Tad

Penelope Brown*
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Abstract

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"...Margaret, you are far too lenient with Theodore! If you had backed me when this nonsense first began, the problem would never have developed! I don't care what Dr. Johnston says, I tell you it is NOT normal behavior for a boy of eight to play with imaginary people—you and your Dr. Johnston, telling me that the behavior would pass with time if we were patient and understanding; well, you have been patient and understanding, Margaret, and where has it gotten us?—deeper and deeper into this nonsense, that's where! And I have come to my limit; I am putting an end..."
The boy turned back to his solitary play. "Now, Tad, you be the little boy and I'll be the daddy. But remember that you must always call me Father. And remember that you must mind, and you must always act like a big boy. No, no! you must not hit the daddy or he will be very angry! Oh, Tad, now look! His arm is broken, he can't hurt you. Get him!!" Viciously the child threw the boy-hanger upon the father-hanger and clanged them together.

"Theodore! What do you think you're doing? His father's chill words of fury brought the clangor abruptly to a halt as the child's head flew up and he saw his father blocking the doorway. Quickly he stood and tried to hide the hangers behind his back.

"Nothing, Father." His voice was colorless. "I was only playing with Tad."

"Tad!" The man's voice was sharp and the boy flinched, but showed no other emotion. "Theodore, I will tell you once more. There is no Tad. Repeat after me: 'There is no Tad.'"

The boy stared hard at the green floor and scuffed one shoe against the other to break the menacing silence.

"Theodore!" The tone demanded some reply.

"Yes, Father?"

"Theodore, give me whatever you're hiding." Unwillingly the boy held out his dolls and his father snatched them. "Now, to your room until supper. We will discuss this later."

"Yes, Father." The boy's slow steps took him in a half-circle around his father; then he broke into a run that carried him up the stairs. His father's voice came after him.

"And how many times have I told you to move that ball from the top step—I might slip and fall on the damned thing!"

The boy hardly broke from his run to scoop up the ball. He ran into his room and, with his hand on the knob, pushed the door hard until it was almost closed, then suddenly stopped it just before the slam and eased the door silently shut. He leaned against the door, listening to his father roaring downstairs. Then he crept across the room and sat cross-legged on the bed, crooning over the ball that he held cradled in his lap. "Tad, you shouldn't leave balls where the
daddy might not see them—he might be killed. But this time the daddy was saved, he saw the ball, the ball was too big. Yes, he might not notice the smaller balls—but you shouldn't think things like that, Tad! Dr. Johnston tells me that you're bad to think things like that. . . .” The boy sat and rocked his ball until his mother's voice interrupted him.

“Theodore,” she called faintly from downstairs, “it's suppertime, sweetheart.” Leaving his ball in the center of the bed, he went downstairs and stood by his place at the table.

His father greeted him. “Well, Theodore, are you ready for supper?”

For a moment something showed on the child's face. Then it was gone. “No, Father, I don't want any supper tonight.”

“Theodore!” Then more clamly, “You will eat your supper.”

“No, Father, I don't like the peaches.”

The man's mouth became thin and tight, his eyes cold with anger. “Theodore, Dr. Johnston told me to be tolerant, to allow you to express yourself. I have done so and failed. Now you will be punished. You will go to bed without your supper.” The man's wife tried feebly to protest but was silenced by a threatening stare.

The boy turned away, hiding his smile. His parents were silent as he bumped up the steps and into his room and let the door swing shut behind him. He took his ball from the bed and placed it carefully in the wastebasket. Then he sat on his bed with the new toy and played. . . .

At last his parents went to bed and the house was quiet. Silently the boy opened his door and carried his new toys out to the top of the steps. Gently he rolled them around and whispered to himself, “Isn't this fun, Tad? Just look at all the shiny balls—many little balls are better than one big ball, aren't they, Tad?” The child pushed one of the balls slowly down onto the second step. “Tad, look at the pretty marble on the step. But it looks lonely. Give the marble some company, Tad.” Lovingly the boy arranged all the marbles on the second step.
Then he walked softly down the rest of the stairs. At the bottom he began humming and tramped noisily into the kitchen. At the refrigerator he opened the door and pulled the dish of peaches out and down onto the floor with a crash. “Look, Tad, you broke it.” The child backed down the hall. “The daddy will be down soon to punish you.” At the bottom of the stairs the boy turned and looked up, waiting. Light slashed thinly into the dark on the stairs as the boy’s father came charging out of his room and started down the steps. The child closed his eyes but he could hear the astonished cry followed by the dull thumps. Then the only sound was the pinging of the marbles against the woodwork.

The boy opened his eyes. He stood for a moment and looked at the still form of his father and at the horrified, dead eyes that stared up at him. “Daddy, you shouldn’t have stopped for your slippers. Tad says that with bare feet you might only have broken a leg.” Then he looked to the top step at the stunned woman clutching at the bannister. “Mother, will you please fix us a snack? We’re hungry. And, Mother ••• no more peaches. Tad doesn’t like them either.”

A Face Like an Angel

Earl Keyser

HARRY Coles, Jonesboro High School geometry teacher, sat on his bed, vainly trying to undo a knot in one lace of his black dress shoes. When he had begun dressing, he was whistling Seventy-six Trombones, now he whistled “The March to the Scaffold” from Berlioz’ Symphonie Fantastique. His moisture-laden brow contracted as he labored in vain, the knot seeming almost Gordian.

Suddenly a brow plop sounded and, much to Harry’s amazement, a nine foot square of his ceiling disappeared or,