

Chocolate Biscuits

by Adam Byatt

Sunday's early afternoon sun tapped Josh on the shoulder. He stirred, stretched and thought about the night before. He scooped up his mobile from the bedside and scrawled through the text messages from the night before. Derek had sent a few late night incoherent ramblings that Josh laughed at.

He stopped at the one that read, "Thnx 4 talking last nite. C U at skool on Mon. Katie." His heart skipped a beat. He remembered her black hair pulled back into a single roped plait that hung over her shoulder and the sapphire earrings that dangled when she laughed. They had spent most of the night at the edge of the party, caught up in each other's company. Josh felt his stomach jump with excitement replaying the night before. When he had left with Derek, Katie had squeezed his hand.

Dragging his body off the bed, he headed downstairs for lunch. His younger sister Caitlin was diving into a peanut butter sandwich while his Dad read the paper.

"Good afternoon sunshine. How was last night?" his mother asked from the bench. "Would you like a sandwich?"

"Yes please. Cheese thanks. Last night was good. Had fun."

"Didn't hear you come in. Were you late?"

"Nah, I was home by curfew."

Caitlin popped her thirteen year old nose into the conversation. "Mum, I know something you don't know. Josh spent all night talking to a girl. Emma's sister was at the party and told her all about it and Emma told me."

"Oh, that's nice dear. What's her name?"

"No one in particular," mumbled Josh.

"Mum, Katie Byrne isn't just anybody," chimed Caitlin.

"Shut up, Caitlin," Josh hissed as his face reddened.

"She's lovely," his mum said.

His father kept reading but threw his son a wink over the paper.

Josh took his sandwich and excused himself, saying he had more homework to complete. He was having a hard enough time getting through his final year of studies without having his sister point out his fledgling love life to his parents.

Sitting at his desk, he spun backward and forwards, looking at Katie's text again and his heart skipped a beat. He wanted to find another way to talk to her again on Monday. He had no idea how they fell to talking in the first place. The thought of approaching Katie made him nervous but he needed to speak with her again. Josh thought she was stunning and when he looked in the mirror he saw a face that had taken a beating with the Ugly Stick.

He needed a plan, something tangible to help him open the conversation. Like a drowning man, Josh felt out of his depth. Scooting through the myriad movie clichés in his mind, he narrowed it down to the gift of chocolate. A reconnaissance of the kitchen yielded the last two chocolate biscuits in the packet. He carefully wrapped them in plastic film and hid them in a paper bag, stashed at the back of the fridge.

His plan was formed. At recess, he would approach Katie and share his food with her. To engage with the object of his desire required courage, but he felt like Marty McFly's dad. He didn't want to come out sounding like an idiot.

"You are my density," he mimicked.

The next morning Josh carefully retrieved the biscuits from the back of the fridge and put them into his bag. His phone beeped an incoming message. *Don't forget your History homework. Derek.* Josh shot back a reply and hurried to his room and flipped his papers around until he found his homework.

The buzz on the train to school the next morning was all about the party and Josh and Katie's liaison had not gone unnoticed. Derek jumped right in, "So, you and Katie. What happened?"

Josh blushed. "Nothing happened. We just talked."

"Are you going to talk to her again?"

"I want to, but... I have a plan and it's silly."

"What is it?"

"I've packed some chocolate biscuits so I've got something to open the conversation with at recess time. I mean, I have no idea how we got talking in the first place, so I need a way to talk to her."

"Any plan is a good plan. Hope it works. Do you have classes with her today before then?"

Josh skimmed his timetable and was thankful Katie was not in his morning classes. In class he fidgeted, couldn't focus, knowing the seemingly insurmountable task before him. By the time recess came, his stomach felt like a writhing pile of snakes.

He caught up with Derek at their recess spot. Across the courtyard he spotted Katie and her friends.

"You ready for this?" said Derek.

"Nup. Here goes nothing," said Josh.

He rummaged through his school bag looking for his present. Nothing. Gone. Disappeared. Vanished. At the bottom he found the crumpled paper bag that had held his treasure. No matter how much he looked in the bag, it did not contain the two wrapped chocolate biscuits. **The bag was empty except for a smudged slip of paper which said, "Thanks for the biscuits" scrawled in pink highlighter. Josh was dumbfounded but it gave way to fury when he saw the smiley face.**

"What's up?" Derek asked.

"Caitlin, that sneak of a sister, flogged my biscuits and left me a note just to rub it in."

Josh felt deflated; his plan amounting to nothing but crumbs and an empty bag. He flopped down against the wall and felt gutted.

"Have you lost something?" Even dressed in the sack of a school uniform Katie was appealing.

"I was wondering if you would like to share a choc chip biscuit," she said offering her hand forward.

