

Doris lived in a small townhouse on the west side of the tracks. A train rumbled by as he climbed the steps to the front door and rang the bell. The door was opened by a ten year-old girl, a younger version of Doris with darker stringier hair in pony-tails.

"Hi," Ian said to her. "Are you Doris' sister?"

The girl stared at him in silence.

"Uhm. Is Doris here?"

Remaining mute, her stare focused on his nose.

"If she lives here, can you tell her Ian is here?"

"Who's Ian?" she finally spoke.

Relieved she could speak, he replied, "I'm Ian."

The girl looked at her watch. "You're early."

"I know. But I don't mind waiting if she's not ready. Can I come in?"

She opened the door wide to let him in, then turned and yelled, "Doris! It's him!"

"Already?" Ian heard her reply. "I'll be down in a few minutes."

Ian closed the door behind him, then looked about the entranceway. To the left, an archway led into the living room.

"You can sit down if you want," the girl said.

"Thank you. Should I take my shoes off?"

She thought for a moment then looked at his worn and dirty sneakers. "Hmmm. Maybe you better."

He untied his shoes and left them by the door as she stared at him. Then he took a seat on the couch while she sat in the

armchair opposite, continuing to analyze him.

"So you're taking Doris out on a date?"

He nodded.

"I guess you like her, eh?"

Ian fidgeted. Why was he stuck here with this precocious child? And why was Doris taking so long?

"Where's your Mum and Dad?" he asked.

As much as he hated meeting the parents of girls, he hated sitting with little sisters even more.

"Out. Do you like her a lot?"

Ian listened in vain for a signal of Doris' impending arrival. "I guess I do, yes."

"Are you going to kiss her?"

Now this was getting far too personal. Unfortunately, Ian had little experience with ten year-olds and didn't know how to deflect their intrusive comments by humouring them. He also didn't want to put the girl off by telling her it was none of her business. What if he and Doris hit it off and then this child told her he had been rude to her? Doris might think he was insensitive and wasn't good with kids. He couldn't just speak his mind.

"I ...I don't know."

"That's what boys do if they like a girl."

He decided to avoid comment.

"They also buy them flowers and chocolates. Did you buy Doris flowers and chocolates?"

"You usually only buy those things if you know the person

better. I don't know Doris very well."

The girl was obviously disappointed with him. He felt he needed to redeem himself somehow.

Then he remembered he had a Twix bar in his coat pocket. He had bought it yesterday and intended to have it last night but had forgotten about it.

"Well, I..." he stammered, showing her the chocolate bar. "I have this."

She peered at it judgmentally then looked up at him.

"Twix are for kids."

"No, they're not," Ian retorted.

He put the bar back in his coat pocket and shuffled his feet awkwardly.

The girl then leaned forward and stared curiously at his face.

"What'd you do to your nose?"

"What do you mean?"

"How come it's all flat and squashed like that?"

Ian felt like making *her* nose flat and squashed but he thought better of it.

"That's the way my nose is."

"Were you in a fight or something?"

"No. It just grew that way."

"Weird."

He heard footsteps on the stairway and eagerly looked up. Instead of Doris, one of her older brothers came down and introduced himself as Joe. Indicating his youngest sister, he

added, "Has she been giving you the third degree?"

"A little."

"Sara, why don't you go in the kitchen and put the dishes away. You were supposed to do that right after supper."

Sara dragged herself out of the room sighing dramatically.

Joe was Ian's age with similar features, except that Joe was taller, heavier and more muscular, with a moustache, a long straight nose and a rugged square chin. He peered at Ian curiously. "What happened to your nose?"

Ian forced a small grin. "Nothing happened to my nose. That's just the way it is."

"Really? Nobody hit you? A jealous boyfriend?"

Seeing Ian didn't like this line of questioning, Joe quickly added, "Hey I'm just kidding ya. Ya want a beer? I think Doris is gonna be a while."

"I don't think so."

Joe sat on the couch beside Ian.

"So, where ya taking Doris?"

"A movie. We're gonna see 'For the Love of Julie'."

Joe snorted. "Sucker. She's dragging you to see that, eh? Well, at least it's not as long as the first one. That was an endurance test, I tell you. What was it? Four and a half hours?"

Ian just smiled, not wanting to voice his objections to the movie in case Doris overheard. And where was she??

Joe tried another attempt at conversation.

"Did you catch the Jays' game last night?"

Ian shook his head. "No. I was at a Francois Truffaut film fest."

"Uh-huh."

"Saw 'Day for Night'. I think it's his best."

"Yeah."

"Of course 'Jules and Jim' is a classic. The maturing of their friendship while they continue to love the same woman. Amazing."

"Uh-huh. The Jays had three double plays. Shoulda seen it."

"Good game?"

"Good? The Yankees were hurting."

Ian knew nothing of baseball but he knew what a Yankee was. "Was Boston playing?"

"Boston?!"

Footsteps at the top of the stairs caught their attention and Ian was saved from having to explain himself. This time another member of the family - a 15-year old brother with long jet black hair and a tattoo of a guitar on his right bicep - came down to meet him.

"Oh, this is Scotty." Joe explained. He turned to his brother. "Scotty. Ian. A friend of Doris'."

How many siblings did she have?! As he took in this newcomer, he noticed Scotty was peering at him curiously.

"It's not broken. That's just the way my nose is."

Scotty silently looked from one to the other.

"He don't say much," Joe informed Ian.

Scotty gave his brother the finger then headed toward the kitchen. On his way he stopped near the door, picked up Ian's shoes and dropped them in the garbage can.

"Hey, hey!" Ian cried out. "Those are my running shoes!"  
Scotty fished them out and handed them to Ian. "Sorry, man."

Ian brushed off some coffee grinds and bits of lettuce, then put them back by the door. As he headed back to the couch, he heard the downstairs toilet flush. Knowing Doris was somewhere upstairs, he wondered who it could be. Yet another sibling?!