She Wishes Me Away to the Cornfield

She wishes me away to the cornfield. She waits until I am bending over with the baby in my arms and then hits me square on the back of my left thigh. It hurts a little. Startled, I let out a yelp and then stifle it. “Lauren! What was that for?” I demand.

“I’m mad at you ‘cause you…’cause you,” she begins.

Lauren has started doing that lately, stumbling a bit on her words mid-sentence. “What did I do, honey?”

“You didn’t come play with me. I told you to come play and you didn’t.”

I’m home alone with her and the baby needs to be fed. “Go to your room, sweetie,” I plead. “As soon as I feed your brother, I’ll come back and play with you.”

“Brother, too,” she says and walks away before waiting to hear if I agree or not.

All of this is true.

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She wishes me away to the cornfield. She comes home from school one Friday acting more tired than usual. She’s grumpy and wants to argue with whatever I say. We tell ourselves that she’s had a long week. Between ballet class and soccer and not going to bed last night when she was supposed to, we are satisfied that that’s all it is. She goes to sleep without a fuss around 7:00, but wakes up hot an hour later. The swine flu is going around, so we worry. We take her to Medcenter West since Dr. Harrison’s office closes at 4:00 pm on Fridays.

The doctor there tells us she’s negative for H1N1, which is good, but he thinks she has bronchitis. Giving us a prescription for a decongestant and an antibiotic, he rushes us out the door.

“She won’t take the medicine,” Michael says. Michael’s my husband and my kids’ dad and he’s remembering the last time she got sick and how hard it was to get her to take the medicine then. He continues to complain as we drive away. “Is it even worth it to try to make her take it?”

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“Yes!” I insist, surprised by his demeanor. “Cut the radio down,” I tell him. I try to say this nicely.
“When it’s one of your songs on, it’s okay if it’s loud…” he begins.
“Just cut it down, okay?” My tone is not quite as polite this time.

Turning around uncomfortably in my seat so I can see her in her booster, I begin to talk. “Sweetie, we’re going to get you some medicine and you need to take it. If you take it, you’ll feel better and we’ll buy you a toy.” I am definitely not above bribing her in this case.
“What kind of toy?” she wants to know.
“Well, what kind do you want?” I ask.
“I want a toy from the blue toy store, not from the white toy store, okay?”

The funny thing is, both of the stores she’s referring to are Toys-r-us stores, but they are on different sides of town and their exteriors are painted different colors. I have to hand it to her that the blue toy store does seem to have a better selection and friendlier employees, though.
“Okay?” she asks, again. Apparently, I am not quick enough to respond.
“Yes, Lauren,” I say. “That’s fine, as long as you take all of your medicine.”
“What will happen if I don’t take it?” She seems to really want to know the answer to this.
“I don’t know, honey.” I really am getting exasperated now. I was counting on a low-key Friday night and we got anything but. “I don’t know,” I repeat, “but you need to take your medicine and then you’ll get better.”
“And then I’ll get a toy?”
I must not have answered quick enough this time either because she demands again, “I’ll get a toy—right? Right? I’ll get a toy from the toy store?”
“Yes, sweetie…as long as you take your medicine.”
All of this is true.

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She wishes me away to the cornfield. At her preschool the kids talk about their mommies, compare them. I guess they want to see who has it best, who has it worst, that sort of thing. One day she tries to trade—me for Lacey’s
mommy. Lacey is her new best friend. Now she wants the same Skechers that Lacey wears, the kind that light up. She asks me to braid her hair now, just like Lacey’s mom does. I don’t know how to braid hair, not really. Pigtail were fine last week; now they are not. Lauren decides she wants Lacey’s mommy to be her mommy; she doesn’t want me anymore.

None of this is true.

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She wishes me away to the cornfield. “Mommy,” she says, insistently, “I’m trying to tell you about the dream I dreamed last night.”

Putting her brother down, I turn to her. “Tell me, then,” I say, perhaps a little too impatiently.

“I had a dream that you died,” she begins.

“Died how?” I ask.

“You got sick, Mommy. You got sick and you took your medicine but you died anyway.”

All of this is true.

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She wishes me away to the cornfield. We’re at her grandparents’ house, my in-laws. Except for the baby who is already asleep in the other room, we’re all sitting at the table about to have dinner. My father-in-law starts to say grace.

“We say grace at school,” she interjects. “Never at home, though.” She goes to a Catholic school and grace is big there. Michael and I have always been more of the Christmas and Easter church crowd, as I like to put it, though to tell the truth it’s hard to get him to attend church even then.

My mother-in-law looks at me askance. In her mind, if we’re not saying grace, it must be my fault.

“Lauren, sweetie,” I coax, “we can start saying grace at home if you want us to.”

“I want us to,” she answers and smiles at me knowingly.

No one talks for an awkward moment. Then, Lauren, still looking at me, tells us all, “When you say grace, you are talking to God.”

None of this is true.
She wishes me away to the cornfield. I’m talking to her dad and the television is on loud and we’re sort of watching it and she bursts into the room. I didn’t hear her coming, probably because of the noise on the T.V.

“I want to know where Victoria’s daddy is, Mommy,” she interrupts. Victoria is her best friend this week.

Victoria’s dad died last year, but I’m not sure what the best way to communicate that to Lauren is.

“Victoria doesn’t have a daddy anymore,” I try to tell her.

I’ve had conversations with her about single parents and divorced parents. I was even able to explain to her about the little boy from the pool who had a mommy and a “helper mommy” (as I chose to describe her).

“What happened to Victoria’s daddy?” she wants to know.

I start and then stop. I am thinking to myself that I need to explain this as delicately as possible.

“Okay, honey. Here’s the thing. Victoria had a daddy. He was a very nice man and a very good daddy.” As I’m talking to Lauren, I’m putting a lot of emphasis on the word very, though I feel silly as I’m doing it. “Everyone liked him very much, but he died.”

“Died? How?” she demands.

“He got sick, sweetheart. Very sick.”

“What kind of sick?” she wants to know. How do you explain bone cancer to a four-year old? I don’t know what to say. I don’t say anything for a moment; I just look at her.

“Did he take his medicine, mommy?”

“Yes, sweetie. He took his medicine and everyone tried to help him.”

“But it didn’t work? It didn’t work?” She really wants to know.

I pause. After a second, I look at her. “No, honey, it didn’t work.”

She looks away from me but doesn’t move. She seems to be thinking. After a minute, she gazes back at me and asks, “Did he pray?”

All of this is true.