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The View from Here

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We are going to see Dr. Bern again today, because I still look like Casper.

“You look pale,” Mom said two days ago, when I woke up in the morning and told her my leg was hurting.

“What’s ‘pale’ mean?” I asked my Mom. She was sitting with me on my bed.

“Like Casper,” she said. “Your skin is white.”

“My skin is always white,” I said, and looked at my hands. They were still white.

“But this is different,” she said, and put her hand on my forehead. “You look sick.” Then she said I was staying home from school, and went to the other room to call the doctor. I smiled, because you’re lucky not to go to school. My leg was hurting, and it was cool that I got to stay home.

They’ve got Donkey Kong in the waiting room, and they play videos of movies on a big TV, like Aladdin and the Lion King. Playing Donkey Kong is better than school. Last time, I got to the third level, but then a barrel killed Mario right when Mom pulled me away. Maybe today I’ll get that dumb monkey.

Lucky I’m not a wimp, like my brother. He’s ten, and he cries whenever he gets a shot. I’m only seven, and I don’t cry. Except the one time I got a shot in the butt. That really hurt. It was worse than that bee-sting I got on the monkey bars at school, right on my eye. My eye got big and red and puffy, but Mom gave me medicine and lots of kisses when I got home, and it got better.

“Am I going to get a shot again?” I asked Mom when she sat on my bed this morning.

“Probably not,” she said, and rubbed my hair. I’m not a dummy, so I knew that probably meant yes.

“I hope it’s not in the butt!” I said, and ran into the kitchen for some waffles. My leg was feeling okay.

Right now, everyone is home. Dad stayed home from work today. He says he is going with me to the doctor. I am eating waffles with syrup. Mom made the waffles in the toaster.

“Can I come too?” Steven asks. He’s my brother and he’s in fourth grade. He cries when he gets a shot.

“No, you go to school,” Mom says. “We’re just taking your brother.” I like that. I stick out my tongue at him.

“No fair!” my brother says. “He’s missed a hundred days already!”

“This is the third day, Steven,” Dad says. “And it’s because he’s sick.”

“He doesn’t look sick.” Steven looks at me. “He’s faking.”

I don’t feel so sick, either. My leg feels okay today, but yesterday it still hurt. Mom tells me I still look like Casper, and keeps putting her hand on my forehead. But I like missing school when my brother has to go and he won’t get to play Donkey Kong. I stick my tongue out at him again.

“I saw that,” Mom says. “Eat your waffles, both of you.”

Felicia Mailer’s mom comes over to our house and talks to Mom for a long time in the front yard before taking Steven to school in her car. Mom comes back in the house and brings the newspaper with her.

“When are we going?” I ask, bringing my plate to the sink. I stop to scrape a piece of waffle into the garbage. Mom and Dad are still at the table. Dad is pulling the plastic wrap off the newspaper. Mom looks sad.

“Mom?”

“At nine o’clock, dear.”

I go into the other room and turn on Tom & Jerry. It is the one where they both talk, and they fight the big, ugly dog. I like it when they talk to each other, and they are friends.

Last time, two days ago, a nice lady made me stand on a scale. I stood on my tiptoes, and she caught me. “Flat feet,” she said, then lowered a piece of metal onto my head. She told me I was getting big.

Then she took me into a room with Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd on the walls. Mom came in the room with me. She wanted to help me get undressed, but I did it by myself. I was wearing Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle underwear. I did a karate kick, with my leg that didn’t hurt. Mom laughed.

“What a strong boy, my little Jason.”

“I’m not little!” I yelled. I’m bigger than most of my friends. I’m always the hero.
“I’ll karate-chop you!”

“You don’t want to hit your Mom, do you?” she said. I karate-chopped the table.

The doctor came in. He smiled. He doesn’t look so old. Younger than my dad.

“Which one are you?” he asked.

I looked at Mom.

“Which Ninja Turtle are you?” he said.

“Rafael!” I screamed. I karate-chopped Dr. Bern’s arm.

“Jason!” Mom said.

“Sorry.”

“That’s okay, Rafael,” said the doctor. He’s nice.

I got a shot last time, two days ago, maybe because I hit him. Right in my finger, the one Mom told me never to stick up at anyone. I don’t know what it means, to stick that finger up at someone, but I guess it’s bad. The doctor, he rubbed and rubbed my finger until it turned red at the tip, and then he stuck me. It only hurt a little. I didn’t cry. Then, he felt my neck and listened to my heart. His hands were cold. He pushed on my tummy, and then he tickled me and I laughed real hard. Mom laughed, too.

“I didn’t know Rafael was ticklish!” he said.

I karate-chopped his hand.

“Jason!” Mom yelled, but it didn’t sound so mean.

Today, Mom lets me sit in the front of the mini-van. Dad is driving. It’s neat, me in the front and Mom in the back.

“It’s like you’re the kid!” I turn and say. She smiles at me, but she still looks sad. I ask her if she wants to come sit up front, and she says no.

“Put on your seat belt,” she says.

“It’s on,” I tell her, and show her the belt around my belly. I’m big, but not big enough yet for the other part of the seat belt that the grown-ups wear.

When we get to Dr. Bern’s, I run to Donkey Kong, but there’s another kid playing. A girl. I don’t know her. I just sit on the other side of the game and tell her to jump when the barrels are coming.

“I know when to jump,” she says but doesn’t look at me. I’ll never get to play. I go sit on the floor and watch Aladdin. I’ve seen it a hundred times.

“Jason, let’s go.” Mom and Dad are by the door with the same lady from last time.

“If I get a shot, I won’t cry,” I tell the lady. I hold up my finger, without thinking that it’s the bad one. Mom and Dad don’t see.

This time, I go into a different room. There are no cartoons on the wall. It is a brown room, with a mushy carpet and a big desk. Much bigger than my desk at school, which flips up and is where I keep my pencils and stickers and marbles. *I wonder what’s in that desk?*

“Martin will be in soon,” the lady says.

“Whose Martin?” I ask.

“That’s Dr. Bern,” says Mom. She is looking at me funny, rubbing my hair. I think she’s gonna put her hand on my forehead, but she doesn’t.

We sit in the chairs on one side of the desk. I’m in the middle, but we’re all real close. Mom and Dad are holding hands in my lap, like a seat belt across my belly.

Dr. Bern walks in.

“Hi, Martin!” I say.

“Hi, Rafael,” he says to me. Mom and Dad stand up. *He sure could have a lot of stickers in that desk!* They shake hands, and then they all sit down. My seat belt is back on. The doctor starts talking.

I wonder how many marbles he has!

Mom starts crying. I don’t like it when she cries. The doctor isn’t talking right now. It’s quiet except for Mom crying. She’s got a hand over her mouth. I look over at Dad.

“It’s going to be okay,” he says over my head.

“What’s going to be okay?” I ask. “Is Mom sick?”

Dad rubs my head with his hand, real slow. Not fast, like he does when he gives me a noogie and tickles me and messes up my hair. He turns to the doctor and says something.

“I know a good doctor,” the doctor says to my dad.

“You’re a good doctor, Martin,” I say.

“Why thank you!” says Martin, turning to look at me. “I’m glad you think so, Jason.”

“Why is my mom crying?” I ask. Mom is wiping her eyes with a tissue that she pulled off the desk.

Martin leans forward, and smiles at me. Then he starts to say something. I watch his mustache go up and down as he talks to me. His hands are folded in front of him.

“Do you have any questions?” he says.

“Is that why I look like Casper?” I ask.

“Yes, Jason, that’s why.”

We sit for a second and say nothing. Mom is looking at me. Dad is looking at me. Martin is looking at me.

“Any other questions,” he says.

“What’s leukemia?”