Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

The Cardturner

Written by Louis Sachar

Published by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

1

My Favorite Uncle

Ever since I was a little kid, I've had it drilled into me that my uncle Lester was my favorite uncle. My mother would thrust the phone at me and say, "Uncle Lester wants to talk to you," her voice infused with the same forced enthusiasm she used to describe the deliciousness of canned peas. "Tell him you love him."

"I love you, Uncle Lester," I'd say.

"Tell him he's your favorite uncle."

"You're my favorite uncle."

It got worse as I got older. I never knew what to say to him, and he never seemed all that interested in talking to me. When I became a teenager I felt silly telling him he was my favorite uncle, although my mother still urged me to do so. I'd say things like "Hey, how's it goin'?" and he'd grunt some response. He might ask me a question about school. I imagine it was a great relief to both of us when my mother took back the phone. Our brief conversations always left me feeling embarrassed, and just a little bit creepy.

He was actually my great-uncle, having been my mother's favorite uncle long before he was mine.

I didn't know how much money he had, but he was rich enough that he never had to be nice to anyone. Our favorite uncle never visited us, and I think my mother initiated all the phone conversations with him. Later, after he got really sick, he wouldn't even talk to her. My mother would call almost daily, but she could never get past his housekeeper.

I had only met Uncle Lester face to face one time, at his sixty-fifth birthday party. I was six years old, and to me, his house seemed like a castle on a mountaintop. I said the obligatory "Happy birthday" and "I love you" and "You're my favorite uncle" and then steered clear of him.

"His heart is as cold as a brick," my father said on the drive home.

That phrase has stuck with me, I think, because my father used the word *cold* instead of *hard*.

My elementary school was a brick building. Every day on the way home, I would drag my fingers over the hard, and yes, cold surface.

I'm in high school now, but still whenever I walk by a brick building, I feel compelled to touch it. Even now, as I write this, I can almost feel the hard coolness, the sharp edges, and the roughness of the cement between the bricks.

2

A Turn for the Worse

Uncle Lester has taken "a turn for the worse." That's a phrase I heard a lot around the first of this year. Another phrase that came up a lot was "complications resulting from diabetes."

I wish I could report that these words brought great concern and sadness to our household. True, when my mother spoke of our favorite uncle's unfortunate turn, her voice had a somber tone, and sometimes she would place a hand on her heart, but I would say the overall mood was one of anxious anticipation. Once, I actually saw my father rub his hands together when he mentioned that Uncle Lester was not long for this world. December 25 might have come and gone, but there was a sense that Christmas was still just around the corner.

To be fair, I should mention that my father worked for a company that manufactured and installed insulation material. He often complained how the synthetic fibers made his hands itch, and that could have been the reason he was rubbing his hands together.

Nevertheless, the only person who seemed genuinely worried about our favorite uncle was my sister, Leslie. She was also the only one of us who had never met him, unless you count his sixty-fifth birthday party. She was about four months old when we went to his dark castle on the mountain. My mother put extra emphasis on the first syllable of my sister's name when she introduced Uncle *Les*ter to his new grandniece, *Les*lie.

Leslie was eleven when Uncle Lester took his turn for the worse.

"What's diabetes?" she asked me.

"It's kind of a disease," I answered. "It has something to do with your body not being able to turn sugar into insulin."

"Why do you need insulin?"

I didn't know.

"Is Uncle Lester in pain?"

Complications-resulting-from-diabetes was just a string of words to me, and I never gave much thought to their meaning. Unlike me, Leslie could feel the suffering behind the words.

A week later I found out just how complicated his condition was. My uncle Lester had become blind.

"I guess he won't be playing cards anymore," my father said, rather callously, I thought.

It was the first time I'd ever heard anything about my uncle and cards.

According to my mother, we were Uncle Lester's closest living relatives. By this, I think she meant we lived the closest, which I doubted had any legal significance, but she

seemed to think this was important if, God forbid, anything should happen to him.

He had no children of his own. He had one brother and two sisters, and they all had children (including my mother), and their children had children (including Leslie and me).

That was a lot of people with whom to split any inheritance, but my mother seemed especially concerned about Mrs. Mahoney, Uncle Lester's longtime housekeeper. "I think there's more going on there than just housekeeping, if you know what I mean," she said one evening during dinner.

She was speaking somewhat cryptically because of Leslie. I knew what she meant, of course, and I'm pretty sure Leslie did too, but I really didn't want to think about my old uncle and his aging housekeeper while I was eating.

There was somebody else who was even more worrisome to my mother than Mrs. Mahoney. That person was Sophie Castaneda.

I'd heard about the Castaneda family all my life, "the crazy Castanedas," but I never quite got my uncle's relationship to them. It was complicated, to say the least.

From what I understood, Sophie Castaneda was the daughter of Uncle Lester's ex-wife's crazy sister.

When Uncle Lester was in his twenties, he had been married for less than a year. His wife had a sister who went insane. The sister had a daughter named Sophie King, who later changed her name to Sophie Finnick, and then became Sophie Castaneda when she got married.

See what I mean?

According to my mother, all the Castanedas were bonkers. I met Toni Castaneda, Sophie's daughter, at my

uncle's sixty-fifth birthday. Toni was about six years old, and I remember I was glad to find someone my own age to play with. Toni ran up to me. She covered her ears with her hands, her elbows sticking out, and shouted, "Shut up! Leave me alone!" and then she ran away.

She didn't do that just to me. I watched her tell other people to shut up and leave her alone too. I thought she was funny, but when I tried playing that game, I got in trouble for saying shut up.