

The Mystery Twin

A Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book

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LEVELED BOOK • Y

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Correlation

LEVEL Y	
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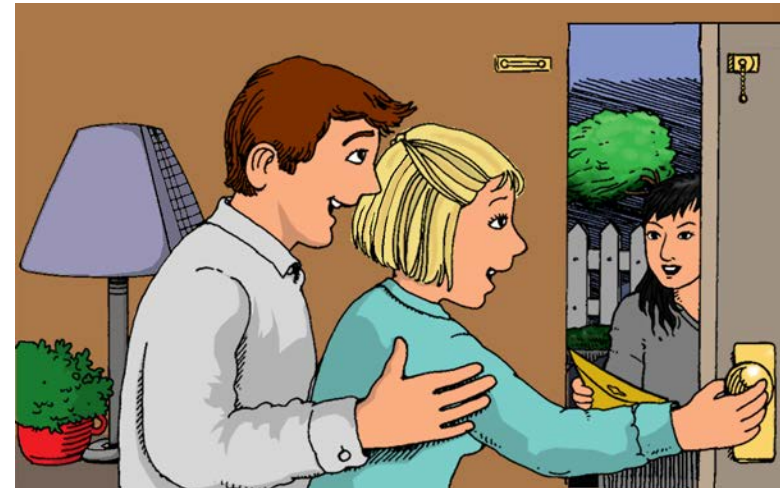
Table of Contents

The Note	4
Telling Heather	6
The Search	10
The Interviews	12
The Selection	17
The Happy Reunion	21
Glossary	22

The Note

One dark and **blustery** night, Theresa Alto was securing the windows against a storm when she heard a rapid banging on the door. At first she assumed it was just the wind, but then it came again. She cautiously opened the door, keeping the chain fastened, for the Altos weren't expecting any visitors on a night like this. It was Mrs. Banks from the private adoption agency.

"I'm so sorry to disturb you on such a night," said Mrs. Banks. "But the agency is moving. When we moved a file cabinet, a note and photograph fell from behind it. It's about Heather. I thought you'd want to see it right away."





Thirteen years ago, Brad and Theresa Alto had adopted a beautiful baby girl. They had named her Heather after Theresa's favorite flower. Theresa placed her arm around Brad's, worried about what the note might say.

Mrs. Banks continued, "The note explains that the baby you adopted is a twin. The birth mother thought there might be a better chance for the babies to be adopted if they were separated. She had to make a difficult decision after the car accident that killed the babies' father. She also included a photograph of the two of them in happier times. I thought it would be comforting for you to have the photograph, and exciting for Heather to know that she has a twin."



Telling Heather

After Mrs. Banks left, the Altos called Heather into the dining room and sat her down. As they ate dessert, Mrs. Alto started telling the story of Heather's adoption.

Heather interrupted, "You know I am really glad you are my parents, but really, do I have to hear this story all the time? I could **recite** it by heart!"

Mrs. Alto gazed lovingly at her thirteen-year-old daughter and sighed, and then glanced quickly at her husband. "I know, dear, but now that you're thirteen and such a grown-up young lady, there's something else we need to tell you. We didn't tell you before, because we just found out."

"What is it? Is something wrong?" asked Heather.

Her parents exchanged cautious looks, and then Mr. Alto began, "Dear, we love you very much."

"Yes, and . . . ?" said Heather, growing more and more impatient.

"Well, you have a twin," Mr. Alto stated.

Heather sat stunned for a moment. "Really, a twin? You mean, I'm not an only child? Oh, you know how much I've always wanted a *sister*. This is the best news ever! Where is she?"

"Well," Mrs. Alto began, "your birth mother was afraid that if she left one family with twins, they might reject one or both of you, so she thought it best to separate you. The adoption agency can't tell us where your twin is, but Mrs. Banks did leave us this photograph of your birth parents and a note."



Heather stared at the photograph. "Wow," she whispered, dumbfounded, "I kind of look like them, don't I? I guess I understand why they thought they had to separate us, but how will I ever know where my twin is? I'd hate to think I have a sister out there who I'll never know. Will you help me find her?"

"Of course, dear, we'll do everything we possibly can," Mrs. Alto promised. "But you know, your twin could be a brother as well as a sister."

“Oh, a brother, that would be okay too—just as long as it is a **sibling!**” exclaimed Heather.

“Why don’t we place an ad in the paper?” Mr. Alto suggested. “Or maybe in a couple of papers, and some magazines, too.”



“Great idea,” agreed Mrs. Alto. “In the meantime, we should think about how we’re going to determine whether or not someone is actually related to Heather. Heather, why don’t you come up with a list of things you think that you and a sibling might have in common.”

Heather jumped up. “I’ll get started right away. Thank you both so much!”

The Search

While Heather began to work on her list, Mr. and Mrs. Alto prepared an ad for several local and national newspapers and magazines. They also left postings on adoption websites. They were sure to include the exact date that Heather was born and a summary of the contents of the note that was left. The ad asked that anyone who could possibly be the missing twin to contact them immediately, and to send a photograph.



They waited and waited as responses began trickling in over the next few weeks. Most were just letters of support or e-mails from people describing their own adoption and lost-sibling stories, but a few offered information that helped the Altos.



The Altos were finally able to narrow down the responses to three candidates, all of whom were the same age as Heather and had similar birth and adoption dates. All of them had come from the same adoption agency. The Altos contacted each of the families and set up interview times for the following week. Heather finished her list and got ready to finally meet her twin.

The Interviews

Heather apprehensively reread her list while she waited for the first candidate to arrive. The list read:

Things about myself:

I have long, curly brown hair.

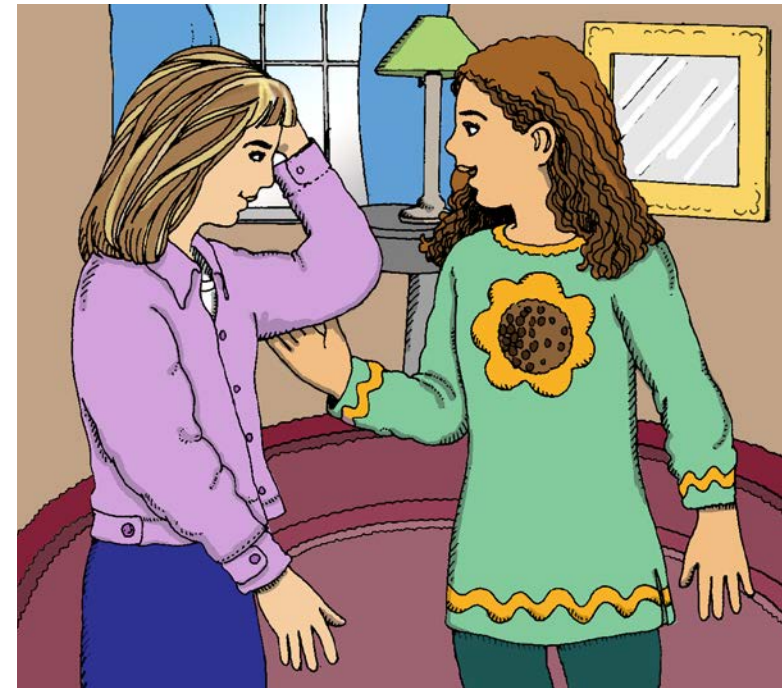
I have brown eyes.

I like to play chess.

I like cats better than dogs.

I love peanut butter.

I have attached earlobes.



Amelia skipped through the door. "I'm so excited you chose me to come see you, Heather! You know, I've always had the feeling that I had a sister, and when I read your ad, I almost fell out of my seat. I'm sure we're sisters, I can just sense it; I know you and I are twins!"

Amelia obviously wanted to be chosen as the missing twin. She gave very elaborate answers to Heather's questions, giving all the information she needed and more. The Altos were wary; they didn't want to think Heather's twin was the first candidate just because she was energetic. They wrote down Amelia's responses to Heather's questions.

Amelia:

She has long, straight brown hair with light streaks in it.

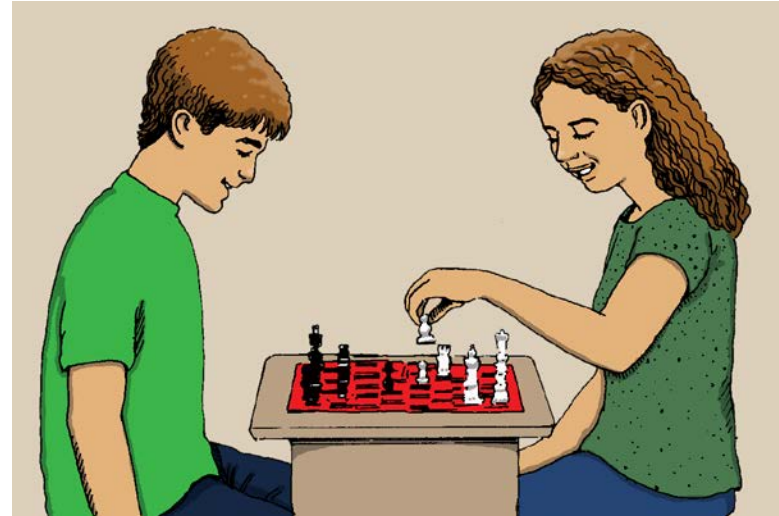
She says she has hazel eyes, but they look sort of brown.

She doesn't know how to play chess.

She likes cats, but she has a ferret and likes him better than either dogs or cats.

She's allergic to peanut butter, so she doesn't eat it.

Her earlobes are not attached.



The next to arrive was Harry, a thirteen-year-old boy with brown eyes and short, dark hair. Harry was soft-spoken and polite, and said he had read the ad in the local paper and lived just a few neighborhoods away. He answered all the questions very **concisely**, and seemed like a nice boy, just a little on the shy side, especially when compared to Amelia.

Harry:

He has short, curly, dark brown hair.

He has brown eyes.

He likes chess.

He doesn't like cats.

Peanut butter is not his favorite food.

His earlobes are attached.

The final candidate was a very pleasant girl named Casey. She was also thirteen and had long, curly brown hair, brown eyes, and a nice smile. She chatted with the Altos, seeming very comfortable with the entire family. She even stayed for a while after the interview to talk about chess and school. After she left, the Altos listed her responses next to the others’.

Casey:

She has long, curly brown hair.

She has brown eyes.

She likes chess.

She likes cats.

She also likes peanut butter.

Her earlobes are not attached.



The Altos sat down and began comparing all the responses. They were a bit upset to find that none of the candidates were a perfect match, though all of them had enough in common that they might be related to Heather.

“I don’t think we understand enough about heredity to figure out who is related and who is not,” said Mr. Alto.

“I agree,” sighed Heather, who was terribly disappointed that they couldn’t figure out who her twin was.

“I know,” said Mrs. Alto, “why don’t we take the responses over to Mrs. Jean’s house? She’s a genetic counselor, and spends her whole day researching and talking to parents about the **traits** they pass on to their children.”

So they gathered all their responses and brought them to their next-door neighbor, Mrs. Jean, and asked her for help.



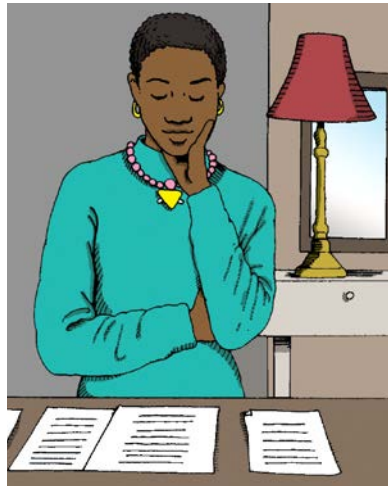
The Selection

Mrs. Jean carefully read the interview questions and then scanned the responses. “First of all,” she began, “let’s talk about each of your questions. Your first question is about hair, and it’s true that hair color and type is something passed down through your genes.”

“Jeans, like blue jeans?” asked Heather.

“Actually, I meant genes, spelled G-E-N-E-S, which are units of heredity that transfer traits like hair and eye color from one generation to the next,” Mrs. Jean explained.

“Human genes are found in pairs, and you get one from your mother and one from your father. Genes can either be dominant or recessive, which means that a dominant gene will always **override** a recessive gene. For example, with hair, the genes for brown hair and curly hair are dominant, while the genes for blond hair and straight hair are recessive.”



“So that means my twin has to have curly brown hair, like I do,” said Heather.

“Not necessarily. Your parents may have each carried the recessive gene. Also, hair is something you can change by **bleaching** blond or straightening. So I would say that you can’t really use hair type to indicate heredity unless you know for certain that the person has not changed his or her hair in any way.”

“I guess we don’t know whether or not any of our finalists changed their hair,” said Mrs. Alto.

“Now, about eye color; the brown-eye gene is dominant while the blue-eye gene is recessive, so eye color used to be a very good **indicator** of heredity. But nowadays, people can wear colored contact lenses and change the color of their eyes.”

“I suppose you’re right,” said Heather, trying not to sound disappointed.

“And three of these other questions about liking chess, cats, and peanut butter all deal with **acquired** traits, which means they’re all things you can learn to like or not like. You aren’t necessarily born liking chess, cats, or peanut butter, so I’m afraid these questions will not help you find your twin.”

Heather's head hung low, as did Mr. and Mrs. Altos'. It seemed they had asked all the wrong questions.

"Don't look so discouraged! This last question about attached earlobes may be the key," said Mrs. Jean. "The gene for attached earlobes is recessive, while the gene for unattached earlobes is dominant. In order for a recessive trait like that to appear, both of Heather's genes for earlobes must be recessive, so she knows each parent carried at least one recessive earlobe gene."

Mrs. Jean paused for a moment and picked up the picture of Heather's parents. "Look at your birth parents—you can see they both have attached earlobes, so you know that both of their genes were also recessive. There is no way that two parents who carry only recessive genes could have children with unattached earlobes!"



Heather began thinking out loud, "Okay . . . both my parents had attached earlobes, which makes sense because I have attached earlobes, too. That means that my twin must have attached earlobes, and the only one of the finalists who does is Harry. Harry is my twin!"

"That's right, Harry could possibly be your twin," said Mrs. Jean. "But he also may not. It may be just a coincidence that his birthday is the same as yours, that he came from the same adoption agency, and that you both have attached earlobes. In order to be certain that he is your twin you should both have your DNA tested. DNA carries your genetic code. If your DNA carries some of the same codes, then you are brother and sister."

"But . . . I thought my twin would be a girl," said Heather.

Mrs. Jean responded, "Only **identical twins** are the same gender, because identical twins have exactly the same genes. They were born from the same egg that split in two, but **fraternal twins** were born from two different eggs. They're more like regular siblings, only they were born at the same time."

"So, if Harry and I get our DNA tested we can find out for sure whether or not we are twins. Let's go tell Harry!" Heather exclaimed.



The Happy Reunion

The Altos quickly called Harry and his family, who were thrilled to hear that Harry and Heather might be twins.

The next night, the Altos invited Harry and his family for dinner. Harry and Heather discovered that there were a lot of things they had in common. Both were left-handed and both laughed as they tried in vain to roll their tongues. Both got their first tooth at ten-months-old and named their first pet Socks. After talking things over, both families agreed to get the children's DNA tested. However, they all agreed that they had enjoyed each other's company so much that they **anticipated** spending a lot of time together in the future, even if Harry wasn't Heather's twin.

Glossary

acquired (<i>adj.</i>)	gained through experience (p. 18)
anticipated (<i>v.</i>)	eagerly looked forward to (p. 21)
bleaching (<i>v.</i>)	lightening by removing color (p. 18)
blustery (<i>adj.</i>)	very windy (p. 4)
concisely (<i>adv.</i>)	using as few words as possible (p. 14)
fraternal twins (<i>n.</i>)	twins who are born at the same time but are not identical (p. 20)
identical twins (<i>n.</i>)	twins who look exactly alike (p. 20)
indicator (<i>n.</i>)	a clue or sign that something exists in a particular way (p. 18)
override (<i>v.</i>)	to automatically take over, cancel out, or replace another (p. 17)
recite (<i>v.</i>)	to speak out loud something memorized or known well (p. 6)
sibling (<i>n.</i>)	a brother or a sister (p. 9)
traits (<i>n.</i>)	features or qualities (p. 16)