



My name is Amy Kramer, and every Thursday night I feel a little dumb. That's because Thursday is "Family Sharing Night" at my house.

Sara and Jed think it's dumb, too. But Mom and Dad won't listen to our complaints. "It's the most important night of the week," Dad says.

"It's a family tradition," Mom adds. "It's something you kids will always remember."

Right, Mom. It's something I'll always remember as really painful and embarrassing.

You've probably guessed that on Family Sharing Night, every member of the Kramer family — except for George, our cat — has to share something with the rest of the family.

It isn't so bad for my sister, Sara. Sara is fourteen — two years older than me — and she's a genius painter. Really. One of her paintings was chosen for a show at the art museum downtown. Sara may go to a special arts high school next year.

So Sara always shares some sketches she's working on. Or a new painting.

And Family Sharing Night isn't so bad for Jed, either. My ten-year-old brother is such a total goof. He doesn't care what he shares. One Thursday night, he burped really loud and explained that he was sharing his dinner.

Jed laughed like a lunatic.

But Mom and Dad didn't think it was funny. They gave Jed a stern lecture about taking Family Sharing Night more seriously.

The next Thursday night, my obnoxious brother shared a note that David Miller, a kid at my school, had written to me. A very personal note! Jed found the note in my room and decided to share it with everyone.

Nice?

I wanted to die. I really did.

Jed just thinks he's so cute and adorable, he can get away with anything. He thinks he's really special.

I think it's because he's the only redhead in the family. Sara and I both have straight black hair, dark green eyes, and very tan skin. With his pale skin, freckled face, and curly red hair, Jed looks like he comes from another family!

And sometimes Sara and I both wish he did.

Anyway, I'm the one with the most problems on Family Sharing Night. Because I'm not really

talented the way Sara is. And I'm not a total goof like Jed.

So I never really know what to share.

I mean, I have a seashell collection, which I keep in a jar on my dresser. But it's really kind of boring to hold up shells and talk about them. And we haven't been to the ocean for nearly two years. So my shells are kind of old, and everyone has already seen them.

I also have a really good collection of CDs. But no one else in my family is into Bob Marley and reggae music. If I start to share some music with them, they all hold their ears and complain till I shut it off.

So I usually make up some kind of a story — an adventure story about a girl who survives danger after danger. Or a wild fairy tale about princesses who turn into tigers.

After my last story, Dad had a big smile on his face. "Amy is going to be a famous writer," he announced. "She's so good at making up stories." Dad gazed around the room, still smiling. "We have such a talented family!" he exclaimed.

I knew he was just saying that to be a good parent. To "encourage" me. Sara is the real talent in our family. Everyone knows that.

Tonight, Jed was the first to share. Mom and Dad sat on the living room couch. Dad had taken out a tissue and was squinting as he cleaned his glasses. Dad can't stand to have the tiniest speck

of dust on his glasses. He cleans them about twenty times a day.

I settled in the big brown armchair against the wall. Sara sat cross-legged on the carpet beside my chair.

“What are you going to share tonight?” Mom asked Jed. “And I hope it isn’t another horrible burp.”

“That was so gross!” Sara moaned.

“Your face is gross!” Jed shot back. He stuck out his tongue at Sara.

“Jed, please — give us a break tonight,” Dad muttered, slipping his glasses back on, adjusting them on his nose. “Don’t cause trouble.”

“She started it,” Jed insisted, pointing at Sara.

“Just share something,” I told Jed, sighing.

“I’m going to share your freckles,” Sara told him. “I’m going to pull them off one by one and feed them to George.”

Sara and I laughed. George didn’t glance up. He was curled up, napping on the carpet beside the couch.

“That’s not funny, girls,” Mom snapped. “Stop being mean to your brother.”

“This is supposed to be a family night,” Dad wailed. “Why can’t we be a family?”

“We are!” Jed insisted.

Dad frowned and shook his head. He looks like an owl when he does that. “Jed, are you going to share something?” he demanded weakly.

Jed nodded. “Yeah.” He stood in the center of the room and shoved his hands into his jeans pockets. He wears loose, baggy jeans about ten sizes too big. They always look as if they’re about to fall down. Jed thinks that’s cool.

“I . . . uh . . . learned to whistle through my fingers,” he announced.

“Wow,” Sara muttered sarcastically.

Jed ignored her. He pulled his hands from his pockets. Then he stuck his two little fingers into the sides of his mouth — and let out a long, shrill whistle.

He whistled through his fingers two more times. Then he took a deep bow. The whole family burst into loud applause.

Jed, grinning, took another low bow.

“Such a talented family!” Dad declared. This time, he meant it as a joke.

Jed dropped down on the floor beside George, startling the poor cat awake.

“Your turn next, Amy,” Mom said, turning to me. “Are you going to tell us another story?”

“Her stories are too long!” Jed complained.

George climbed unsteadily to his feet and moved a few feet away from Jed. Yawning, the cat dropped onto his stomach beside Mom’s feet.

“I’m not going to tell a story tonight,” I announced. I picked up Dennis from behind my armchair.

Sara and Jed both groaned.

“Hey — give me a break!” I shouted. I settled back on the edge of the chair, fixing my dummy on my lap. “I thought I’d talk to Dennis tonight,” I told Mom and Dad.

They had half-smiles on their faces. I didn’t care. I’d been practicing with Dennis all week. And I wanted to try out my new comedy routine with him.

“Amy is a lousy ventriloquist,” Jed chimed in. “You can see her lips move.”

“Be quiet, Jed. I think Dennis is funny,” Sara said. She scooted toward the couch so she could see better.

I balanced Dennis on my left knee and wrapped my fingers around the string in his back that worked his mouth. Dennis is a very old ventriloquist’s dummy. The paint on his face is faded. One eye is almost completely white. His turtleneck sweater is torn and tattered.

But I have a lot of fun with him. When my five-year-old cousins come to visit, I like to entertain them with Dennis. They squeal and laugh. They think I’m a riot.

I think I’m getting much better with Dennis. Despite Jed’s complaints.

I took a deep breath, glanced at Mom and Dad, and began my act.

“How are you tonight, Dennis?” I asked.

“*Not too well,*” I made the dummy reply in a high, shrill voice. Dennis’s voice.

“Really, Dennis? What’s wrong?”

*“I think I caught a bug.”*

“You mean you have the flu?” I asked him.

*“No. Termites!”*

Mom and Dad laughed. Sara smiled. Jed groaned loudly.

I turned back to Dennis. “Well, have you been to a doctor?” I asked him.

*“No. A carpenter!”*

Mom and Dad smiled at that one, but didn’t laugh. Jed groaned again. Sara stuck her finger down her throat, pretending to puke.

“No one liked that joke, Dennis,” I told him.

*“Who’s joking?”* I made Dennis reply.

“This is lame,” I heard Jed mutter to Sara. She nodded her head in agreement.

“Let’s change the subject, Dennis,” I said, shifting the dummy to my other knee. “Do you have a girlfriend?”

I leaned Dennis forward, trying to make him nod his head yes. But his head rolled right off his shoulders.

The wooden head hit the floor with a *thud* and bounced over to George. The cat leaped up and scampered away.

Sara and Jed collapsed in laughter, slapping each other high fives.

I jumped angrily to my feet. “Dad!” I screamed. “You *promised* you’d buy me a new dummy!”

Jed scurried over to the rug and picked up Dennis's head. He pulled the string, making the dummy's mouth move. "Amy reeks! Amy reeks!" Jed made the dummy repeat over and over.

"Give me that!" I grabbed the head angrily from Jed's hand.

"Amy reeks! Amy reeks!" Jed continued chanting.

"That's enough!" Mom shouted, jumping up off the couch.

Jed retreated back to the wall.

"I've been checking the stores for a new dummy," Dad told me, pulling off his glasses again and examining them closely. "But they're all so expensive."

"Well, how am I ever going to get better at this?" I demanded. "Dennis's head falls off every time I use him!"

"Do your best," Mom said.

What did *that* mean? I always hated it when she said that.

"Instead of Family Sharing Night, we should call this the Thursday Night Fights," Sara declared.

Jed raised his fists. "Want to fight?" he asked Sara.

"It's your turn, Sara," Mom replied, narrowing her eyes at Jed. "What are you sharing tonight?"



“I have a new painting,” Sara announced. “It’s a watercolor.”

“Of what?” Dad asked, settling his glasses back on his face.

“Remember that cabin we had in Maine a few summers ago?” Sara replied, tossing back her straight black hair. “The one overlooking the dark rock cliff? I found a snapshot of it, and I tried to paint it.”

I suddenly felt really angry and upset. I admit it. I was jealous of Sara.

Here she was, about to share another beautiful watercolor. And here I was, rolling a stupid wooden dummy head in my lap.

It just wasn’t fair!

“You’ll have to come to my room to see it,” Sara was saying. “It’s still wet.”

We all stood up and trooped to Sara’s room.

My family lives in a long, one-story, ranch-style house. My room and Jed’s room are at the end of one hallway. The living room, dining room, and kitchen are in the middle. Sara’s room and my parents’ room are down the other hall, way at the other end of the house.

I led the way down the hall. Behind me, Sara was going on and on about all the trouble she’d had with the painting and how she’d solved the problems.

“I remember that cabin so well,” Dad said.

“I can’t wait to see the painting,” Mom added.

I stepped into Sara’s room and clicked on the light.

Then I turned to the easel by the window that held the painting — and let out a scream of horror.