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The Devil in Disguise

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Devil in Disguise by Nicole Wiesenthal

"My biggest problem is what to do about all the things I can't do anything about." – Ashleigh Brilliant

My parents were fighting again. I covered my ears with my comforter, trying to plug the sheet into my ears. It worked, kind of. I couldn't tell what they were saying, but loud shouts erupted in my ears. After the fight, my dad came into my room. He pretended like nothing was happening, but we both knew what he had been up to. "Are you and Mommy going to get a divorce?" I asked. "I don't know, Honey. I don't know," he replied and left the room. At school I sat on the floor, building colored towers with wooden blocks. My friend was attempting to hold up the buildings to keep them from collapsing when our school guidance counselor called me out of class. She sat me on a tiny, blue, plastic chair. She attempted to reassure me, saying, "It's okay to talk about it. You're not the only child whose parents get divorced or in big fights." Or have to call the police because their fight gets too out of hand, I thought. "Can I go back and play with the blocks again? Andy probably misses me," I said as I wiped the lenses of my fake glasses against my shirt tail. Today my school was celebrating Purim, a Jewish holiday. We got to sing, dance, eat triangular cookies, and wear costumes. I had dressed up as a nerd and wore huge glasses, a Looney Tunes tie, and suspenders that hitched up my really high shorts. Today I was supposed to have fun, but this had put a damper on my day. The guidance counselor gave me a curt nod of approval, and I rushed off back to my second grade class.

"There's no cause for alarm. I chopped just one tree. I am doing no harm." – Dr. Seuss

My sister and I were sitting inside playing with our dolls when the new babysitter arrived. I should have known she was trouble from the start; she had short, blonde hair and a Brazilian accent. She also had already divorced three other men. This strange woman, Leia, talked as my sister and I marched our plastic dolls across their pink house. "How are you, Macy?" Kaitlin, my sister, asked. "Super good. Let's go for a picnic," I replied, pushing my brown-haired, big-headed doll into a toy van. "I think you'll make a great babysitter," my mom said, nodding at Leia as she spoke. "Let's go," Kaitlin said to me, not paying attention to the conversation, not knowing what this would lead to, as she pushed the plastic van off. The van smashed into the wall, and all of the dolls fell out. We rushed to put them back in the van, but they wouldn't stay wedged in the seats. My dad slept in my bed now. This meant that I would sleep with my mom. I didn't like sleeping with her. She wouldn't let me move around at all. I would stay frozen in the bed, unable to find a comfortable position and unable to fall asleep. Often I found myself creeping to the bathroom in the middle of the night. I would crouch in the corner, close my eyes, stretch my muscles, count to one-hundred, and then slowly crawl back into bed. "Go to sleep," my mom would whisper. I lay awake for a few minutes, and then, I slowly drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

“Bang-ups and Hang-ups can happen to you.” – Dr. Seuss

One day my mom decided we needed a dog. She brought us with her to choose a purebred poodle. A breeder had just received three puppies, and we were going to decide which one to take home with us. I was so excited! A dog! We were actually getting a dog! We chose a white standard poodle with a playful attitude and named him Prince. It was love at first sight. When my dad got home and found the dog, he became furious. He didn't like pets. He began to yell at my mom, and they got in a huge fight. I huddled up with my sister in a corner of our house. My dad became so angry that he threw the dog cage into the lake. My mom yelled, grabbed my new cell phone (a gift from my dad), and threw it into the lake. “You are too young to have a cell phone,” she growled. The cage was pulled out, but my phone was lost forever. I didn't care, though. We got to keep the dog. When my dad hit my mom, he was forced to move into a small apartment. It had three rooms. My dad and my brother each got their own. My sister and I had to share one. I was overjoyed, though. Not only did I get my room back, but I got another one as well! On the first night, we slept on air mattresses, ate dinner in a huge cardboard box, and played X-box. My dad had brought the TV and video game system with us. I felt like a real explorer. Life was good.

“On you will go though your enemies prow!” – Dr. Seuss

Leia suddenly spent more time with my dad. I felt like she was stealing him away from us. My mom fired her because Leia spoke to represent my dad in a court case against my mom. I didn't really understand why that was a bad thing. I liked Leia most of the time. She lied and cursed, but she also took me shopping. I hoped to be like her when I grew up. My mom started to work again. She had worked at my dad's office ever since he had opened it. Now that my dad was out of her life, she needed a different way to earn money. Before she had worked for my dad, she was a nurse. And so she became one again, picking my sister, brother, and me up from school at five-thirty every afternoon. My dad only saw my siblings and me on weekends. Sometimes I would ask, “Why don't you split the days in half? We could stay with you half the week. Mom can see us the other half.” “Your mom won't agree to the terms I have laid out.” When I returned to my mom's house the next day, I asked the same question. “Your dad would be giving me zero child support if I agreed. He has so much money but always wants the easy way out. I have to struggle with you guys every day. I have a tiring job. He's so irrational,” she replied. Although I didn't know what child support was, I let the subject drop. I felt bad for my mom. One day my parents got in a fight when my dad came to pick us up from my mom's house. My mom called the police again. My dad and mom were forced to exchange us at the police station. I didn't like being picked up there. I was



scared. The missing children posters and uniformed police everywhere made me feel so small and vulnerable.

“When you’re in a Slump, you’re not in for much fun.” – Dr Seuss

My dad became a very religious person. Although we were Jews, one day when we went over to his house, he announced we would be attending church from now on. “How come?” my brother asked. “Because the rabbis wouldn’t help me in my quest to find God. When I went to church, the minister answered all of my questions and made me realize that God was right in front of me. He will help you too,” he said. I didn’t like the idea of switching religions. I had found God already. He was in Heaven watching over us. Nevertheless, every other day we spent with my dad, we spent in church. I didn’t get to see him because I was in the preteen section of the church. Now God was taking my daddy too, I thought, as I listened to the minister preach away about how Jesus was my savior.

“I’m afraid that some times you’ll play lonely games too.” – Dr. Seuss

And then they started the lectures. Whenever my sister and I got in a fight, whenever I accidentally did something wrong, I was shuffled into my dad’s room. There he would look up at the sky, complain about how God was tired of my messing up, and explain how my dad was giving me a second chance. God was, apparently, also giving me another chance. I was running out of chances, my dad would explain. I became frightened and would start to cry. I didn’t want God or my dad to leave me. My dad would hiss that my mom was taking me away from him. He would talk about how I needed to behave better. Finally he would allow me to hug him. Then he would send me off to my room. I was to be grounded to my room the entire day. My dad gave these demoralizing lectures to both my brother and me. My sister was spoiled rotten and was allowed to do whatever she wanted. She was taught to be rude, and my dad looked on her with pride. It didn’t make sense that I could end up getting yelled at for not saying thank you, while my sister could just steal and would end up being praised.

“And when you’re alone, there’s a very good chance you’ll meet things that scare you right out of your pants.” – Dr. Seuss

When my siblings and I went to our dad’s house another time, we found out that he and Leia had gotten married. “I was afraid you would embarrass me,” he explained, showing us the tape of their wedding vows. I looked on in disbelief. What was happening to my dad? He wasn’t the same caring person as .

before. He loved religion, but it seemed that he hated us. I was confused and hurt. The building felt like it was caving in as I watched my dad gush words of love for Leia.

“You’re too smart to go down any not-so-good street.” – Dr. Suess

My dad forced me to go to school, even though I was throwing up everywhere, because he said I deserved to be sick. I decided that I had to do something. I gathered my siblings together in a room at my mom’s house, my home. “I think we should stop visiting Dad. Maybe we would only go out for lunch with him or something, but I don’t want to sleep over his house. He always gets really angry the next day,” I mumbled. The thought of leaving Dad terrified me. I still loved him. I loved who he used to be before he met the Satan who pretended to be God and before he met the lying Leia. Everyone agreed unanimously: my brother, sick of being verbally and mentally abused, and my sister, just to go with the flow. My brother wrote my dad a note explaining that we no longer wished to stay over his house again. My dad wore a pained look that got uglier as he read. When he finished, he crumpled the paper up and threw it into the trash. “We’ll still visit you,” I pleaded, tears forming in my eyes. “Well, I see the devil has infected you,” he replied. He led us to his car to take us to my true home. No one cried. My eyes welled up. I pulled out a pencil and paper. I drew both my dad and myself as stick figures. In the picture we were holding hands. I wrote underneath it, Dad + Nicole Forever. My dad looked into the rearview mirror. “I bet you’re writing me another letter about how you wish you had never had to stay with me. I don’t need it. You have already hurt me enough. God will not forgive you,” he called out. I burst into tears. Everyone sat awkwardly in the car, listening to my loud sobbing. I crumbled up the paper and jammed it into the crack of the car seat. I felt cramped, sitting in the tight car, bad vibes radiating from my dad. I didn’t understand how everyone else could hold back tears. Kaitlin didn’t even seem to care. I found this strange since she was the one he favored the most. When the car stopped, we all rushed to get out. My dad gave us each a tense hug. “I love you and you let me down,” he said. “We’ll visit, I promise. We just won’t stay overnight,” I hiccupped, willing him to realize how wrong he had been and to immediately turn back to the person who he would sing to so long ago. “Yeah, right,” he muttered, walking back to the car, the shadows cast from the houses making him look like a black, lurking monster. We watched as he drove off, my loud sobs echoing through the street. Little did I know, that was the last time we would be seeing each other. Sometimes we would be in the same place at the same time. He would plaster a smile on his face and walk by as if we were invisible. My siblings and I liked it that way. We did not want his love anymore and he didn’t want ours. The experience made me more resilient. I accepted others’ mistakes and learned from them, trying to help them instead of tearing them down.