

Tuesday, October 5  
36 days to Parent Night

Mrs. Hatcher sits in the principal's office, her hands in her lap, by all appearances attentive and respectful. She has been forced to sit through these lectures before, and she never accords them much weight. She allows Miss O'Donnell to say what she needs to, and then tells her, in all earnestness, "I'll take care of it."

Later, at home, Mrs. Hatcher will wheedle the full story out of Lyle, and lay down the law regarding future behavior. As a child, she spent more than her own share of time at the principal's, which unquestionably taints her perspective.

But just being Lyle's mother also causes her to discount these meetings. Miss O'Donnell's presumptions about Mrs. Hatcher's son, in the frankest of terms, annoy her. She knows more about Lyle's behavior than anyone else ever can or will. Granted, he requires more maintenance than her two other children, but Mrs. Hatcher knows there is nothing inherently wrong with Lyle. She simply must see to his needs: a carefully controlled diet, liberal quantities of discipline, frequent and aggressive exercise, and a sufficient amount of sleep. When it comes to the lecture on all she's *not* doing, Mrs. Hatcher politely pretends to listen.

"What you need to be aware of is things have reached a critical juncture," Miss O'Donnell begins. "You already know about Lyle's disorderly conduct in dance class, making fun of Mrs. Maxfield, and his disobedience running on the sidewalk and knocking me to the ground."

Miss O'Donnell sits erect and calm. She takes an unhurried breath, and continues. "We had his reckless behavior on the playground with the black widow spider, the pocketknife incident in the library—which traumatized several of the other students, believe me; I received a number of calls from

parents. And, as I reported to you on the phone last week, I saw him push David Dahlke's wheelchair into a group of children on the playground, actually hitting one of them with the chair. And, of course, there was the incident with Sandra Murphy's dress."

The phrase "Sandra Murphy's dress" pierces Mrs. Hatcher's inattentive fog, and instantly she finds herself concerned.

"I did not hear about the dress."

Miss O'Donnell shakes her head, dismissing it.

"We have far more important things to discuss this morning. Lyle and David had a Science Day pass to work in the field below Five Mile, and were to report back here by two o'clock which they failed to do. Officer Jenkins came by instead, and informed me there was an incident involving a BB gun reported to the police department, and he had to locate the boys and take them home. I assume you're already aware of all this."

"Boys will be boys," Mrs. Hatcher thinks to herself, nodding for Miss O'Donnell's benefit.

"The point I want to make today is, I strongly suggest you call your family doctor."

Mrs. Hatcher startles. "Why? Is Lyle sick?"

Miss O'Donnell looks Mrs. Hatcher in the eye. "I want you to ask your doctor about a pill that is available."

A sick feeling creeps into the pit of Mrs. Hatcher's stomach.

"A pill?" she manages.

"Yes," Miss O'Donnell continues. "I've spoken with several doctors about this. They've been using it in other schools around the country, and it's been a very successful way to mainstream some of these children. Very successful."

Miss O'Donnell pauses.

Mrs. Hatcher chooses to remain silent.