

For Katelyn and her Mommy, who are both good and lovable

My name is Katelyn. I am four. Today Mommy and I went shopping. Mommy said I could choose a treat because I hate boring old shopping. I was so happy and excited.

Mommy said, "Katelyn, hurry up. Make up your mind and choose what you want."

I started feeling a scary feeling inside, like lots of ants crawling in my tummy. I started going in circles from one thing to the other.

Mommy's voice is getting mad, "Choose now. I have to get home to cook supper."

I picked up the rainbow markers. I would make a beautiful picture. Then a voice in my head said, "What about the puzzle? You could make a puppy and have friend." I picked up the puzzle and voice inside my head said, "what about this baby doll" You could take care of her." I picked up the doll and voice inside my head said, "What about the pony? You could ride away to wonderful places." I picked up the pony, and a voice inside my head said, "What about the blocks? You could build a castle and be a princess."

Maybe the answer was to get more than one thing. I said to Mommy, "Can I have more than one thing?"

"I said I could have one thing!" Mommy's voice was getting like a pot scourer. I was so scared.

"You took too long and I am leaving," said mommy, with voice that sounded like a cold stone.

Suddenly the jello in my tummy stopped and I yelled, "NOOOOOO! I won't come." I stood still and gave her a cold, stone look too!

Mommy got really mad. I could tell because all the lines in her face turned down instead of up. She got an ugly line between her eyes that looked black and blank.

"You are being a very naughty little girl," she said, "and you will come home with me right now. I tried to give you something nice and then you act so stubborn and selfish. You can't have everything you want."

She grabbed my arm and yanked me out of the store. I wriggled and squirmed like a worm. I felt that little, too. People stopped and looked at us. I wanted to die.

I felt like I had ants and jello in my tummy and I felt like a big crab was clawing at my throat. I started crying, "I'll choose, mommy, I'll choose, I promise, I'll choose."

“Too late! We are going home this minute,” she said in a voice that sounded like an icicle. It felt as if it would go right through my heart and get stuck there.

I knew nothing would work. I sat in the car and felt green, slimy, yuk, all over me. It made me want to cry. But I said to myself, “You are not going to cry. You are a bad girl. And I am not going to let that mother see me cry. She doesn’t even care.”

We got home and I threw my coat and mittens on the floor. “She doesn’t care about me and I don’t care about her.” I thought to myself.

“If you want to behave that way, young lady, you can go straight into time-out. I’ve just about had enough,” she yelled.

I ran to my room. I was really mad and I felt bad and sad all at the same time.

But I have a secret in time-out that Mommy doesn’t know about. She thinks she can be mean to me but instead something else happens that is magic.

The magic that my mommy doesn’t know, is that I have an angel who lives in my heart. When I feel mad or sad, or bad she stands close to me with her wings wrapped around me.

So today I said to my angel, “Am I a naughty, selfish little girl?”

My angel knelt down in front of me and folded her big, soft wings around me and looked into my eyes. Her eyes are like pools of deep blue, still water. When I look into her eyes I can see myself.

“No, you are not a naughty or selfish little girl,” That is not true. Then she added, “You know that yukky feeling you have inside your tummy? That is a feeling called shame. You get it when YOU believe that you are bad or naughty or selfish or unlovable. So it is important for you to know that you are not bad, or naughty or selfish or unlovable, even when other people say things like that to you.”

The ants and jello and slime in my tummy stopped moving around.

The icicle in my heart was melting and turning into tears. I kept looking into her eyes and said, “Am I a stubborn and greedy little girl?”

“No,” she said, “You are a brave little girl that tried hard to choose quickly. It’s a difficult problem to choose when you can see what you could do with lots of things. It was a smart idea to ask mommy if you could have more than one thing. I know that with those things you could have become a princess who lived in a castle. You could have made beautiful pictures. You could have rode your pony to exciting places and made a puppy to go with you.” (My angel knows me so well)

"So why couldn't I choose?" I asked.

"Well," she said, "you know that feeling like mosquitoes in your head? It's caused by a voice that says, "What about this?" and "This is nice," and, "Maybe you want this more than that?" That voice caused you to feel a feeling called muddled and confused and scared you might make the "wrong" choice.

"So what must I do about that voice?" I asked.

"Next time you hear it, " she said softly, like rose petals floating through the air, "You can answer it and say, "You are right. There are so many lovely things, It is confusing. Today I will choose one thing and then next time I can choose another thing." When you do that the feeling will go away. Instead of having mosquitoes in your head, you can have butterflies that rest for a long time on flowers ,in the hot, summer sun, sucking all the sweetness out of them before the flutter to the next one."

"I can do that!" I said.

I thought a bit more. It is easy to think with my angel. She waits and makes a warm, light around me that glows like the fire in our fireplace at the cabin on snowy nights.

"Am I bad for saying I wouldn't go home?"

"No, you are not bad," sand she stroked my cheek gently with her feathery wing.

"So why did I say that?"

"I think you felt sad and disappointend when mommy said you couldn't have anything. Sometimes when we feel sad and disappointed and yukky in our tummy - remember, that is the feeling of shame I told you about, we get mad. And sometimes when we get mad we don't want to do what someone else says.

"Are those feelings bad?"

"OH no! Our feelings help us. They let us know what is happening inside us. If we know what we are feeling we have lots of choices about what to do. One thing you can choose to do is tell your Mommy what you are feeling."

Suddenly I felt mad again when I thought about my Moomy dragging me by the arm.

"Do I have a mean, bad Mommy?" I asked.

"No, you do not have a mean, bad mommy," and her voice sounded like the soft fur of my teddy bear.

"So why was she mean to me?" "Was it my fault she did that?" I asked.

"I think," she said, "that your Mommy had lots of feelings at the same time. She was feeling guilty that you had to go with to do boring old shopping. She was feeling worried about getting supper cooked and sad that she could only buy you one thing. Grown-ups get to feel like yuk too. I think she didn't listen to how she was feeling. When she didn't listen to her feelings, she forgot that she had lots of choices about how to behave and that is not your fault!"

"Oh no," I said, "am I bad for not thinking about her feelings?"

"No, no, no," she laughed like wind chimes tinkling in the spring breeze. "Your mommy is in charge of her feelings and you are in charge of your feelings. You only have to tell Mommy about your feelings and she must remember to tell you about her feelings. Then you can both see all the different things you can do to solve a problem."

"Hmmmmmm...." I said, "so why does my Mommy let me have only one thing?"

"Well," she said, "it's like this. What would happen if you ate everything you ever wanted at one time? What would happen if you decided to eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and then chocolate chip ice cream and then cookies and then noodles and then strawberries and then pepperoni pizza and then...?"

"Yuk," I shouted. I would get sick. I would blow up!"

She laughed. "Yes, you are right. It would be far better to have a plan to eat all those things, one at a time at different times, don't you think?"

Suddenly I laughed. "So sometimes it's hard to have lots of choices and sometimes it makes it easier to have lots of choices?"

"That's right," she said "you are a good thinker."

Just then my Mommy came into the room. She knelt down by me.

"Katelyn, I'm sorry I pulled you by the arm and said you were naughty. I behaved badly I can imagine you felt really yukky and sad when I did that, because you thought it meant you were bad? I would like to do it over and tell you my feelings. I was feeling worried about cooking supper on time and I feel sad when I can't buy you lots of toys. You are not naughty or selfish or bad. May I give you a hug and tell you I love you?"

I felt a feeling like hot chocolate in my tummy. I hugged my Mommy and said happily, "I have a plan for the next time we go to the store. I can choose one thing. I can tell you how I am feeling. I can ask you if I can choose another thing the next time." She looked at me kind of funny and then laughed and hugged me again.

"I have a plan too. I can go when I am not in a hurry. I can tell you my feelings. I can listen to why you want things. I can tell you that you can have another thing the next time we go shopping."

I am so glad we both have a plan," she said with a voice like the soft velvet of my red Christmas dress.

Sometimes, I think the angel in my heart is really my Mommy.

In reading this story, see if you can extract the principles of development and the dynamics of dysfunction and of health. Can you write your own story with a fairy Godmother, good fairy, angel figure that is the inner Great Mother of Love and Wisdom. Can you see the difference between anxious and authoritative parenting and the result, and authoritative parent and the result?

One causes disconnection and conflict, the other connection and intimacy.