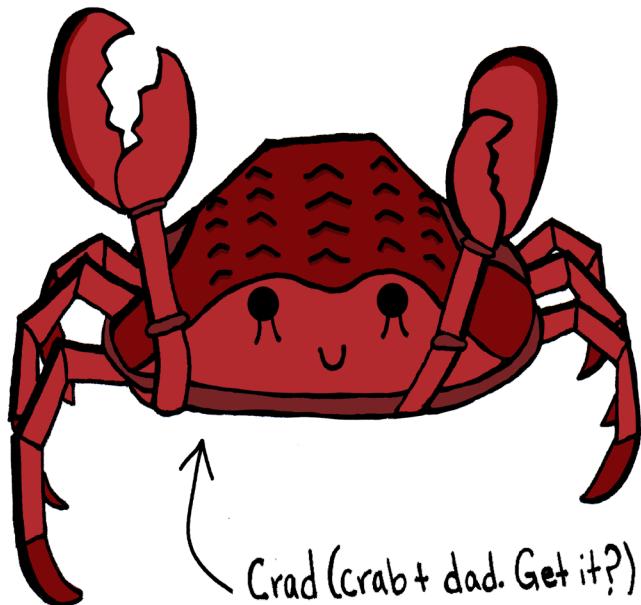


Crab Girl 1

Chapter 1

Crad with a “D”

Having a crab for a dad can be a real
bummer . . .



He never tucks me in at night.
Or asks me how my day was.

2 Crab Girl

But he also never grounds me for not doing my homework. That's what my mom is for.

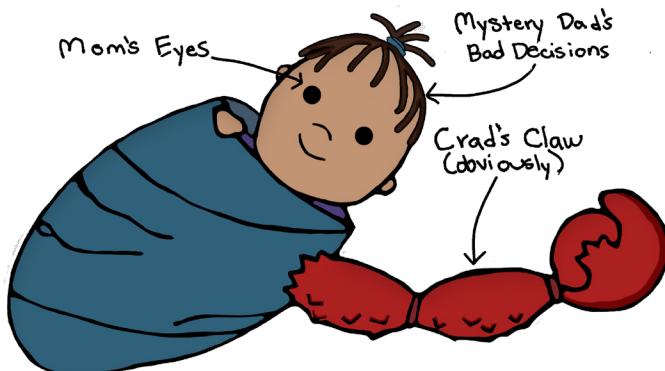
At least she and Crad are around.



That's better than the man who belongs to the final third of my DNA; the human DNA Mom spliced with Crad's to help make me.

I've never even met him, my DNA dad. If I had, maybe I'd have someone who understood me better.

After all, he gave me the part of my brain that makes bad choices.

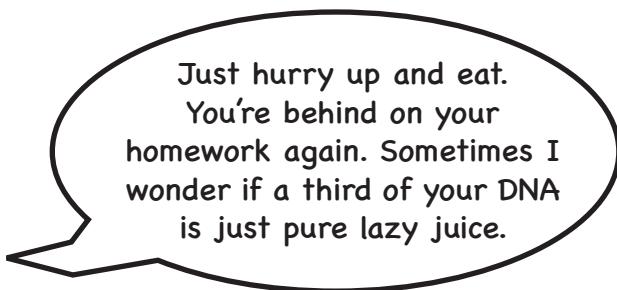


Crab Girl 3

Or, at least, that's what Mom hints at. "Why did you fall asleep in class on Tuesday? I never did that as a kid." Or,



What? Is she worried about Jack? It's not like he hasn't seen me chow down before.



Mom walks away and I scowl.

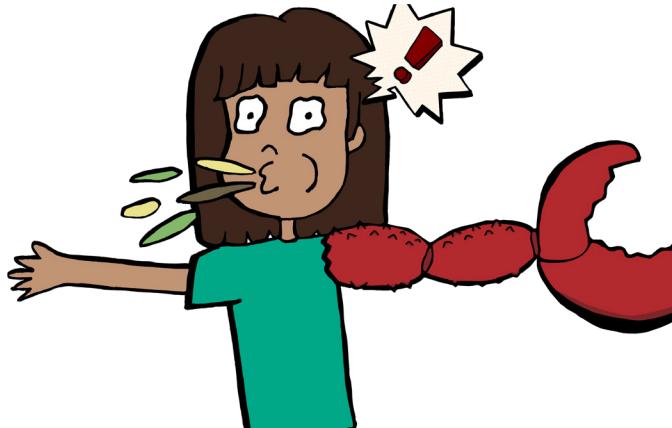
4 Crab Girl

She thinks I got my lazy juice from my mystery father, too.

Forget the fact that my other dad is a sea-lubbering crustacean.

But Mom has a soft spot for Crad and laughs when he blows bubbles. Nothing is ever his fault.

I sulk some more before taking a bite of my mashed potatoes.



It tastes like a sea drenched cupcake!

Mom must have used the vanilla almond milk again on accident.

There goes my appetite!

I turn to Jack.

I'd rather be made of lazy juice than judgey juice.



Jack nods.

And she called me a guest.
I've been eating here every night for like a year.

I can always count on good ol' Jack and his giant buck teeth to take my side.

Our brains are so in tune with each other that we think the exact same thing.

It's better than mind-reading because it takes no effort; we just know.



Jack nibbles on a piece of lettuce before waving the leafy green in my direction.

Want some?



I crinkle my nose.

No way. That's bunny food.



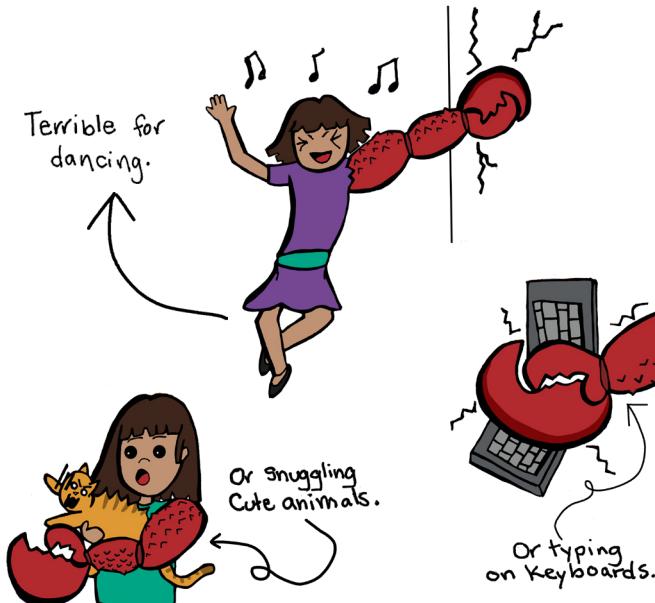
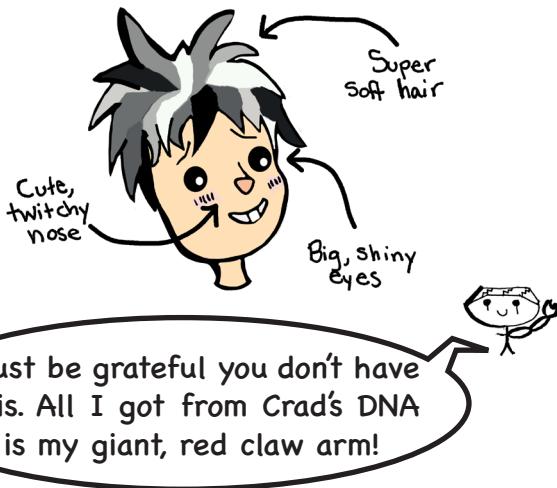
Har, har. So original.



He shakes his fluffy hair to mock me.

6 Crab Girl

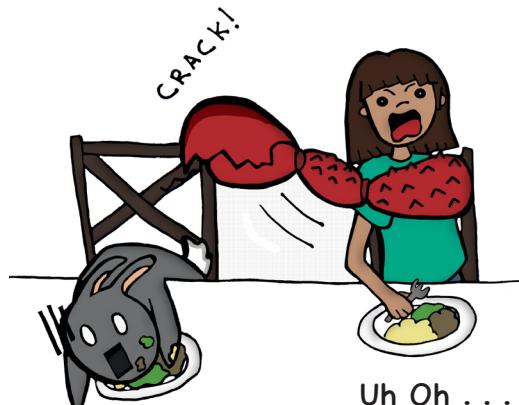
Whatever. At least he got spliced with something adorable. Why couldn't I have been mixed with bunny DNA?



You don't have to put up with
the cold-hearted jokes I do.



Don't you mean
cold-blooded? And you don't have
to be so crabby.



Uh Oh . . .

Mom comes rushing in right on cue, water droplets splashing off her hands from the dishes.

Oh, Annie, not again!

Her hair frazzles as she speaks. And Even though she was born before splicing began, her sad eyes look part puppy right now.



8 Crab Girl

I can feel my face reddening to the same color as my claw.

Or maybe you could just learn to buy titanium furniture. And walls. And seatbelts. And . . .



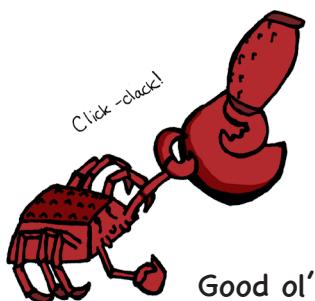
There are too many things to list...



I bang my claw on the table and its wood cracks, too. I flinch.

Before Mom can say anything else, I kick my chair back and storm upstairs. I slam the door to my room. The shell curtain that drapes the inside of my door frame shimmies from the force.

Crad bubbles at me from across the room.



I stick my claw in his tank so he comes over and scrapes at the exoskeleton.

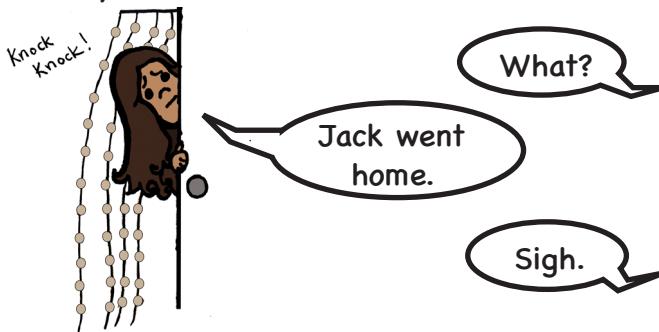
Good ol' Crad

Crab Girl 9

I pull my claw back into the stuffy air of my room and shake off the droplets of saltwater.

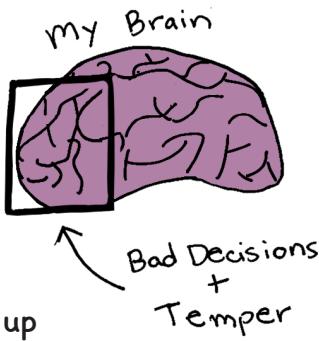
They splatter my face, the outside of the tank, my bedspread, everything. But I like it. It's the crab in me, I guess.

Does my DNA dad like water, too?



Of course he did.

He doesn't like it when people are angry. He gets all twitchy and uncomfortable.



Just chalk my temper up to that part of me that does everything wrong, too.

10 Crab Girl

I make sure to stare straight ahead.

If I don't see Mom, maybe my chest won't hurt so much.



I'm not mad, Crab Cakes.



I am! Why did you make me like this? I hate it.

I hold my claw up in the air and snip-snap.



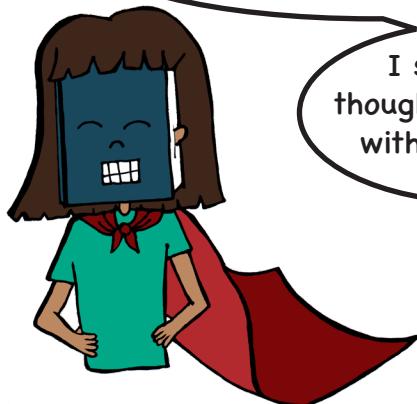
I like the way you are.
You're unique.



I don't want to be unique.

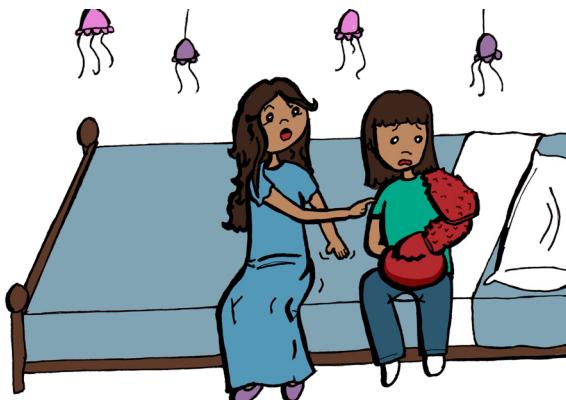


You're right, dreadfully
boring is a much better option.



I should have
thought to splice you
with a dictionary,
instead.

Dictionary Girl!
Society's last
defense against
malapropism!



Mom puts a hand on my shoulder and leans in closer.



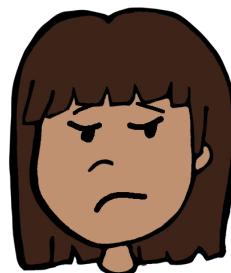
I'm sorry I snapped at you at dinner. The double-shift I worked at the aquarium today was brutal.

Her words blow the heat right out of me. If I didn't break everything she wouldn't have to work so much.



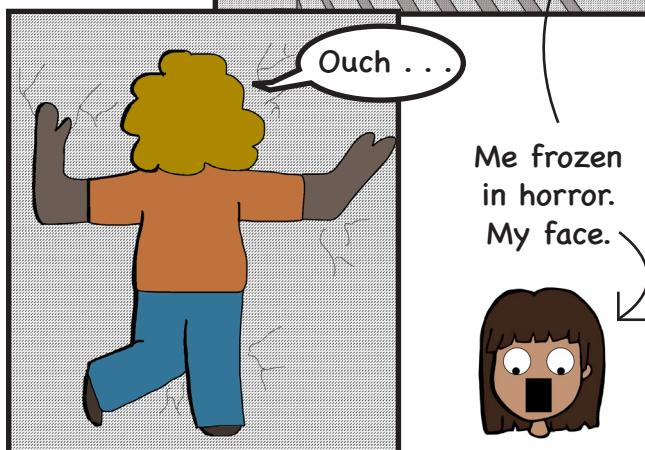
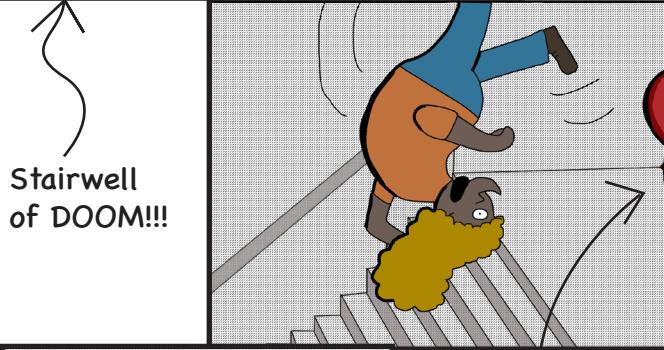
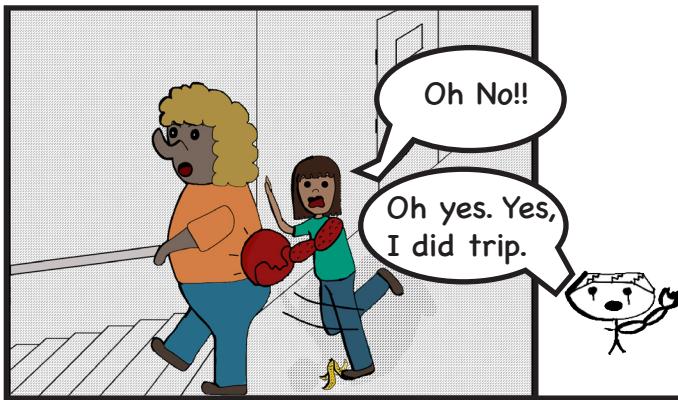
Did something happen at school today?

Something always happens at school, Mom. I'm part crab!



12 Crab Girl

My day at school . . .





They've been calling me Clutzy the Killer Crab ever since.

I'm weird, Mom, even for a splice. Everyone says it. Becca Chang said it today in front of everyone. And it's your fault. You did this to me.

Mom wrings her hands together over and over, then turns to face me.



I keep hoping that if you knew how much I love you it would be enough for you to be happy.

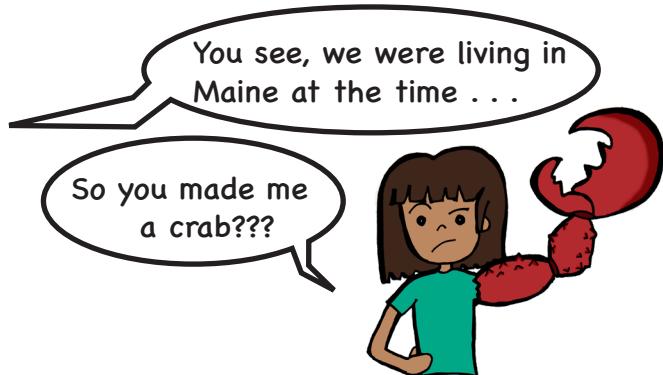
But you've grown up so much lately, maybe it's time I tell you more about your past.

I sit a little straighter and try to keep the hope from bursting out of my chest.

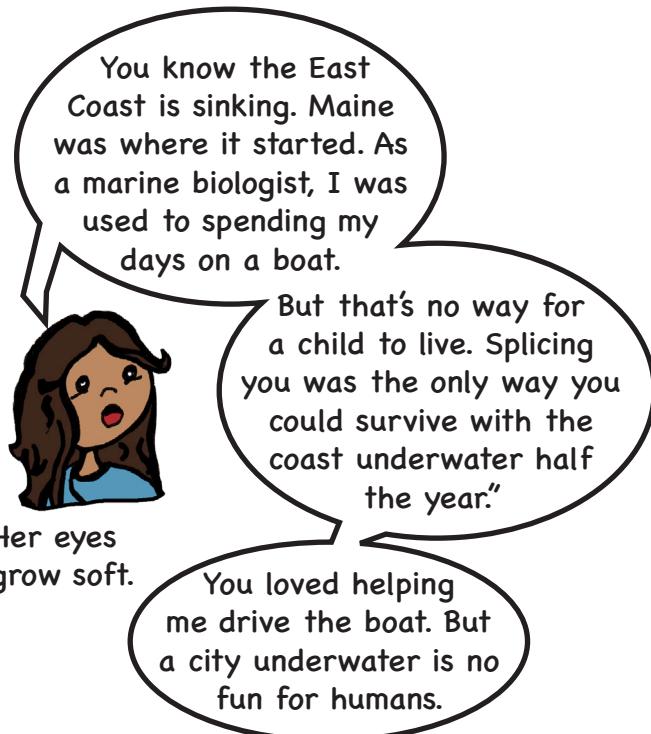
Will I finally learn who my DNA dad is?

Or where I came from?

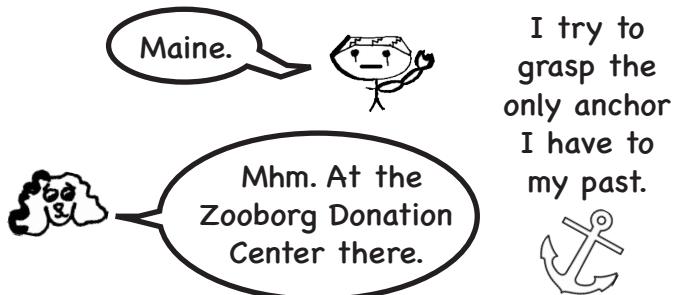
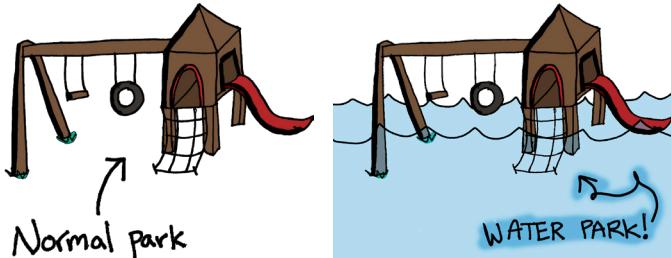
Or why I am the way I am?



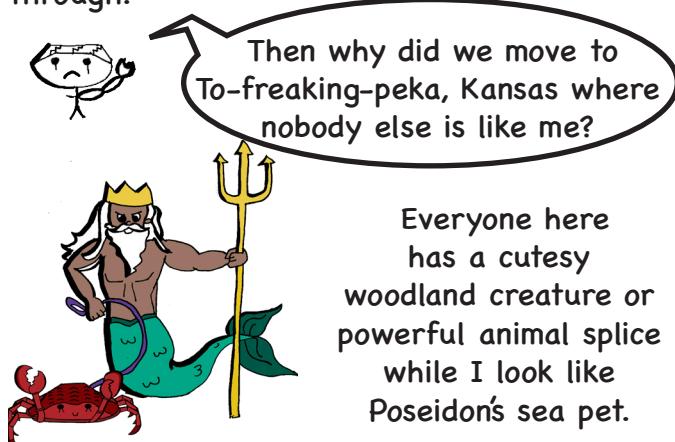
She pushes my claw down and strokes the hard shell, not that I can feel it.

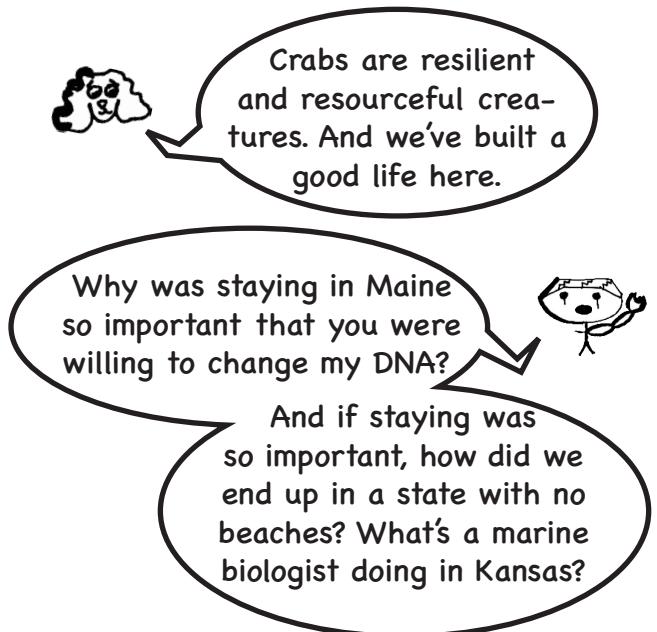


Doesn't sound so bad to me . . .

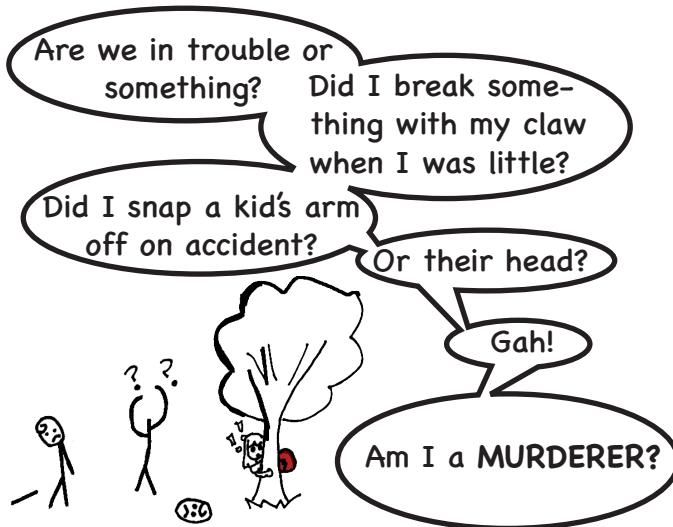


Learning where I was born, where I was created, washes my heart in gentle waves of comfort, but a cold undercurrent cuts through.





She reaches an arm around me, but salty bile climbs up my throat and I shrug her off.





Hahaha. What non-

Mom's laugh pulls me back to reality. She wouldn't laugh if I were a murderer.

But then a thought catches my breath. I force my lungs to exhale so I can speak.

It has something
to do with my DNA dad,
doesn't it? Something
you're not telling me.



Do your homework.

She stands and pulls my shell curtain open on her way out of the door.

You know I don't care about grades as long as you do the work.

It's when you let the lazy juice take over and you do nothing that you get in trouble.



Her lazy juice comment nips at me like a remora on a shark.

Mom freezes
in her tracks
but doesn't
turn around.

I bet he isn't lazy.



Who?

She knows
who I mean. I
know she does.

I bet he's great. And funny.
And does more than crawl around
the bottom of a tank.



Your biological father has
done nothing for you, Annie, and he
never will. Now go to bed.

I want to meet
him. I want a parent
who doesn't think I'm
made of lazy juice.



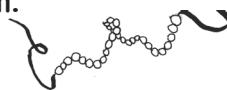
Mom turns and her eyes are as deep as a sea
cave and hard as coral.



You will never know your
biological father. Goodnight.

A strand of shells breaks off in her fingers.
She drops it to the floor, then walks out.

Mom is wrong. My DNA donor dad has done
something for me. He's given me a third of
my DNA. A third of who I am.



And I'm going to find him.