

My Medicine

Nichole Mowery

“Here’s my medicine, Mrs. Smith. Mom says I have to take one at lunch, and I have to give it to you to hold for me,” I said convincingly, or so I thought, as I stood in front of my colossal-sized first grade teacher at the beginning of the school day.

I had waited until the lunch count was taken and I could speak to her alone. That’s what everyone else had done when they had something private to say to our favorite teacher. Today was my turn. Confident that she would carefully follow the instructions of my mother, I cupped the round medicine container in my small hands, bumped my finger alongside the tiny opening in the back that reminded me of my Wonder Woman Pez dispenser, and placed it in her corpulent hands.

With one eyebrow half raised, she looked curiously at my container, then asked, “What kind of medicine is this?”

“Well, it’s *my* medicine,” I explained as I tightened my lips into a straight, emphatic line and lowered my eyebrows into a “V” shape. My tear ducts were prepared to unbolt the dam of water behind them at a seconds notice if necessary, just in case she didn’t believe the gravity of the situation.

The teacher instantly released a round of inquisitive darts, asking: “Are you ill? What hurts? Is it your tummy, your head, or your heart? Do you know what this medicine does for you? Did your mom send a note with your medicine?”

Beginning to feel invaded, yet not wanting to be doubted, I insistently exclaimed, “It keeps me from having more babies. That’s why I have to take *my* medicine. Mom says I can’t miss even one.”

Mrs. Smith tapped the top of my head and replied in a sing-song calming tone, “Well, okay. We wouldn’t want that to happen.” She quickly batted her eyes and tried to comfort me in my growing hysteria as she carefully placed the container in her pocket; I could tell that Mrs. Smith didn’t quite believe me. My one mistake was not having a note from home. As she whirled me around toward my seat, she added, “Why don’t you go back to your seat and finish coloring your picture and I’ll keep your medicine until lunch.”

Uncertain of my victory, I acquiesced. I shuffled to my seat with piggy tails swaying in the air. “What if she doesn’t believe me?” I thought, “She’s never asked other kids so many questions when they brought their medicines to her. Normally, she just puts it in one of the cubbies on top of the cabinet marked: “Medicine to be given in the morning, at lunch, in the afternoon.” I resolved to follow the final placement of my container.

Pretending to color, I peered up from my desk to see my teacher empty the contents of her pocket and place it in a plastic bag with a note she had quickly scribbled and handed to Miss Caroline. Miss Caroline, the aide, took the lunch count to the office every morning, so I surmised that my container was going there too. I began to panic and wonder: “What if I don’t get it back? What if I really do have a baby from not taking one? Mom told her friend last night that she would just die if she ever got pregnant again; four kids were plenty. Would that happen to me?”

I knew from experience that every time mom got pregnant she preferred resting a lot, if she could, instead of playing. She hadn't felt like playing with me in what seemed like forever: It bothered me some, but what really worried me was that I liked to play, and I didn't like the idea of giving up my dolls, my bike, and my friends to rest. "I didn't want *that* to happen to me," I thought. I finally resolved that the plastic bag storing my medicine container was meant to preserve it; that's why Miss Caroline took it to the office, to keep it separate from the bottles of liquid pain relievers and cough medicines that stood erect like soldiers in the appropriate cubbies. I finally concluded the office was the best place to stow the medicine until lunch.

The morning passed quickly. We added and subtracted with our old pop bottle lids, we sat Indian-style in horseshoe fashion reciting the letters and their sounds, and we listened to the hypnotic rhythm of Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*. We were too busy for me to even think about the medicine that absolutely had to be taken at lunch.

It wasn't long until the principal knocked on the door to my classroom. With him I saw my mother clad in her long denim skirt, the one she wore when she had to run important errands, with her better looking blue t-shirt that was probably my dad's. She had my brothers in tow completing the picture of a small domestic queen. The three-year old would alternate clinging to her faded denim skirt in embarrassment, then running to the doorjamb to rev up the engine of his old matchbox car. The one-year old sat quietly in the stroller with a bottle in one hand and a hand-me-down chew toy in the other. The three-month old, wrapped tightly in a blue receiving blanket and sucking his right thumb, rested in the crook of mom's right arm.

Mom's face told the story: Something was wrong. I had seen that expression before, but I couldn't figure out why, nor could I figure out why she was at the school. So, I cautiously rose from my seat and went directly to the middle brother, the one imprisoned by the stroller, and started "goo-gooing" with him while trying to determine the purpose of this unannounced visit. Mom informed me that we were going home. While I was gathering my things, I saw the principal hand her my medicine container.

"What is mom doing?" I wondered as she handed the infant to Mrs. Smith. She quickly opened the lid and ran her pointer finger along the dial of peach and white dots. I saw her lips move in quick succession as her finger tapped each one, and then she breathed a long sigh of relief.

Not much was said on the journey from the classroom to the house. I wondered if I would be in trouble, but she didn't say a word to me except to ask if I wanted a grilled cheese or peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch. Since there was no definitive change in her voice or face, I figured that I might be off the hook and began to think of activities to busy my afternoon. I could sit on the couch and watch *Mr. Cartoon* with my brothers. I could even take the oldest on a nature hike and share what I had just learned in class about pine cones, or I could just help mom in the kitchen, pretending to make tea and pizza. We could even sit at my Mickey Mouse table like we used to do – before the babies.

Once we got home, though, I realized I hadn't earned a free day for no reason: I was in trouble. Mom waited until my brothers were down for a nap to talk with me. She said, "The reason I picked you up early today was because the principal called and said that you had

A Rude Awakening

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The alarm screams: 6:00 a.m.;
Get up! Time to start another day.”
Well who wants to start a *new* day
When it looks like the day before has yet to
end?

Through hazy, itchy eyes,
I reach across a catatonic three-year old
And a peaceful sleeping ten-month old
To silence the annoying cries of the timepiece.
I scan the room with eyes half shut,
Trying to ignore the hideous scene.

Maybe if I go back to sleep the magical
House-cleaning fairy will honor me with a visit
And save me the trouble.

Drifting back into unconsciousness, I'm
annoyed.
My mind replays the catastrophic scene,
Using the inside of my eyelids as a projection
screen.

I see: blue, green, and khaki colored Dockers,
Plain colored dress shirts, and gray Fruit of the
Loom
Boxer briefs frothing over the wicker laundry
basket.
I see several half-empty Mt. Dew cans
Resting in the corner on top of the micro-
fridge.



The abandoned blue bassinette that should
have been
Placed in the attic months ago harbors
An array of socks waiting to find that perfect
mate.

Glutton for punishment, I pry my eyes open
To survey the true depths of the situation.
With disgust, I observe:
My tired, half-emptied suitcase longing
To be freed of its burden and retired to
Its restful haven under the bed.
I see the baby's chew toys
Littering the walk space between the
Dresser and the bed, and the wet toddler
underwear
Drying on the doorknob.
Looking towards the closet, I notice the kids'
suitcase,
Unopened,
Towering over the overstuffed diaper bag
Filled with bottles containing formula
Too spoiled to drink.

The nagging clock once again reminds me
Of the day's responsibilities which the
sunlight--
By the way-- confirms by
Filtering its way through the cracks in the
blinds.
With defiant resolution, I terminally hush
The rectangular timepiece on my nightstand,
Roll to my side, wrap my arms around
My hubby and bury my head in the pillow.