



The Red Mug on a Tuesday

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: Somebody Laughs

Rina laughs in the kitchen.

It is a real laugh, sudden and loud, and Simi stops outside the doorway.

Bubby died three weeks ago.

Her red mug is still on the counter. Mama keeps it there while she decides where the few things from Bubby's apartment should go. No one uses it yet.

Rina stands beside that very counter, laughing at something their little brother says.

Simi steps into the kitchen.

"How can you?"

Rina's smile disappears.

Their brother looks between them, holding two breadsticks like a pair of enormous eyebrows.

"What?" Rina asks.

Simi doesn't answer. She looks at the red mug.

Rina follows her eyes.

"Oh," she says quietly.

Somehow that little word makes Simi angrier than the laugh.



Chapter 2: The Dry Eyes

The sisters share a room. Rina is twelve; Simi is ten.

Before Bubby died, they shared visits too. Rina liked sorting Bubby's sewing buttons. Simi liked sitting at the table while Bubby told her which visitor went with which piece of cake.

Now Rina tidies her schoolbag and reads. Simi sits on her bed remembering the table.

"Do you miss her?" Simi asks.

Rina looks up. "Yes."

"You don't look like it."

"What should I look like?"

Simi hears a challenge in the question. She doesn't hear how tired Rina sounds.

"Not like everything is normal."

Rina closes her book.

"Nothing is normal. I still want to read."

Simi turns toward the wall.

She doesn't want to be unfair to her sister. She wants the room to prove that both of them remember the same person.

Right now, only Simi's wet pillow seems to be proving anything.



Chapter 3: What the Mug Can't Measure

Mama comes upstairs after supper. Her dark green tichel covers all her hair.

Rina goes downstairs to help Tatty with the younger children. Simi stays on her bed.

"Rina laughs," she tells Mama.

"I hear."

"She reads. She asks what's for supper."

Mama sits beside her.

"I do those things too."

"But you cry."

"Sometimes you see me. Sometimes you don't."

Simi touches the damp place on her pillow.

"I don't want Bubby to turn into somebody we used to know."

Mama puts an arm around her.

"She is somebody we love who isn't here anymore. That is very hard. We don't have to keep the whole house sad every minute to keep loving her."

Simi doesn't feel ready to agree.

Mama doesn't ask her to.



They talk about the red mug, the biscuits Bubby always forgot in the cupboard, and the way she called both girls by the wrong name when she was in a hurry.

Simi cries. Mama stays.

Downstairs, a chair scrapes. Ordinary sounds keep happening.

Chapter 4: An Unfinished Button

The next afternoon, Simi looks for her ruler in the shared drawer.

Rina's little sewing case is there. On top lies a piece of cloth with one red button half attached.

Simi doesn't open the case. She knows the button.

Bubby chose it at their last sewing afternoon. She held it against the cloth and said it was the size of a very respectable beetle.

Simi takes out the ruler. Then she leaves the drawer open.

When Rina comes home, Simi points to the cloth.

"Are you finishing that?"

Rina stares at it.

"Not yet."

"Why?"

"Because she won't see it."



Simi goes very still.

Rina takes the cloth out, then puts it back.

"Sometimes I can read. Sometimes I can laugh. I can't do that button."

Simi has been watching the wrong things as if they are windows into everything.

She shuts the drawer gently.

"I didn't know."

"You didn't ask. You told me."

Simi sits on her bed.

"I'm sorry."

Rina doesn't say the whole week is fine now.

She takes off her shoes and sits on her own bed.

Chapter 5: One Memory Each

On Sunday, Mama asks if the girls want to help choose photographs for a small family album. They can say no or stop when they need to. Mama has the album and a small stack of photographs ready on the table.

Simi wants to help. Rina isn't sure.

"I'll look at a few," she says.



They sit at the dining room table. The first picture shows Bubby beside an enormous cucumber. Their uncle gave it to her from his garden.

"She said it should pay rent," Rina recalls.

Simi smiles before she can stop herself.

The smile frightens her for a second.

Then she looks at the picture again. Bubby is smiling too.

"I remember the sandwiches," Simi says. "She made us eat cucumber for days."

Rina turns the picture over to read the date. Mama writes the girls' words on a separate page, checking that they want them kept.

After four photographs, Rina stands.

"That's enough for me today."

Simi wants her to stay. The old argument rises, ready to say what enough means.

Instead, she nods.

Rina brings them both a glass of water before going upstairs.

Simi stays for two more pictures.

Chapter 6: Tuesday Again

On Tuesday, their brother puts the breadstick eyebrows above his real ones.



"Do I look important?"

"Extremely," Rina says.

Simi laughs. Then she begins to cry.

Their brother lowers the breadsticks.

Mama comes to sit with her. Nobody asks Simi to choose one face and keep it for the whole evening.

Later, Rina brings the piece of cloth downstairs.

"Can you sit with me while I finish it?" she asks Mama.

Simi moves a chair nearer without touching the sewing.

Rina finishes the button slowly. When she puts down the needle, her eyes are wet.

Simi doesn't say, At last.

She passes the tissue box.

That evening, Mama puts the red mug on a kitchen shelf. She talks to the girls first, so its absence from the counter doesn't arrive as another surprise.

"May I look at it sometimes?" Simi asks.

"Of course. Tell me, and we'll take it down together."

The counter has space for tomorrow's breakfast.

Simi misses Bubby as much as before. Rina does too, though Simi no longer thinks she can count it by looking at her sister's face.



Before bed, Rina asks whether Simi wants the cucumber photograph for their room.

They put it where both beds can see it.

The cucumber still looks like it owes rent.