

I walk the path up to the house while Finn runs ahead. The porch steps feel like a mountain while I carry an imaginary backpack overflowing with an uncomfortable feeling that maybe Cody doesn't want to be friends.

“And what are you up to this fine morning?” Uncle Willy opens the screen door wearing his bathrobe and sweatpants.

“I was...I was down at the dock.” I lower my gaze.

“I see.” Uncle Willy sips his coffee from a blue and white coffee mug that says, *Be Calm and Eat Clams*.

“I looked for the trash from yesterday. But, I couldn't find it anywhere.” I sit on the top porch step while Finn curls up in the sunspot.

I've never been good at lying. It must show on my face, or sometimes I think there's a sign on my back that says, *always tells the truth*. But suddenly, it becomes clear to me I need to do whatever it takes to protect Cody.

Uncle Willy sits next to me. “Who do you think picked it up then?” He takes another sip.

“I bet animals grabbed it, like raccoons or something.” I bring my knees in close and hope Willy doesn't press me with more questions. “Did I tell you I met a really nice lady? She was clamming, and she wore this big hat, and she was really nice to me.”

“What was her name?” Willy tilts his head to the side.

“Her name is Sally.”

Willy grins. “Sally is a very nice lady. A good neighbor to have.”

I scoot close. “And you know what she told me?”

“What did she tell you?” Uncle Willy's eyes are soft and warm.

“She told me if I’m too anxious to find something, like a friend, that I need to let that something come to me. She said I need to be patient, or I’ll scare it away. Not sure I understand what she means, really.”

“Sounds like something Sally would say.” Willy gazes out at Nantucket Sound. “Think about it this way. It’s like fishing. You have to know where the fish are, be patient, and let them come to you. You can’t force things.”

I hug my knees in again and think about Cody. “I guess being a friend or finding a friend *is* like fishing.”

“Yes. Finding a friend is just like fishing.” Willy pats my knee. “Are you hungry?”

“Did you make pancakes?” I bite my lower lip in anticipation.

“You bet I did.” Willy ruffles my hair and gets up.

Inside Uncle Willy’s gray-shingled house, the smell of bacon and maple syrup bring back memories of Sunday breakfast here with my mom, my dad, and my brothers. I miss the comfort feeling of all of us being together. I know Uncle Willy is doing his best, but my whole body still aches for my mom.

“Are you okay, Aiden?” Uncle Willy wraps his freckled arm around my shoulder.

I fight my sadness lump. “I’m okay. I just miss her.”

“I know you do. But, remember what I said when you first got here when you told me you thought you’d always feel this way?”

I take a minute to remember.

Willy stands in front of me and plants both hands on my shoulders, eyes level with mine. “I reminded you that losing someone we love is a hard thing. And that life is full of hard things. It’s up to us how we handle it. We can be a turtle and hide, hoping the feelings go away. But they

don't. Or we can face them head-on. We breathe into our imaginary balloon and let those feelings go up to the sky like an eagle. You have your whole life ahead of you, Aiden." He wraps me into a bear hug only Willy can give. "You'll be okay, I promise."

I pull away first. "You promise?"

"I promise." Uncle Willy's soulful eyes somehow convince me.

"Maybe after breakfast," I pull out a chair, "we can play some Wiffle ball out back?"

"Love to." Willy turns away from the stove with a plate stacked so high with pancakes they could touch the ceiling. "Better eat up. I've got my fastball ready."

"Oh, I'll be ready." I rub my hands on my thighs and reach for the syrup. "I hate to say it, but I wish my brothers were here." I drench my plate. "Tommy's good at playing shortstop and Robby's pretty good at covering first." My mouth waters in anticipation.

Uncle Willy pulls out a chair and sits down. "And you're not a bad hitter yourself, as I remember." He reaches for the syrup.

"I love baseball." I carve out a hunk and take a bite. "But I hardly get picked for the good teams back home." I wipe the syrup from my chin. "I like doodling better, you know? Drawing things from inside my head." I've never felt comfortable enough to say anything to anyone about my drawing, but my Uncle Willy is different. I know I can talk to him about anything.

Uncle Willy reaches for a crispy piece of bacon. "It's more than okay to be good at one thing, you know." He takes a bite.

"I guess so." I raise my shoulders.

"Will you show me some of your drawings sometime?" Uncle Willy carves out a chunk of pancake.

"I think I can do that." I begin to feel that warm, comfort feeling again.

