you to meet my fiend, Amy Freeman." The girls exchanged hellos. "Well, got to go, Amy, see ya tomorrow!" Sherry waved as she boarded the bus. "See ya, Sherry!", yelled Amy, waving, as she walked toward her own bus.

The next few months went very well for Sherry. She began to make more friends, but Amy was still her best friend. She and Amy always giggled together about Josh. It was now late November, and the girls were looking forward to Christmas.

Meanwhile, back in Chicago, Randy Jefferson tried out for and made the football team as a quarterback. He still remembered that home run Greg Parker hit off him in the seventh game. Everyone at Illinois school missed Greg. As Christmas break drew near, Mrs. Armstrong got an offer to teach next year in Austin, Texas, at better pay. She was looking forward to going to Texas and seeing Greg again.

Christmas finally arrived. Sherry's first Christmas with her new family was, in her mind, the best Christmas she had ever had. She got a Barbie doll, and a doll house from her mom. "I don't raise any tomboys, right girls?" Lisa directed the question at Ashley and Christine. "Right, Mom," they agreed. Sherry just smiled.

Sherry also got lots of new clothes, including six new dresses. She squealed with excitement as she opened her gifts. "Oh, it's so beautiful!" exclaimed Sherry, every time she got another dress. Then she would hold it up to herself, and show it off.

"That one will look real pretty on you, Sherry," said Lisa. "You're a pretty girl." Sherry smiled and said, "I just can't wait till I get to start wearing makeup!" With that, Lisa knew she was raising Sherry just like she wanted. This was no tomboy standing there. Sherry was definitely a girlie girl. "Wait until you start junior high, Sherry, then you can start wearing makeup," said Lisa. "Me, too?" asked Christine. "You, too, Christine," agreed Lisa. "But, Mom," complained Ashley, "I had to wait till eighth grade!" She pouted, then finished with, "How come they get to start early?"

"They're not starting early, Ashley, you got started late." She smiled. "You can say that again," surrendered Ashley.

It was now February. The girls were back in school. Sherry kept making new friends and started dance lessons. She played at recess with all of her girlfriends from dance class, including Amy Freeman, her best friend, who had also joined dance class with Sherry.

On the fourteenth, though, Sherry didn't show up at the girls hangout. Sherry had received a Valentine from Josh. They went to recess together that day, and hid behind the portable buildings on campus.

After recess, when she got back to class, Amy leaned over and whispered to Sherry, "Where were you today?" Sherry smiled, and replied, "Oh, just hanging around."

The rest of the day went by. As usual, Amy and Sherry walked together out to the buses. "So where were you, really?" asked Amy. "Nowhere special," replied Sherry, nonchalantly. Christine came skipping along, singing, "Sherry and Josh sittin' in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G!" Amy giggled, and Sherry turned bright red. "Hi, Amy!", greeted Christine. "Sherry here has a boyfriend!"

"You didn't tell me that!", exclaimed Amy. "So that's where you were today." Sherry turned even brighter red. "Yeah, that's where she was," said Christine, "behind the portables, kissing Josh!" Amy giggled. "We were not! Why do you say that, Christine?" asked Sherry, finally finding her voice. "Because you're such a cute couple," teased Christine, giggling. "Bye, Amy!", she yelled, as Amy left for her bus. Amy waved back. Christine and Sherry got on their bus to go home.



The girls got off the bus at their stop. Both girls ran for home. Christine won the race. She threw open the front door, singing, "Sherry's got a boyfriend, Sherry's got a boyfriend!" Sherry, who came in just behind Christine, turned bright red all over again.

Lisa, who had been in the kitchen, came out to greet the girls. She had been making a snack for them. "Hi, girls," greeted Lisa, smiling. Sherry, still bright red, said nothing. "Hi, Mom," said Christine, "Sherry's got a boyfriend!"

"Why, Sherry, that's wonderful!" cooed Lisa, smiling. "Is it someone from your class?"

Sherry didn't say anything. Christine piped up. "His name is Josh. Sherry was behind the portables today, kissing him. I heard all about it!"

"Well, that's sweet, Sherry," said Lisa, "when do I get to meet him?" Sherry, finding her voice again, said, "He's not my boyfriend."

"Well, what do you call him," teased Christine, "when the two of you are swappin' spits?"

"Christine!" Sherry squeaked, turning redder than a stop sign. She couldn't finish what she was going to say. Just then, Ashley walked in. "Hi, Ashley," said Christine and Lisa. Sherry still couldn't talk. "Hi, everyone," replied Ashley. "What are you all red about, Sherry?"

"Sherry's got a boyfriend," teased Christine, "I saw her with Josh behind the portables, sucking face!" Ashley got a look on her face that was half amazement, and half amusement. "Aw, that's so cute....puppy love!", she giggled.

"He's not my boyfriend," said Sherry, "he's just the only boy in my class who gave me a Valentine! And we were NOT kissing".

“Sherry's in love, Sherry's in love!” sang Christine and Ashley together, almost as though they had some private signal. “No, I'm not!” squeaked Sherry.

They all started for the kitchen. Ashley and Christine trailed behind Sherry and Lisa, making kissing noises and giggling. They got to the kitchen and sat at the table. Christine and Ashley, on the count of three, started in again: “Sherry and Josh, sittin' in a tree...” They both broke off into a mad giggling fit.

Over the next couple of weeks, Sherry began to enjoy the teasing, as most girls do. Towards the end of the month, the teasing slowly began to peter out. Of course, this made the “puppy love” not as much fun as it had been, and eventually it wore thin.

Meanwhile, in Chicago, the football season was wrapping up, and Randy Jefferson, formerly the ace pitcher for Indiana School, became the star quarterback.

The baseball season was about to begin again. “Boy, I'm sure gonna miss Greg Parker's bat,” lamented Jason Winters to his assistant coaches. “Well, we still have a pretty good team,” replied David Johnson, the third-base coach. “Yeah,” agreed Jason, “but it won't be the same without Greg.”

He turned out to be right. The defending Little League Champions Illinois School Giants seemed to be affected by Greg's misfortune and sudden departure. They lost their first seventeen games. They got their first win on March 27th, which also happened to be Greg's birthday. Coach Winters noted the irony of that win. “Strange, isn't it, that we won our first game on Greg's birthday?” he asked no one in particular. Much like Sherry, the team now underwent a rebirth. They eventually finished the season in second place.

“How's the birthday girl?” asked Lisa at the breakfast table. “Twelve years old today!” Sherry smiled. They had a party at school for her, naturally. Amy, of course, had brought a card and a little gift. It turned out to be a friendship bracelet that Sherry had seen Amy working on in art class. “So we'll be best friends forever,” said Amy, putting the bracelet on Sherry's wrist. “Oh, we'll always be best friends, Amy!” replied Sherry. “Thank you!”

Instead of the usual routine at the bus stop, Amy got on Christine and Sherry's bus, to ride home with them. Amy was invited to Sherry's birthday party that night. They got to the stop at the corner, and the three girls got off the bus.

They were walking to Sherry's house now, when Amy asked, “So what ever happened between you and Josh, Sherry?”

“Oh, nothing,” said Sherry, “he's just a boy.” The girls giggled at that.

“Hi, Mom!” yelled the girls, upon coming in. “Hi, Miss Kennedy,” said Amy, as Lisa came in from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a towel. “Hi, girls,” she said, smiling. “Be quiet, though, or you'll make the cake collapse.”

Just then, Ashley came in, crying. “What's the matter, honey?” asked Lisa, giving Ashley a hug. “Kevin just dumped me!” sobbed Ashley, crying on her mom's shoulder.