

Chapter 1: My Old Phone

Sometimes, when I have a rare moment to myself, I lift up the loose board under my bed and pick up my old phone. Its body is a light-grey, clean metallic hue that is unlike anything else around me here. The screen, dead black, is as smooth and pristine as always, save for a small crack on the upper left side where I dropped it once, so long ago that I don't remember when.

I hold the smooth rectangle in my both my hands, passing it from one to the other, one to the other. It's so smooth, almost like water. I take it in my right hand and hold my thumb over the home key and press it. Once, twice. I know it doesn't work. But somehow I think that maybe this time it'll come to life. I press once more. Still dead. So I swipe my thumb across the screen. My muscles remember this motion, will never forget. Despite the dead black screen, I can almost see the crisp, bright colors, all joy and movement. I swipe my thumb three times quickly, then once more slowly, and stop. I hold the phone still for another moment and then put it back under the floor. It's dead.

Once, Jon, my brother, stuck his head in my room just as I was about to put my phone away.

"What are you doing?" he said, inching his way closer between the ajar door and its frame.

"Nothing." Little brothers, whether they're yours by birth or adoption, are always a pain in the ass.

"What is that?"

I tried to put it into my pocket. But then I realized I didn't have any pockets. So I just stood there, speechless.

"It's just something from home," I admitted. It doesn't even work.

"Can I see it?" he asked, not impolitely for a nine year old.

"Fine," I said. I handed it over.

He held it in his hands, rubbing his fingers and thumbs over its smooth surface.

"It's so smooth," he said.

"Yeah, I know."

"I remember hearing about these. What did they do again? I mean, I know you could make telephone calls. But what else? Write letters or something?"

I had to actually think about all the many things I used to use an iPhone for. "Yeah, it was a telephone. And you could write letters, yeah. You could type on a tiny little keyboard. And you didn't need paper for any of it." *What else?* "Um, you also got pictures."

"Pictures of who?" he asked.

"Um, like of your friends and family and stuff. Or whoever. Like a newspaper." I had to think about that for a second, though. "Like an English newspaper, I mean. Pictures of famous people and the President and things like that."

"Huh," said Jon.

"Listen," I said, gently taking the phone back from his hands. "Don't tell Mom and Dad about this, okay? They won't understand like you do, and I don't want to make them upset. Okay?"

He thought about it for a moment. "Okay," he said.

“Thanks.” I put it back underneath the floorboard and put everything back in place.

“Let’s go downstairs.”

I said this, but it came out slow enough to elicit a strange face from Jon. Because it took me a couple seconds to remember what the word for “downstairs” was in Pennsylvania Dutch.