

Either Side of the Glass

by Jodi Barnes

Why do you lie? the old woman repeats when her mouth is not busy filling the waste bin. We sit as far away from her wheedle and wretch as the small waiting room allows. A young woman glares at us through the mental health clinic's safety glass behind Officer Wilkins who raps his patient song: *You have to stay on this side. You can't go out that door.*

I look at my daughter wondering if this will bring her back to her old self, that perhaps depression can be scared out of its host. My brother and I loved scaring the hell out of mom who gave us permission when she hiccupped. You can't have a crazy mother and pretend you don't hate her all the time.

The young woman stares at us then mouths the words *Help Me*. My daughter's eyes plead on her behalf. I know she will ask me why no one is helping this girl. And she does. I tell her to look away, but she matches the young woman's stare, unafraid of crazy.

I am uncomfortable enough to sit on a heavily stained chair. I don't like this telepathic connection between my daughter and the young woman. Tommy and I would sit in our secret place waiting for mom to wear herself out, our eyes having to say everything. One time I peed myself but I knew I had a choice. I'm terrified of crazy.

My daughter and the girl behind the glass might be the same age. The old woman now sits across from us, howls for her medicine. Officer Wilkins tells her to be patient. *Why do you lie? How can you lie to me?* she wails. I don't know which woman I hate more.

The glass-bound girl tells Wilkins that the doctor is coming at her with a needle. *Please let me out. Please let me talk to them*, she points at us. *Absolutely not*, I say too loudly for the 15 feet between us and Wilkins, even for the 6 feet between Wilkins and the glass. I lean closer to my daughter. I want to pick her up and run back through the doors out into the sunshine away from the vomit in the can into my car, pretend this was an exercise I failed, an over-

reaction like my mother pulling a knife on the pharmacist over a non-refillable prescription.

A mistake. My daughter doesn't need an evaluation. It's all a misunderstanding.

The intake nurse suddenly calls her name. I take my child's hand, whisper that everything will be fine. Then the crazy bitch says it again: *Why do you lie?*

