

Little Meadow Simms

by Marcy Dermansky

Meadow Simms was beat up at school again today.

Little Meadow could read minds. The other children called her a witch. She was the shortest girl in the third grade. This morning she looked at Bobby Blue, whose hair was dirty, whose clothes were dirty, whose shoes were untied, and she said: "Do you sometimes wish that your father was dead?" Bobby Blue whacked her over the head with his knapsack. In his knapsack, he had six toy cars, a thermos full of tomato soup, and two text books, one math, one science. Meadow Simms lay in the infirmary with an ice-pack on her head.

I wanted to whack Bobby Blue right back. Instead, I did nothing. In my classroom, the kids were doing multiplication problems in their work books, and I was doodling in my lesson planner, aching for my Meadow. I am in big trouble with the administration, mostly because of Meadow.

I adore that girl.

It started early in the school year. I was late to school, my car wouldn't start, so I rode my bike to work, something which made the other teachers sneer. My morning plans included spelling and long division, but it was much too much. Often, lessons are too much, I'm a lazy teacher, and I did what I always did on such occasions.

"Free time," I said.

The kids whooped. They broke out their comic books and magic markers and the Connect Four games donated by the Coca Cola Foundation. Meadow Simms came up to my desk holding an

unscratched game card from McDonalds. There was a McDonalds two blocks away from the school and kids were always sneaking out to buy French fries.

"I had an Egg McMuffin for breakfast this morning," she said. Meadow Simms took a nickel out of her pocket and handed it to me. She lay the card on my desk.

I looked at this skinny, little female child, Meadow Simms. It wasn't only that she was small. Meadow Simms didn't look like other children. Her parents were hippies. They dressed her in tie-dye clothes. She had never once had a hair cut. Loose, her hair hung down to her ankles. There were often various objects in her hair. I have pulled out pens and plastic bunny rabbits, a half-smoked joint, a book of matches. She brought vegetarian lunches to school. Cold slabs of tofu and alfalfa sprouts on gummy wheat bread.

"Your parents wouldn't like that, would they?" I said.

Meadow shrugged her shoulders.

"I am not feeling lucky today," Meadow said. "But I think you are. In fact, I know it."

"Which one?" I said to Meadow.

Meadow shrugged her shoulders.

"You are going to win," she said. "I know it."

I scratched the first one. Instant winner, it said.

Instant winner. Instant winner. \$5000. Instant winner. "Baby," I said.

Oh, I kissed little Meadow Simms, I hugged her, I danced her around

the class room to the astonishment of the other children. Unfortunately, the principal was in the hallway. He marched in to my classroom and banged his fist on my desk. Back by the hamster cage, Donald Morris had swallowed a checker. His face was turning purple.

"Order," the principal yelled.

I adored Meadow Simms, but the principal forbade me to defend her from the other children. The decree came in a long speech that contained the words law suit. Law suit, lawsuit. Liability. When Tammy Parker pushed Meadow into a sandbox, I didn't think. I threw sand into Tammy's eyes. Oh, did Tammy scream.

According to Meadow, Tammy had stolen the class hamster. She saw it in a dream. "Did not," Tammy said, tears streaming down her cheeks. I carried the girl to the infirmary, threatening all the while to call her parents if she did not return the hamster. Meadow loved that little hamster. All the children did.

"Unacceptable," the principal said.

He put me on probation. I thought he was going to fire me. I deserved to be fired, assaulting a child, but it was probation. Meadow Simms stared at me with worshipful eyes. I found this gratifying, of course.

The end came when Bobbie Blue creamed her over the head with his backpack. I wrote Meadow a pass to the infirmary. There was a cot already set up for her. It hurt my heart. The bell rang. The children shuffled out. "My father is bigger than your father," I whispered to Bobbie as he passed my desk, but the fear in his eyes didn't help.

Next door to the McDonalds, there was a bar called Sammy's, and during my lunch break I went there for a fortifying vodka tonic. I

was on my third drink when I noticed the principal sitting in a back booth with the art teacher, Mrs. Jackson-Shabazz. They were sipping martinis.

"You are fired," the principal said. "Pack up your desk and go. Drinking on the job. You're out."

Mrs. Jackson-Shabazz giggled.

Meadow Simms lay asleep on her cot with a cold washcloth on her forehead. I stared at her from outside the infirmary door until Nurse Hathaway saw me.

"I have instructions to keep you away from this child," Nurse Hathaway said.

Why didn't Meadow's hippie parents protect her from misfortune? Why didn't they give her a hair cut? Sometimes, climbing the front steps to the school, Meadow tripped on her hair. I wanted to put little Meadow Simms in my pocket, take her home and keep her safe. I was fired but my car was running better than ever. I had paid for its repairs with my Instant-win money. Meadow Simms could see evil and goodness, and I was fired, so I went right back into the infirmary, and pushed the mean, rule abiding nurse into the supply cabinet, and locked the door. I sat down next to Meadow Simms, and squeezed her tiny hands. I removed three twigs and a section of newspaper from her tangled hair.

"Would you like to get a hair cut?" I said. "Can I take you for a drive, a cheeseburger, a hair cut?"

Little Meadow Simms blinked.

"You," she said. "You are the best teacher I ever had."

