

Renee followed me back into the house.

“Don’t track snow in here, take your shoes off. You really shouldn’t be using the front door anyway.”

“Well, you already had it open, so I just came in.”

“For once I’m glad you didn’t make your bed. It gave me a chance to see your sheets. They were covered with scales and there were even blood streaks. I can’t believe you were sleeping on them!”

“Leave me alone, Renee. I have more to think about than your crazy cleaning obsession. Why don’t you go write a play about zombie maids or something?”

I stormed up the stairs to my room and Renee stood at the bottom and yelling up to me.

“Well, your sheets are in the dryer. Don’t you dare lie around on the bare mattress.”

I threw my books down on the bed and looked at the wall calendar. In less than a week, Renee would be back at college. It would be such a relief to be alone with my mom again. I sat on my dressing table bench and pulled my knee socks down. The psoriasis patches were cracked and bleeding. I had scratched them a lot last night. In fact, the itching woke me up, so I guess my sheets probably were a mess. I put Vaseline and the heartbreak stuff on. It only helped a little.

I glanced up at the calendar again and for the first time realized that the psoriasis might not be gone by spring. I was as scared as I was mad. Why me? Why not Renee? She had the same parents as me. Why didn’t she get it? Why not Mary Lou? She had the picket fence, the perfect hair, a dad at home every night, and a scarf collection. Why did everything work out for other people just the way it was supposed to?

Renee opened the door and flung the warm sheets and mattress pad at me.

“Make your bed. If you hurry up, you can watch *Dark Shadows* with me.”

“Get out of here, Renee. And don’t just think you can bust in here any time you want. Knock the next time! And no, I do not want to watch anything with you. You can take your damn *Dark Shadows* back to Mt. Pleasant as soon as possible!”

“Ruth Ann Bloomfield, did you just say *damn*?”

“Yes I did, and you’re not my mother, so damn, damn, damn!”