

Abby

by Erin Zulkoski

The music is too loud in here and it's hurting my ears. I know some of the words to the songs because my older sister listens to the same stuff when she's in her bedroom and is playing her iPod and my dad yells at her to turn that crap down. I like my dad. He calls me "Sunshine" and winks at me from behind my mom's back whenever she's yelling at me and sometimes he makes funny faces, too. I think mom knows he does it because my mom seems to know everything.

I'm with my mom right now and we're school clothes shopping, which I think is super dumb because it's only July and school doesn't start for another two months, but Mom made me come shopping with her anyway. We've been to three different stores looking for the right pair of khaki pants. I don't like the kind with the pleats in the front because I feel like a dork when I wear them. None of the other girls at school wear pleated khakis and I want to fit in because I'm already pretty different from everyone else.

I always kind of knew I was, but one time, I heard my mom and dad talking in their bedroom when I was playing with my dolls in the hallway. I was pretending they were on vacation and using a table as a giant cliff and they were jumping off it into the ocean below them and using my unicorn Beanie Baby to swim them back to the sand so they could jump off again. I could hear my mom crying and I crawled on my hands and knees very quietly to their door so they wouldn't hear me and I pressed my ear against the door like I saw a spy do one time in a t.v. show I watched with my dad.

"Her medical bills are going to break us, Jack."

My mom sounded really sad and that made me feel sad, too, because I knew they were talking about me. I have to go to the doctor a lot because my heart isn't very good. I've had a lot of surgeries and my big sister told me I almost died once, but I don't know if I believe her or not. I think she was just telling me that to scare me. I see doctors all the time and I decided I want to be a doctor when I grow up because all of the ones I see are really cool and I want to be like them some day.

I heard my mom blow her nose and she honked like a goose and I had to cover my mouth to keep from giggling too loud because my mom and dad would be mad if they knew I was listening to them.

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"Abby, do you like these?" my mom asks and holds up a pair of pants with sparkles on the back pockets.

"I don't want to have a shiny butt, Mom," and wrinkle my nose at her. She laughs and puts them down and goes back to searching.

I am so bored. I want to leave. I want to go home and play with my dog, Dave. I named him myself. He's the best dog ever.

Just then, I see the bouncy ball machine in the corner of the store. My bouncy ball collection is getting low because I keep losing them in the gutters of the house because I can bounce them so high. I dig into my pockets to see if I have a quarter, but I don't. I look around for Mom and walk over to her.

"Mom? Can I have a quarter, please?"

Mom reaches into her purse and pulls out a quarter and hands it to me, which I grab and skip over to the machine. I put the money in and crank the knob all the way around. The machine is one of those cool ones where you can watch the bouncy ball wind around the inside until it comes out of the little door at the bottom. I watch as it twirls around and reach my hand inside to get my ball. It's really pretty—it's clear and has glitter on the inside. I hold it up to my eye and look through it, pretending it's one of those funny eyeglass things that the Monopoly guy has.

I carefully bounce to the ball to test it; I hope it's a good bouncer and can go real high. I like to bounce bouncy balls as hard as I can and chase after them, but that's how they all end up in the gutter and Dad gets mad when I ask him to get them down for me.

The ball is a good one and even with me not bouncing it as hard as I can, it goes up as high as my nose. I look around the store to see if Mom is watching me and I give it one good hard bounce and the ball goes flying out of control. I try to watch to see where it's going to land and run after it.

It finally stops in the men's section of the store and rolls under a rack of clothes. I crawl in after it and am amazed at how quiet it is inside. I can barely hear the loud music anymore.

The pants hanging around me remind me of being in a jungle and I sit down and pretend I'm Indiana Jones and I just found the crystal skull and am trying to escape the bad guys by hiding in a tall tree. Whenever I see a pair of feet outside of my pants jungle, I take my pretend knife and chop at their feet because those are the bad guys trying to find me.

After a while, I feel my eyelids start to get droopy. I've been shopping all day with Mom and I'm tired. I reach up and pull down a pair of pants and roll it up and lay it on the ground and use as a pillow. I see another pair of bad guy feet, chop them off with my knife, and fall asleep with my bouncy ball in my hand. No way are those bad guys going to steal it from me while I'm sleeping.

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I don't know it because I'm fast asleep in my pants jungle, but my mom is really scared and is looking for me everywhere in the store because she can't find me. She goes up to a lady who works in the store and is crying because I'm lost and lady is trying to calm my mom down and get her to tell her what kind of clothes and shoes I'm wearing and what my name is, but Mom is crying too hard to make sense.

The store lady finally gets my mom to tell her what my name is (Abby James), how old I am (seven years old), what I'm wearing (Hello Kitty t-shirt and black leggings), and what kind of shoes I'm wearing (red cowboy boots). The people who work in the store turn the music down, go to the front of the store and lock the doors so no one can get in or out, and they start looking for me, but I don't know that because I am safe and snug in my jungle.

The people who work in the store are looking everywhere for me; in the bathrooms, under tables, in the dressing room, I mean everywhere, but they didn't look under the rack with the pants in the men's section until one of the workers saw my bouncy ball roll out from underneath it. While I was sleeping, it fell out of my grip and lazily rolled across the floor. The man that found it separated the hanging jeans and peeked

inside and found me. The sound of his voice yelling, "I found her!" woke me and I sat up slowly, rubbing my eyes with my fists.

"Missing something?" the man asks me and holds up my bouncy ball.

I reach up and take it from the man and just then, my mom comes running up to us.

"Abigail Miranda James! What in the hell do you think you're doing?!"

Uh oh. Mom used my full name. And she swore. She only does both when she's super mad and she must be super mad at me, which is why it surprised me when she swept me up in her arms and lifted me off the ground and held me in a big hug. I could feel my shirt get wet from her tears.

"Don't you ever, ever, ever, ever, ever do anything like that ever again, Abby," she cried into my ear. My hair was soggy from her tears and snot. I was grossed out, but knew that I had been wrong for running off like that, so I let her get goobers all over me. I didn't mind that much. I hugged my mom back as tight as she was hugging me.

"I promise, Mom," and I meant it.

