

from *Absolutely Normal Chaos*
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Thursday, June 14

Well, I have to admit that we did get an *interesting* bit of news today! I almost missed it entirely because of all the commotion at the dinner table. There is always commotion at the dinner table—you can hardly hear yourself eat. We had spaghetti, and Dougie doesn't like spaghetti and was pushing it around his plate and slopping sauce all over, and so Dennis punched him and Dougie started crying.

In the middle of all that Dad said, "Had a letter from Radene today." Radene is married to Dad's brother, Uncle Carl Joe, and they live in West Virginia. "Did you see it?" Dad said. (He meant the letter.)

"No, I didn't see it," [my mother replied.] "Dougie, if you don't stop that hollering right this minute—" . . .

"Well, she wants to know—"

"Dennis, are you aggravating the situation? If you are—" Mom can hardly eat, she's so busy trying to figure out who's causing the trouble.

"Sally, are you listening or not?" My dad is getting annoyed because he can't stand all this commotion, and it happens every night.

"Why, of course I'm listening, Sam. Dennis, put your hands on the table where I can see them."

"Radene wants to send Carl Ray up here." Dad eats a meatball.

"Radene said *what?*"

"She wants to send Carl Ray up here."

Carl Ray is one of Aunt Radene's and Uncle Carl Joe's seven children. He's my cousin.

"What do you mean, she wants to send Carl Ray up here?" My mom didn't look too happy about this.

"Just temporarily," my dad said. "He wants to get a job. No work down there. It'll just be for a little while, until he gets a job and gets on his feet." . . .

"And just where exactly will we put him?" My mother had stopped eating by now.

"Well, we could put the boys together—"

"All three of them?"

"Wouldn't hurt 'em. Then we could put Carl Ray in the little room where Tommy is now."

"In the *nursery*? Sam. are you *serious?*"

"It's just temporary. A month. Maybe two months. . . ."

". . . And when does she want Carl Ray to come up here?"

My father was chewing when he answered. "Saturday."

My mom almost choked. "*Saturday? Saturday?* Sam, today is *Thursday*. You can't be serious. . . ."

So Carl Ray comes the day after tomorrow. That should be interesting. I have to admit I'm sort of surprised, mainly because the West Virginia Finneys hardly ever leave

West Virginia. The only time I ever heard of Uncle Carl Joe venturing this far north was when he visited my father and met Aunt Radene, a long time ago.

I can hardly remember which cousin Carl Ray is, but Maggie told me later that he is the one with the white-blond hair and he is seventeen years old, the same age as Maggie. This should be *real* interesting.