



## **Dorie**

### **By Christine Eskilson**

Dorie's troubles started again when Daddy married the chief blogger for his re-election campaign. Or maybe Samantha was the head Twitterer. "Twitter Trash," I told Dorie one day, feeling clever. "Twitter Twat," she responded. Where did she get that word? She had a fouler mouth than I did. "It's from Shakespeare," she protested, staring at me with those big blue eyes until we both started laughing. I have no idea if that was true but I only hoped Daddy didn't hear it. He wouldn't buy the excuse that English Honors was a bad influence.

So Daddy's desire for another term in Congress coupled with his total lack of tech savvy gave Dorie and me a new stepmother. Samantha didn't like to admit it but she actually wasn't our first. After Mom died Daddy figured out fast he couldn't handle kids on his own, especially not twin daughters. First he tried the relatives route, bringing up Nana from her condo in Hilton Head but she didn't stay a full winter. She said she loved us but she hated the Chicago cold and we could visit her anytime we wanted. Maybe she meant anytime she wanted since Dorie and I are still waiting for the plane ticket. After Nana left Daddy married Eleanor, who had a tiny dog that looked like a furry rat. Eleanor was one of the women hovering around us, bringing over lasagna and apple pies that she just happened to have made too much of. She had her eye on our big house and on Daddy. Once she moved in she let the rat dog sit on the furniture, which disgusted me, even at eleven. I told Dorie about it and Eleanor didn't last much longer than Nana, especially after rat dog jumped out of the second floor guest bedroom and splattered himself all over the flagstone patio.

Caroline came next. She worked in Daddy's office. Daddy didn't marry her right away, which fooled Dorie and me at first. But then we found fine blonde hairs in the master bathroom and a purple thong tossed carelessly behind the leather sofa in the den and we knew we were in trouble. Dorie took a different tack with Caroline. She pretended to be friends with her and they went on shopping trips and lunches downtown. Daddy thought it was cute. "My little women," he'd say. On one of those long lunches Dorie talked Caroline into sharing her Chardonnay and they both got hopelessly drunk. Dorie had the presence of mind to call a cab to Daddy's office where she made sure to throw up on the shiny wingtips of Daddy's biggest bank client. Needless to say, Caroline got fired from Daddy's firm and his bed.

Then there was Gillian. I don't want to talk about her.

Daddy sent me to boarding school after Gillian left, and Dorie stayed home. Daddy thought he was doing the right thing but I cried myself to sleep every night. I saw Dorie on holidays but most summers Daddy's personal assistant dreamed up some kind of enrichment experience that kept me away. You'd be surprised at how many bodies of water in Canada have canoe trips for kids.

But I was back now and starting junior year at the local high school. Harvey, Daddy's pollster, said it wasn't playing well for Daddy to have a daughter at "some special boarding school in Connecticut" when one of Daddy's main campaign promises was Sweeping and Comprehensive Education Reform So We Can Compete in the Global Economy. How original, Daddy. In the campaign brochure there was a picture of me with my backpack and a goofy smile pasted on my face. I shuddered every time I saw it.

At least I was with Dorie again. It felt so good to be home. I moved back into our big room overlooking the pool and tried not to think about Samantha, ensconced with her Blackberry in the master suite on the third floor. But Dorie wouldn't let go. "I don't like it with her here, Isabelle," she hissed at me from her twin bed across the room. Her pink polka dot bedspread matched mine exactly. "Daddy and I were perfectly fine without her."

"I know, I know," I said, yawning.

"She's not going to let you stay here, either. She'll talk to Daddy and they'll think of some way to separate us again."

"Why would they do that?" I protested. "Daddy just finally brought me home."

Dorie laughed and it wasn't a nice laugh. "Do the math, Bella." That's what they used to call me when I was little. "It's September; they only need you to show up at the high school for two months."

"I don't understand. Harvey put me in the brochure."

"After the first Tuesday in November they won't need you anymore. Daddy will be back in D.C. and no one will notice whether his precious daughter is strolling to public school or flying on a private jet back to her ivy-covered prison. If anyone did notice they could always make some excuse. Daddy could look sorrowful and say a parent always has to do the best thing for his children, regardless of the personal cost."

I considered Dorie's words. I didn't want to believe it but unfortunately I could picture Daddy doing just that. "So what do we do?" I whispered.

Dorie didn't answer. She was already asleep.

At dinner the next night we found out something even worse. Samantha was beaming as she passed around takeout from the gourmet deli in the town center. "It's Friday night so I'm not cooking," she announced gaily, as if she ever made anything other than reservations. I picked the pecans out of the goat cheese and arugula salad, and only ate one piece of pumpkin ravioli. She and Daddy didn't care; they were too busy smiling at each other. I figured Harvey must have said the poll numbers looked good but then I noticed Samantha patting her perfectly flat stomach. When she got up to pour herself another glass of San Pellegrino Daddy patted her stomach, too.

My world stood still.

Dorie was breathing heavily beside me but I couldn't even look at her. I pushed my plate away roughly, knocking over one of the tall silver candlesticks Nana always said would be mine someday.

"Oops," Samantha said with a little laugh and righted it. She couldn't stop smiling. "Are you finished eating, Isabella?"

I nodded. Then I couldn't stop myself. "What's going on?" I burst out.

Once I saw Samantha's cheeks turn pink I wanted to bite back my words. Daddy cleared his throat. "We have some good news."

I didn't want Dorie to hear so I pretended it had to be something else. "You're still ahead, right? By like fifteen points?"

"Seventeen," Daddy corrected me. "But that's not all, sweetheart. You're going to have a little brother or sister soon. Sometime next year." He reached over to Samantha and squeezed her hand.

"She already has a sister," Dorie said but so softly that Daddy and Samantha didn't hear. Dorie pushed back her chair and ran upstairs. I waited a few seconds and then I followed her. From the staircase I could hear Daddy telling Samantha not to worry and that everything would be okay.

I found Dorie crying in our bedroom. "A baby," she sobbed, "what are we going to do with a baby?"

I took her into our bathroom to wash her face. "It might not be that bad," I comforted her. "We're older now; it's not going to make that much difference."

She jerked her head away from me. "You've got it so wrong," she lashed out. "They'll lock you back up in your fancy school and we'll never see each other. I'll be stuck listening to the two of them fawning over a blob that does nothing but yowl and take up space. I won't be able to stand it, Bella, I know I won't!"

I didn't know what to say. She was right. I led her back into our room and we crawled into my narrow bed to hold each other close, the way we did after Daddy told us Mom had been in a car accident and wasn't coming home anymore.

When I woke up the next morning I was alone. Sun streamed through the gauzy curtains in the windows. I opened the door and peered out into the hallway. The house was very quiet and then I remembered that Daddy had an early breakfast at a senior citizens center in the far end of the district. Did Samantha go with him, I wondered. And where was Dorie? She usually slept later than I did.

I pulled on sweatpants and a t-shirt and crept downstairs. I heard singing coming from the

kitchen and for a weird instant I thought it was Mom. But it was Samantha, standing at the French doors that led out to Mom's rose garden and humming *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*.

Then I saw Dorie. She was at the other end of the kitchen, her eyes fixed on Samantha's slender back. She put her finger to her lips as she glided soundlessly toward Samantha. When she passed the butcher block island she pulled a black-handled carving knife from the knife rack.

Remembering what happened to Gillian, I rushed at Dorie to grab the knife. She slumped to the floor, curling up on the Mexican tiles and mewling like a wounded kitten. Samantha whirled around, staring first at me and then at the knife. "What are you doing?" she cried, pulling her bathrobe protectively around her body.

"It wasn't me, Samantha, it was Dorie. I just took the knife away from her. See?" I waved the knife to show her.

"What are you talking about? Put that thing down," she commanded, like she was ordering some campaign intern to bring her a decaf latte.

"I think she wanted to kill you," I explained. "Because of the baby."

Samantha's eyes flickered to the cordless phone next to the refrigerator but Dorie and I were in the way. She took a step toward me, holding out her hand. She pasted a smile on her face but I knew it was fake.

"Isabella, why don't you give me the knife? We don't have to tell your dad about this."

"Don't believe her," Dorie hissed from the kitchen floor, "she's lying. She's going to call Daddy as soon as you hand it over."

"Just give me the knife," Samantha repeated. "I promise I won't tell your dad."

"No!" Dorie screamed.

I shook my head. "I can't. Dorie won't let me. You'll send me back to the school and we won't be together anymore." I was babbling now. "She'll be alone here with the baby."

Samantha took a deep breath. "Listen to me, Isabella. You know Dorie's not here. She's dead."

The red and green colors of the kitchen swirled in front of me and my head started to pound. I looked down at the floor. Dorie was gone.

"No," I whispered, "that can't be true." The pounding in my head increased its tempo.

"Isadora was in the car crash with your mother. You know that. They both died seven years ago."

“No,” I repeated, this time more firmly. I tightened my grip on the knife. “No, you’re wrong.”

Samantha reached behind her back to fumble with the door knob but Daddy kept those doors locked after Mom died. Through a haze of red and green I glimpsed Dorie’s face outside in the rose garden. This time she didn’t have to tell me what I had to do.

Samantha opened her mouth to scream as my arm raised the knife overhead, but it was too late.