

## When There's Nothing to Say – Lauren Geber

CHARLOTTE, NC 1956. Jamie slouched as he crumpled into the cool plastic desk that was entirely too small for him. It was difficult to believe it was the first day of his last year of high school. Mama had finally let him drive the old Chevy 3100 short bed to school instead of taking the bus. It felt glorious pulling the blue rusted piece of metal into the school's parking lot; boys and girls alike looking up from their before-class cigarettes to see who was in the driver's seat. He had casually maneuvered the truck into an open spot towards the back and slid out, like he'd always been allowed to drive to school.

He was finally grown up. Mama had even agreed to let him drive the truck sometimes on the weekends. The thought of no longer having to hitch a ride to school football games on Fridays was delightful. To make the start of his first day even better, the courtyard was flooded with friends he hadn't seen all summer, who greeted him with enough handshakes and "*hey kid's*" to make him feel like a movie star.

After the blast of a morning he already had, sitting in his first class felt like a breeze. Mrs. Sanchez was his biology teacher, once again. Mama and Pops didn't seem to think a "C" was good enough, and they made him retake the class. Pops had said that colleges these days were getting harder to get into, and Jamie needed at least a B. First period bio with a bunch of juniors seemed like bad news, but Jamie figured he could manage a good grade with ease since he had learned everything before. After he was fully situated in his seat, he scoped the classroom. *Yup, full of youngins* he thought to himself. There was Mike Sanders, who he used to call "Lil Mikey". He was his best friend Johnny's kid brother. Jamie couldn't believe he was already a junior. And there was Sally Rogers, she was only a 10th grader, but was crazy smart. He thought maybe he should sit next to her in case the class wasn't a piece of cake after all.

And that was when he saw her. He could name or at least recognize almost everyone in the classroom except for the delicate looking girl in the front row. She had on a pink dress and sneakers; her softly curled blonde hair was pulled back with a matching pink ribbon, and the few pieces hanging out in small curls framed her face well and drew him into her bluish green eyes. She was talking to Ellis Williams who was sitting next to her, and they were laughing. Her smile was even more impressive, framed by a set of plump, pink lips.

*Who was she?* Jamie wondered to himself. She had to be new, but she seemed to fit in well already. He could see that Ellis, along with a few of the other girls had taken an immediate liking to her, nodding to her new-looking outfit and writing what looked like telephone numbers on little slips of paper to give to her. Jamie wondered what it would be like to call her, to hear her voice on the telephone. What it would be like to take her out, to sit next to her in a movie or in a booth at the nearby diner. What it would be like to have her sitting next to him on the front bench of the truck as he drove her around town. To graze her soft curls with his hand, to feel each dewy groove of her lips. To see up that soft pink dress...

BRRRIIINNNGGGG!! Jamie's thoughts were interrupted by the loud sound of the first bell. Mrs. Sanchez, who had been sitting in her desk thumbing through papers, stood up to greet the class. "Hello, everyone! Welcome to Biology." Her thin red lips smacked together so displeasingly. She stared at each of the students sitting before her, as if to silently judge each one, and twiddled her cat-eye reading glasses in her hand. Jamie felt his face get slightly warm when she looked his direction, swearing he noticed a smirk pass on those red lips.

"Now since your teachers last year should have introduced you to biology, I expect you students to already be familiar with some of the basic concepts," Jamie watched the glasses spin round and round as they twirled in her tight, bony fist. "Therefore, we will have a pop quiz tomorrow on the introductory elements of Biology." The entire class moaned except for Jamie, who was happy to have an easy assignment to start off the year. "Well, at least I warned you! I guess it's not a pop quiz after all." Mrs. Sanchez's red lips curled up into a sly smile; her yellow teeth poking out ever so slightly. "Well, enough new business, it's time for me to assign you lab partners! Now, you will be with this person for the rest of the year whenever we do experiments in class. When I call your name, grab your things and sit next to the person I have assigned you with." As well as Jamie thought it would be to be paired with good 'ol Sally Rogers and let her do all the work, he still found himself gazing at the mysterious new girl's ankles and wishing he could follow them all the way up, to feel every curve along the way...

“Jamie Stonewell and Sarabeth Sellers” Mrs. Sanchez suddenly called out. Jamie looked around, frantically realizing he did not know who that was, when suddenly a soft voice spoke and a flash of light pink brushed up next to him.

“You’re Jamie right? I’m Sarabeth. It’s wonderful to meet you.” She grinned and offered her hand out for him to shake. He took it nervously and firmly grasped her smooth and delicate fingers in his. “Yep, that’s me. Looks like we’re lab partners.” He didn’t know what else to say. “Well,” She began with an uneasy caution, “I don’t know about you, but I’m rather nervous for this quiz tomorrow. They didn’t teach us much biology at my old school.” Her downwards gaze slowly met his, and a slight smile formed on her lips. Jamie’s mind wandered yet again. She’s so cute when she’s tense.

When he actually processed what she had said, he had an idea. “Well listen, I had this class last year, and I could help you study after school if you’d like.” Jamie offered her a sly smile as he pondered how genius his idea was. “Oh, that would be so wonderful, you wouldn’t mind would you?” Her bluish green eyes found a new sort of sparkle. “I don’t have a car and my mother works late, so could you come to my place?” Her hand reached out slowly, just barely touching his hand that rested on the side of his desk. Jamie thought this arrangement much more acceptable than a quiet and stuffy library, so he agreed to meet at her house at 4 o’clock that afternoon. She wrote her address on a small slip of paper in soft curly script and handed it to him just as the bell rang. “Class dismissed, and happy studying!” Mrs. Sanchez was still twirling her glasses.

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Jamie had gotten permission from Mama to take the Chevy to “study with a friend”. He did not want to mention it was with a girl or she would ask too many questions. He pulled out the paper and stared at the small but well-kept house in front of him. 3513 Maple Ave? *Yep, this is it* he thought as he got out of the truck.

He nervously approached the cobblestone pathway and knocked on the large wooden front door. Sarabeth answered quickly. “Hello!” She beamed, and led him into the house. He noticed that moving boxes were mainly the only things covering the otherwise empty sitting room. “Sorry it’s such a mess, we just moved here, mother and I.”

“What about your father?” Jamie asked before he thought about whether or not it was rude. Sarabeth turned to him with shameful, sunken eyes. “My parents got a divorce last year. Mother wanted to move us somewhere new, you know, to get away from everything. She’s a nurse over at the new hospital now, and it’s hard for us to have time to unpack our things. But yes, it’s just the two of us.” Jamie could sense a profound sadness in her voice. It was true, he had never met anyone whose parents were divorced before, and he couldn’t imagine the feeling. After nothing was said for a few seconds, Sarabeth took his arm and spun him in the other direction. “Well we do have a kitchen table, so let’s go study on it!”

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The hour Jamie spent telling Sarabeth about cells and molecules could have easily been the most magical hour of his seventeen-and-a-half years on earth. He wasn’t sure how he had said anything knowledgeable, because he had spent the entire time staring at her. He could see straight through her glassy eyes; the look of confusion when he said something she didn’t understand, the nodding of her head when the concept clicked for her. He repeated things and went into detail based on her reaction. She was a wonderful listener, smiling occasionally and making jokes about her poor science skills. She offered him a glass of sweet tea, and his gaze followed her as she went to the icebox. Her dress and hair moved with her body, petite and smooth. Everything worked together in perfect unison. As she sat back down, he caught a slightly larger glimpse of her legs than he had before. It took everything in his power not to glance down past her pink collar and follow each of the small white buttons down her chest.

“Well, I must start on dinner before mother gets back,” Sarabeth said with hesitation as the hour came to a close. “Thank you so very much for everything!”

“I loved to help.” Jamie kicked himself for saying nothing else as Sarabeth led him to the door. Why was it so hard for him to be interesting? He had just had the time of his life teaching a beautiful girl biology in her home, alone, and all he could do was tell her he *“loved to help?”* He had never been so appalled with himself.

“Well,” She said as he turned to open the front door, “I guess I’ll see you tomorrow in class then.” Jamie’s face felt warm. He wanted to ask her on a date, but was it too soon? He had only met her today. He knew he needed to do something, but he was frozen, the only fluid motion his body allowed him to do was to continue walking out the door. He was stopped only by a hand on his waist that turned him around suddenly and swiftly, a firm grasp that forcefully flooded his mind; and he thought of nothing else until he realized that she was kissing him.

It was forceful and sudden, and Jamie could feel his lips pressed to hers in absolute shock, but eventually mold to the point where he was kissing her back. Her lips flowed with his so smoothly, and they continued to kiss as she led him back into the house, shutting the door behind them. He put his hands around her waist, feeling the gathering of her dress material as it hung on her hips. She pulled him closer. She grabbed his face and began to kiss him harder. Then she broke free from the kiss, grabbed his hand, and led him up the narrow wooden staircase. When they got up the stairs, she opened the first door on the right, and they entered her bedroom.

The walls were pure white and adorned with pictures of ballerinas. He noticed a piggy bank in the shape of a rocking horse on her dresser, and a chest full of porcelain dolls on the far wall. He noticed few other things because she grabbed his face and began to kiss him again, leading him to her small wooden bed, painted white with a quilt that matched the pink of her dress. They sat upright on the bed, but as the kisses got stronger and as her hands reached farther around to his back, Jamie ended up with his head on her lace pillow, and her on top. *This is it*, Jamie thought. He had never been in a girl’s room at all before and had most definitely never been in one’s bed. He knew this opportunity may not come again for a long time. He watched in awe as she began to undo the white buttons of her dress, one by one.

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When it was done, Jamie laid next to Sarabeth, neither of them saying a word. After a few moments of silence, Jamie turned to her and kissed her softly on the cheek. She did nothing but continue to lay there, a distant look in her eyes. For the first time, Jamie realized he could not see through them. After a while she spoke. “Please leave now.” She said it neither angrily nor happily nor panicked. There was no tone to her voice at all.

“Are you okay? Like every other time, Jamie did not know what else to say.

“Yes, but I need you to go. You can see yourself out.”

Jamie buttoned his trousers and with no hesitation got up from the bed, slowly walking toward the door.

“Please shut my door behind you.”

He took one last look at Sarabeth, who was now sitting up naked on her small girlish bed. She was combing her hair with her fingers, which was now down and tangled. He looked away and shut the door. As he began to walk down the stairs, he heard a faint noise coming from Sarabeth’s room. She was laughing. A soft but firm chuckle, almost out of smug victory. Jamie lingered on the staircase for only a few seconds longer. After letting out a sigh, he turned his heel, glided down the stairs, slid through the front door, hopped in the Chevy, cranked it up, and drove away.