

one



# HANNAH

**M**y name is Hannah Strafel. Hannah is a palindrome, which means it's the same backward and forward. Strafel spelled backward is Lefarts, which sounds French. As in *Le Farts*. Unless the French have another word for fart, which they probably do. I've never looked that up.

If I were going to look up any word in French right now, it would be *terrible*. Right now, my life is terrible in every single language. For one, my best friend, Sophie, just moved to Ottawa. That's a city in Canada, almost three hundred miles from western New York. I'm sure she's making tons of new friends there and will soon forget I exist. Sophie and I lived next door to each other on Centennial Avenue since we were toddlers. I can't imagine life without her.

Reason two that things are terrible: Sophie's house wasn't empty six hours when a real estate agent teetered across the lawn in her spiky heels and hooked a SOLD!!! pendant under the FOR SALE sign. I bet she SOLD!!! it to old people who hate kids. Or murderers. Or worse, a family full of girls who will take over Sophie's room at the top of the stairs and paint her walls pink and have slumber parties on Sophie's floor, where we used to roll out *our* sleeping bags.

"Hannah?" my stepmom, Margo, calls from the kitchen. "Are you almost done?"

I'm sitting on the side porch. I was supposed to be shucking a bowl of corn, but I've been watching a man move boxes into Sophie's house instead. Another man is wheeling furniture up the driveway on a cart. They arrived a little while ago. At first I thought they were the new neighbors until I saw that their van said MOVING ASSOCIATES.

"Are you almost finished with the corn?" Margo says. "Dad just got home from the store and we want to talk with you."

"Coming," I say. Even though I've only shucked three ears, I've strewn corn silk all over the porch. I brush it into the trash bag that Margo gave me. "I'm not done, though."

“Bring it inside!” my dad calls from the kitchen. “We can help.”

I stand up, holding the heavy bowl in my arms. Margo must have put twenty ears of corn in here. I’m strong, though. I’ve been on the Dolphins swim team since third grade. Freestyle is my best stroke. Everyone says I have muscular arms. That’s the plus side. The downside is that my short sandy hair is greenish from the past month of swim camp. Margo says she’s getting me a new shampoo because my Ultra Swim shampoo isn’t working.

“Hey, Hannah,” my dad says. He unclips his bike helmet and washes his hands at the sink.

Margo is at the table, slicing tomatoes. There are hot dogs and veggie burgers defrosting on the counter. We’re having a barbecue in our backyard tonight. Uncle Peter is coming over and a few of my dad’s friends and some people Margo knows from her book group. If Sophie still lived here, her family would be invited, but she’s probably having a barbecue with her new friends in Canada.

And then there’s reason number three: Fifth grade starts in two weeks. I went online this morning and found out I have Mr. Bryce. I’ve never had a guy teacher before. I bet he’s

the strictest teacher at Greeley Elementary. I bet he yells if you're late and only lets you drink water once a day.

"I got you a peanut butter cookie at Crumbles," my dad says, taking the corn from me and setting it on the table. He gestures to a small white paper bag. "Just save it until after lunch, okay?"

Peanut butter is my all-time, hands-down favorite food. Even so, my heart races with suspicion. Something about how my parents are both grinning makes me think they're going to tell me awful news. I'm being a worrier, but that's the way I am. It's *who* I am. Just like how I swim competitively and my birthday is on New Year's Day and I'm the only kid in Greeley who hates pizza.

Sure enough, my dad grabs an ear of corn, tugs off the husk, and says, "There's something big that we want to share with you."

"We're going to be telling people tonight," Margo adds, shifting her smile to my dad, "but we wanted you to know first."

Hang on! Maybe they're going to tell me that we're moving, too. Please let it be Canada. I've always liked the maple-leaf flag. I will learn to love massive amounts of snow. I will get over my fear of ice-skating.

“The thing is,” my dad says, “we’re having a baby.”

My stomach flips over. Actually, it’s more like a triple somersault. Margo reaches across the table and touches my hand.

I yank my fingers away. “I thought you didn’t want more kids.”

Margo is forty-two and my dad is forty-seven. Not like it’s any of my business, but isn’t that too old to be having a *baby*? Also, she and my dad are always saying how, now that I’m older, we can start traveling and doing cool things. Not to mention that Margo is in the process of adopting me. Margo has been my stepmom since I was one. Before that, it was just my dad and me. I never even knew my real mother. They’ve already done all the paperwork for the adoption and talked to lawyers. After the adoption goes through, our true family was going to be the three of us. Not the **FOUR** of us.

“Honey,” Margo says gently, “we were hoping you’d be excited.”

“Can you believe you’re going to be a sister?” my dad asks.

“No,” I snap. I’ve been an only child for almost eleven years. “Please don’t call me a sister. I’ll be a former only child.”

My dad laughs. He doesn’t get that I’m not kidding.

“You’ll get used to it,” he says. “You’ll have plenty of time to adjust by February.”