

THE VISIT

By Liane Fazio

She hadn't seen her twin brother in 10 years, but there he was, sitting at her kitchen table. "Patrick!" she shouted, dropping bags of groceries onto the kitchen floor. "How... why... how?"

"Hey sis!" Patrick said cheerfully, getting up and moving toward his sister. "I didn't mean to scare you. Just wanted to stop by and say hi. I feel like I haven't seen you in forever. Here, let me help you with those." He squatted, and as he reached out to gather the fallen groceries, she instinctively pulled back.

As she watched her brother pick up her groceries, she dug in her purse and brought out her cell phone. If he was here, she should have been notified that he was out. The screen showed no notifications or missed calls. She opened the calendar app and checked the date in case she missed something. Nothing. She checked the month, and the month before. Not anything. She slid her phone into her back pocket, quietly shoved her car keys into her front pocket, and put on her happy face.

"You surprised me, is all," she said in her cheeriest voice. "I didn't know you had a key to my house."

"I don't." Patrick placed the groceries on the kitchen table and started to sort them.

Smiling, she began putting the groceries away. "Then how'd you get in?"

"I found your hide-a-key," Patrick said.

Hiding behind the open refrigerator door, she winced. After taking several deep breaths, she put a smile back on her face.

“Well, you should’ve told me you were coming. I could’ve picked you up. How did you get here, anyway?”

“I took the bus.”

The bus? He would need money to take the three-hour bus ride.

“Where did the bus drop you off?” she asked, thinking about who in town could have seen Patrick.

“Across from the library.”

Across from the library stood the town hall and the police department, separated by Main Street and the railroad tracks.

“That sounds like a nice walk. Did—did you run into anyone?”

“Oh yeah,” began Patrick, “I saw the Harrisons, Mr. Sullivan from the coffee shop, and our old neighbors who lived next door. What were their names?”

She grabbed the counter to steady herself and said, “Paulson. They were the Paulsons.”

“Oh yeah!” Patrick clapped his hands, making his sister jump. “How could I forget them? They were Mom and Dad’s best friends. Remember?”

She nodded and whispered, “I remember.”

Patrick handed her a box of pasta, saying, “They sure acted weird when I said hi to them. I thought they didn’t recognize me or something. I kept calling and waving to them, but they practically ran across the street.”

Quickly opening the refrigerator, blocking Patrick's view, she wiped a tear from her cheek. She needed to call them. To let them know he was out. That he was *here*. She couldn't do this alone. Not again. She dug her phone out of her pocket, clicked on a contact, hit dial, turned the volume down, and slid the phone back into her pocket.

"Hey," Patrick said, handing her a bag of oranges from around the door, "Where are Mom and Dad?"

Taking the oranges, she pulled them to put them on the shelf, but Patrick didn't let go. Reluctantly, she met his eyes.

"Why are people acting weird to me?" Patrick asked honestly.

"I—I'm not sure what you mean," she stuttered.

He let go of the oranges. "Where are Mom and Dad?"

She turned, put them on the shelf, and closed the refrigerator door, turning to face Patrick. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, I stopped by their house, and they're not there."

She gasped. Wide-eyed, she stared at Patrick. "You *what*?"

"Of course I would go see them," he said, looking at her like she was crazy. "Why wouldn't I?"

"Why wouldn't you—what happened?" she asked calmly.

"Some other family lives in their house!" he said disbelievingly. "In our childhood house! When did that happen? When did Mom and Dad move away? Did Dad finally retire?"

She couldn't help it. Her face automatically grimaced, and a disgusted grunt escaped her.

"What?" he asked.

She took him by the arm and led him to the kitchen table. "Patrick, sit down."

Taking his hands in hers, she rubbed her thumb across his knuckles. "Dad didn't retire."

"Then where—?" Patrick started, but she shushed him.

She took a deep breath. "Do you remember how you got here?"

"Yeah, I told you I took the bus."

She closed her eyes and shook her head. "I mean before the bus. How did you get to the bus?"

Patrick scrunched his eyebrows. He shook his head.

"You don't remember?" she asked.

He shook his head again.

There was a knock at the front door.

She nodded. "Patrick, you were right when you said you haven't seen me in forever. It's been ten years. You've been gone for ten years."

"What?" he asked.

More knocking at the front door.

"The Paulsons were afraid when they saw you. That's why they ran away from you."

Patrick shook his head. "I don't get it. What's going on?"

She squeezed his hands. "Patrick, Mom and Dad don't live here anymore. Do you remember why?"

“No. I—I didn’t know they moved. Where are they?”

She shook her head and said softly, “They didn’t move, Patrick. They’re dead.”

Pounding at the front door. Patrick turned to look down the hallway towards the front door.

“Listen,” she said calmly, quickly, “you live in Brightside Asylum. You’ve lived there for the past ten years. The people at the front door are here to take you back there. You need to go with them. You need to be good, and nice, and listen to what they say. Okay?” She choked back tears.

“No, I don’t,” Patrick said, yanking his hands back. “Why would you say that?”

The backdoor opened. Four police officers entered the kitchen. She nodded to them.

“What’s going on?” Patrick shouted. “You called the police on me? I didn’t do anything! Just because I found your hide-a-key and came in?” She slowly shook her head. “Then what? *What?*”

“You don’t remember because you blocked it out,” she said matter-of-factly. “But I do. *I do*. I remember the screaming. I remember them asking *why*. I remember the sounds of the baseball bat hitting them with each swing. They’re gone because of you. Everyone is afraid of *you*.”

Patrick shook his head fiercely. “No!”

She nodded. “The only way that you’re here right now is that you escaped. And I hate to think of what you did to get yourself here.”

Recognition dawned on Patrick's face as he leaned back in the chair. He stared at her for a long moment, then chuckled. The police officers gently lifted Patrick, cuffed him, and slowly walked him to the door. One officer stood talking to his sister at the kitchen table.

Before leaving, Patrick turned to his sister and said, "I do remember. I remember I covered for you so your life wouldn't be ruined." He glanced at the police officers. "Nice way to pay your brother back."

The police officers escorted Patrick out and into a squad car. She watched from her living room window with a smile on her face. Patrick had always remembered things differently.