

2016

Sunday 14th August

Lucie

Dad walks into the dining room carrying a showstopper of a cake. All eighteen candles flicker above the raspberry and pistachio topping.

“Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday, dear Lucie. Happy Birthday to you!” they sing.

“A work of art, Steve,” says Nana Pat. “Remember when Maisie turned sixteen and you made an amazing gingerbread house.”

“Baking is pretty similar to building: cake for bricks and cream for cement. Just on a much smaller scale!” laughs Dad.

Mum clears a space on the table. With a big inhale of breath, I blow out most of the candles.

“You can still make a wish,” says Mum, as I extinguish the remaining candles.

I make my wish. Maisie nudges me. “What did you wish for?”

“It’s a secret! If I tell you, it won’t come true.”

“Hey, Dad, you should go on Bake Off!” says Maisie.

My sister’s right, Dad could win prizes for his cakes. He’s used one of my textile designs. The pink and mint green chequerboard pattern makes for an even more elaborate cake than the gingerbread house he made for Maisie. “Getting the repeat squares must have taken hours!”

“Patience and an eye for detail. Like tiling a bathroom,” says Dad with a shrug.

“I filmed the whole thing,” says Maisie. “I posted it online. People love baking videos!” The room goes silent whilst we all eat cake.

“It doesn’t just look good; it tastes good too. The tangy raspberries and nuts are a perfect combination,” says Mum pouring herself another glass of prosecco.

“Dad, this really is heavenly,” I say. It tastes and smells so different from shop bought cakes. The raspberries smell of summer and the slightly burnt taste of the toasted pistachios against the moist sponge is so good. Dad could become a baker rather than a builder any day!

“Such creative talent! It runs in the family,” says Nana Pat, sending a shiver down my spine. Dad and Nana aren’t my blood relations. When I was a kid, Nana Pat and I always made my birthday cakes together and she’d tell me, “Lucie, you are following in my footsteps.” Nana

Pat is a brilliant crafter, too. Her hand embroidery is amazing. Until I became a teenager, she always made me a cross-stitch birthday card.

“What did you spend the money I gave you for studying so hard on?” asks Nana Pat.

“This and that,” I say.

“Didn’t you use it to buy art materials for uni?” asks Mum.

“Mostly,” I reply, unable to tell any of them what I really spent the whole lot on. How do I tell them that comments like “it runs in the family”, really get to me sometimes? Sometimes there’s no alternative but to spend money on a DNA test. It won’t be long before the results are in.

Steve has been my dad since I was a toddler. However, he is blonde-haired and blue-eyed and Mum is a blue-eyed redhead. So, it’s pretty obvious to everyone that he is my stepdad, because I, on the other hand, have mahogany brown hair and caramel skin. Whenever I meet new people, they always seem to ask me where I’m from. I always reply “Norfolk”, but that isn’t enough. Strangers want to know my biological father’s origins, and ask, “Yes, but where are you *really* from?” I feel like an idiot not knowing.

“Steve, darling, is it time to drive Pat home?” says Mum.

In the hall Nana thrusts a twenty-pound note into my hand. “You already gave me money for my exams and my birthday!” I say.

“I know I shouldn’t have favourites, but you’ve always been my favourite grandchild,” she whispers.

I tear up.

“What’s that all about?” she asks giving me a big hug.

I pull away. I’ll never be able to tell Nana Pat, let alone my parents, about the DNA test.

“Tori, Maisie, we’re off now,” calls Dad.

Mum and Maisie come out of the kitchen, and we wave Dad and Nana Pat off. It’s my birthday so for once I don’t have to help clear up. Full of cake, I collapse on the sofa.

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The day after my last exam, Nana Pat gave me fifty pounds for studying so hard. I spent it all on a special-offer DNA test which arrived a few days later in the post. *Did I really think this through?* The result has the possibility to change my life forever.

Hands trembling, I undid a cellophane package and took out the plastic tubes. *Was this how Maisie felt when she did that pregnancy test last summer?* It was so weird to see my younger sister do a pregnancy test. *That* could have been life changing too. I wasn't supposed to eat or drink before doing this. I broke the seal, carefully following the instructions as if doing a biology experiment. I suppose it was a sort of experiment, except this was nothing like the ones we did at school. This was personal. I was the guinea pig.

I spat into the tube several times before my saliva reached the marked line. All sealed in the prepaid envelope, I went downstairs, grabbed my denim jacket and popped the small package in my bag.

"Lucie!" Mum called. "Where are you going? You haven't had your breakfast."

Is Mum suspicious?

"I'm still full from dinner last night," I lied, my stomach rumbling. I was actually starving but I had more important things to think about than food. And I'm not one for skipping meals. When I abstained from chocolate for the whole forty days of Lent it was hell on Earth!

I touched the canvas pocket of my backpack, checking the package was still there. Mum loitered in the hall. She had been watching me, as if she knew I was up to something.

"I just need to pop to the shop," I told her, wondering if old Glynis in the village post office could be trusted to get such an important package into the right sack and off for processing.

"What's the rush? Oh, do you need some tampons?" Mum had whispered.

"No!" I had snapped. If only she knew the real reason that my cheeks were flushed and my heart pounding. If I had thought just a second more, I would have said yes to her question, just to get her off my back. Or, the explosive option: I could have opened my bag and said, "This is what is so important. This little package will tell me everything I never knew."

I headed out, letting the front door slam behind me.

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That was six weeks ago. Now it is all about waiting for the results. Mum says she doesn't know anything about my biological father. She always tells me the same old story, that he was an anonymous sperm donor. I grab my phone from the coffee table and google "sperm donor". It's become a little ritual, something I do when questions flood my mind. I stare at the familiar words willing them to tell me something new.

Donor sperm can help you become pregnant, regardless of your sexuality, gender identity, or marital status.

You can use sperm from an anonymous donor by going to a licensed fertility clinic. Sperm can also be donated by the donor directly to an intended recipient. These clinics may have their own stock of frozen donated sperm, or they may buy it in from a sperm bank. You may also be able to use sperm from abroad.

You can use a donor you already know—such as a friend, or a donor you have met through an introduction website.

Donor sperm can also be part of in vitro fertilisation (IVF) if necessary.

“Luce, what are you doing?” asks Maisie coming into the living room.

“Nothing.” I quickly close the tab and change the conversation. “Can you send me the video of Dad making my cake? I want to share it.”

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