

CHAPTER 1: Chapped Lips

My lips are chapped again. It always happens once Little League starts and there's nothing I can do about it. Time's the only thing that heals chapped lips, I don't care what they say in those commercials. It's hot tonight, and humid, even for Iowa in late June, and I've got the fan going full blast on me and my best friend Arnie, who's sleeping over again and snoring again.

Arnie and I both start fifth grade in September, but he's almost five months older and almost three inches taller. When he sleeps over he goes right to sleep once I turn out the light, then he starts snoring until I nudge him and he grunts and looks at me with half-open eyes and shuffles and goes back to sleep. He usually starts snoring again in about fifteen minutes. But Arnie's my best friend, and he doesn't snore on purpose. It's just that with some guys you can always hear them breathing, even when they're awake. Every breath you can hear, and it drives me nuts. Breathing should be a silent thing.

It was a good day for Arnie and me. We usually spend Saturdays outside if the weather's decent. We played tennis this morning, then came home and ate hot dogs and just goofed around then went riding around the neighborhood on our bikes. We played Wii baseball for a while then had a sock fight in my room. I'll tell you more about our



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famous sock fights later. We went to bed about 10:30.

But I woke up again a few minutes ago. I don't know what time it is now, but it must be late. There's a cricket outside my window that can't sleep either. All the other crickets in my neighborhood are done for the night, but this one keeps going. Ever since I woke up he's been singing. Maybe he's got stuff on his mind, too. I don't know how long crickets live but I'm sure it isn't as long as humans so they really have to make the most of their time. And they always have to worry about people killing them and that's got to be stressful for any bug.

It wasn't the cricket that woke me up, though. Or my chapped lips. Or even Arnie's snoring. It was a bad dream. Another one. I've had a lot of bad dreams this past year. It all started — the bad dreams, the fight, the lunchbox incident, the mailbox incident, the school psychologist, all of it — in November. That's when I found out my mom has cancer.

