

A painting of two boys from behind, standing in a grassy field. The boy on the left wears a blue baseball cap and a white t-shirt. The boy on the right wears a white baseball cap and a brown sweater. They are both looking up at a single blackberry floating in the air above them. In the background, there are trees and a small house. The overall style is soft and painterly.

A Taste of Blackberries

Some things never fade away

DORIS BUCHANAN SMITH

Chapter 1

Jamie and I snagged our way into the thicket of the blackberry patch. I picked a dark berry and popped it into my mouth. The insides of my cheeks puckered.

"They need a few more days to ripen," I said.

Jamie had got stuck and had his thumb in his mouth. He took it out with a smacking sound and put his "shh" finger to his lips. Someone was coming.

"I'll bet Jamie and them will be sorry they didn't come," a voice said. I was "and them."

Jamie and I made faces at one another and pressed our lips together to keep quiet.

"Maybe they knew the berries weren't ripe," another voice said.

Jamie nodded. I almost laughed out loud.

"Well, that's what Jamie will say anyway." The voices began to fade. "He thinks he knows everything."

Jamie nodded again. He clasped his arms to himself, shaking in silent laughter.

"I've got to get out of here," he whispered. He started charging his way out of the brambles. The stickers snatched at him every which-a-way. When he cleared the patch, he fell down and rolled.

Jamie couldn't laugh without falling down in exaggeration. But he did have more sense than to fall in the middle of a blackberry patch.

I sat down cross-legged and watched. I could see the tops of the kids' heads as they went down the hill. It was funny, that we'd been right there, hidden, and heard them

talking about us. But it wasn't worth having a fit over.

That Jamie. For my best friend he surely did aggravate me sometimes. I mean, if we got to pretending—circus dogs, for instance—he didn't know when to quit. You could get tired and want to do something else but that stupid Jamie would crawl around barking all afternoon. Sometimes it was funny. Sometimes it was just plain tiresome.

Jamie sat up, finally, and wiped the tears that had squeezed out from the corners of his eyes.

"Race you to the creek," he said. He hopped up and tore down the dirt road behind the houses. He had sneaked a head start on me and I really had to dig in to catch up with him.

If we started even I could always beat him. And, since he beat me in most things,

What do you do without your best friend?

Jamie isn't afraid of anything. Always ready to get into trouble, then right back out of it, he's a fun and exasperating best friend.

But when something terrible happens to Jamie, his best friend has to face the tragedy alone. Without Jamie, there are so many impossible questions to answer—how can your best friend be gone forever? How can some things, like playing games in the sun or the taste of the blackberries that Jamie loved, go on without him?

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