

## ***See You at Harry's***

**By Jo Knowles**

The very best day of my life, I threw up four times and had a fever of 103 degrees. I was pretty sure I was going to die, and sometimes by the look on my mom's face every time she took my temperature, I think she was pretty sure, too. It was all because of Random Smith, a boy in school who never had any lunch. I'd given him a bite of my sandwich and all of my crackers, he looked so hungry. Growing up, my mom wasn't the kind of mom who said never drink from the same cup as someone else. That stuff didn't occur to her. So I'd given him a sip of my milk, too.

But in addition to being hungry all the time, Random was also usually sick. People never knew what he had, so they always just said he had "some random thing" - which they all thought was hilarious but I just thought was mean.

That day at home, my mom spent every minute with me. My older sister and brother were at school, and my dad was working at my parents' restaurant. I was eight and had never been home alone with just my mom before, at least not all day and definitely not with her full attention. The house was so quiet, except for us two. My mom got into bed with me and read *Charlotte's Web*. It took all day, and at the end, we both cried and shared a tissue.

When we finished sniffing, my mom adjusted herself in the bed so she could look at e. "Fern," she said softly. "Do you know why I named you Fern?"

I nodded, looking at the drawing of the girl on the cover of the book.

“Why?” she asked.

“Because Fern is one of your favorite characters?”

“And why is that?”

I shrugged.

“Because Fern cares,” she said. “From the moment you were born, I could tell you had a special soul. I knew you’d be a good friend. A hero.”

I looked at my chest and tried to feel my soul buried in there, deep in my heart.

“It’s true,” my mom said. “Not everyone would share a sandwich with Random Smith.”

I smiled, feeling my soul stir a little.

My mom took my hand and kissed it. “I’m proud of you, honey,” she said. “I know you’re miserable now, but you made a little boy feel like he matters. And I hope you think it was worth all this.”

I nodded slowly, thinking about Random and his dirty face and stinky unwashed hair. I wondered if he was home sick, too, and if he had a mom next to him on his bed, reading to him all day and telling him he was special. But then I started to feel like I was going to throw up again. So I turned over on my side and my mother rubbed my back in slow, tiny circles, humming a lullaby I barely remembered, with fingers on my back I hardly knew. She was always so busy cooking and cleaning and working at the restaurant and basically just taking care of everything else.

I closed my eyes and tried to remember that feeling, because somehow, even then, I had a hunch that I might not feel it again.

Two days later, my mm got Random's bug. But instead of getting better, she kept throwing up. Every morning she was sick, sick, sick. And then finally, after what felt like weeks and weeks, she and my dad sat us down and told us the news. My mom was going to have a baby.