

~Blood of My Blood ~

by KG MacGregor

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"You're late."

"I brought ice cream."

"Is that supposed to make it okay?"

"It's Rocky Road."

Lily resisted on principle for ten more seconds before granting forgiveness, backhanded though it was. "Lucky for you I'm PMSing."

"I don't think I've ever imagined a sentence like that before." Anna crossed the kitchen to where daughter Eleanor was coloring at the table and planted a kiss on her head. Then she bravely ignored her partner's cranky mood and embraced her from behind. Over Lily's shoulder, she eyed the pot on the stove and groaned. "Macaroni and cheese again?"

"Andy needs a pick-me-up. He had a tough day."

"What happened?"

"I got a note from his teacher. He got upset at school today when they were talking about different kinds of families."

Anna frowned. "Why would he-?"

"Stop it, Georgie! Give me that back," Andy yelled from the family room.

"Uh-oh." Anna went in to see about the ruckus.

"He took my car," Andy pouted.

Sure enough, three-year-old George appeared to be starting a garage of his own on the other side of the room.

"Which one do you want back?" Anna's implication, of course, was that Andy might consider sharing a few.

"The Vette."

"Hmmm." Anna picked up another car from George's purloined stash and swapped him for the

one in his hand. "I might have chosen the Porsche."

"They're all mine."

"I know, and that's what makes you such a great brother. George is lucky that you share your toys."

"He's not my brother."

"Excuse me?" That was her stern voice, the one that meant she had heard clearly but wanted an explanation.

"He's not my brother because I'm adopted."

"Of course he's your brother. Just because we-"

"Dinner's ready!"

"Come on, pal. We'll talk about this." She nudged him up from the floor and turned back to George. "Let's go, son. Mama's calling."

"You should read this," Lily whispered, handing her the folded note:

To the parents of Andy Kaklis,

I'm sorry to say that your son had a difficult time today during a discussion about different kinds of families. When I asked some of the children to describe their families, Andy talked about being adopted. Some of the other children remarked that theirs were "real" families, prompting Andy to become angry and upset. I feel certain after our talk today that all of the boys and girls in my class have a deeper understanding and acceptance of these differences. However, Andy could have some lingering hurt feelings that may warrant your attention at home.

Thank you as always for your support. Having your son in my class is a pleasure.

Mrs. Rueghal

Anna folded the note and set it on the counter before taking her seat at the round table, which was set with two booster seats for the twins, one on each side of Lily. "Yum! I see we're having macaroni and cheese again."

Andy knew she didn't like his favorite dish, so when he didn't respond at all to her remark, it was a sure sign he was genuinely depressed about the events of the day. Anna shot Lily a pleading

look.

"I told your mom that we were having macaroni and cheese tonight because you had a tough day and I thought it would cheer you up."

"I don't like macaroni," Eleanor said, making a horrid face.

"I do," George announced, seconds before he shoveled an enormous spoonful into his mouth.

Anna sat between her two sons. "So what happened today, Andy? Does this have anything to do with what you said about George not being your brother?"

Andy remained glum, only picking at his food. "He isn't. I'm adopted and he was born."

"You were born too, honey," Lily said. "But you grew in my sister's tummy."

"But Georgie and Ellie grew in your tummy, so they aren't my real brother and sister."

"Wait a minute, Andy," Anna said. "It doesn't matter whose tummy you came from. Families are connected by love."

"That's right," Lily chimed in. "And we all love each other, so that makes us a family."

Andy looked directly at Anna and asked her pointedly, "How come you always call me pal and you call Georgie son?"

Anna felt as though she had just been kicked in the stomach. "Those are just nicknames, Andy. I've always called you my pal. I thought you liked it."

"I do," he admitted, his voice small and seemingly contrite.

"You and Georgie are both my sons, and you are both my pals."

"I want more macaroni," George said, prompting Anna to scrape hers quickly onto his plate before Lily could get up for more.

"But Russell said real families all had the same blood."

"Well, Russell's wrong," Lily said indignantly.

"He said he got his blood from both his mom and his dad. Who did I get mine from?"

Anna set her fork down. "Okay, it's like this. We're all connected by blood." She gestured at everyone around the table.

"This should be interesting," Lily said, not bothering to hide her smirk.

"Now pay close attention, because this might be difficult for people who can't follow simple directions." She sneered at her partner sarcastically. "Everybody put down your spoon or fork."

Andy complied and rested his hands in his lap. Anna practically wrestled George's spoon from his hand and set it out of his reach. "You can have it back in a minute. Okay, we'll start with your mama. She and her sister had the same blood, right?"

Andy nodded.

"And since you grew in her sister's tummy, that means you have the same blood too."

That realization brightened his face.

"Okay, so I want you and your mama to hold hands."

Lily reached across the table and took Andy's hand.

"Now, here's where it starts to get complicated." How does one explain invitro fertilization to an eight-year-old? "George grew in Mama's tummy and he came from her blood. So George, I want you to hold your mama's other hand, okay?"

George did, and now he, Andy, and Lily were connected.

"All right, here's where it gets really convoluted. Pay attention."

She didn't need to ask him; he was spellbound.

"Eleanor grew in your mama's tummy too, but she came from my blood." Anna held out her hand to her daughter. "Take my hand, sweetie."

Now Anna and Eleanor were connected, but the most difficult aspect of the link remained: the sperm donor.

"Before a baby can grow in its mommy's tummy, it has to have blood from a woman, like your mama or me"-she watched Andy's eyes to see if he was following along-"and blood from a man. Now we don't know who that man was-the doctor did that while we weren't looking-but the same man gave his blood to George and Eleanor. That means that George and Eleanor are connected to each other by blood. Georgie, take your sister's other hand."

He did.

"So look what we have Andy."

What they had looked like an octopus in the middle of the kitchen table.

"You're connected to Mama. She's connected to George."

Andy started to mouth the words along with her.

"George's connected to Eleanor. And she's connected to me."

"We're all connected to each other!" By the look on his face, Andy was ecstatic.

"That's right, but you know what, Andy?"

"What?"

"Even if we weren't connected by blood, Russell was still wrong. We're a family because we all love each other."

George lunged forward to retrieve his spoon.

"And George has to be your brother because he's the only one I know who loves macaroni and cheese as much as you do."

"But you don't like it."

"Ah, but I like cars and so do you."

"So does George."

Lily stood. "And I like Rocky Road ice cream. Who else does?"

"Me!" came the chorus.

Anna smiled, tremendously satisfied with herself. When she got up to help clear the table for dessert, Lily tugged her aside for a quick kiss.

"Have I ever told you that I think you're brilliant?"

"Not nearly enough."

"Maybe when the kids go to bed we can go upstairs and I'll tell you some more."

"Promises, promises. Once we turn the lights out, you never want to talk about my brain."