

## Pedestrian Crossing

Come on, Teddy! Hurry, or mummy will be mad! She's *always* nagging about us being late for this, late for that. I keep telling her that it's not your fault because you like to look all pretty in your different dresses before we go out, but I don't think she understands. Which is really weird, right Teddy? Remember the time she went out in that real pretty, sparkly black dress that's always in the back of her closet? And she was late? She said that she doesn't remember, but I think she does. I think she was scared that Daddy was going to nag at her for being late because he was still at work and didn't know about her being late. But we know better, right?

Anyway. Hop in the car. We're going on a new adventure! Too bad Miss Rainbow couldn't come with us. She always loves to look out the window and count all the lampposts, but it's a shame she can only count to twenty. She looks a bit silly, always starting all over again once she says 'twenty'. But that's why we're going on this adventure – Daddy says I can learn a lot more numbers, so I can teach her later too. Daddy is smart like that. He's the one who taught her how to count, remember? But I still don't get why you didn't learn too. You were right there next to her. But maybe it is because I was cuddling you too hard again. I'm sorry. But you always say that you like your stitches and show them off to everyone else, 'cause they're red, which matches your little scarf.

What?

Okay, okay – I'm sorry for trying to pull the scarf off you. I already said sorry a gazillion times already. I didn't know you liked your scarf so much that you glued it on to yourself.

“So, Isabelle, are you excited? It's your first day!”

Hey, Daddy asked us a question! What's that? He only asked me? Well, I'm sure he means you too but he just forgot. You are smaller than me, you know.

“I'm okay, and Teddy says he's a little nervous. He always gets nervous during adventures, but I think he'll be okay too.”

“Oh! Well, tell Teddy that he's a big bear by now, and shouldn't be scared. And tell him to take care of you when Mummy and I leave.”

“What are you talking about, Daddy? We take care of each other, so don't worry so much. And Tiffany will be there too, with Hershey.”

Ah, isn't Daddy so forgetful? He should know by now that we're just fine together, right? But mum says it's because he's getting old and fat. Heehee. I think she just likes the sound of the words 'old and fat' because I keep hearing her say it, even though it's not true. Daddy's not that old, right? Not as old as grandpa – he doesn't have grandpa's wrinkles or white hair or scratchy hands or crackling voice. And he's not fat, either. I mean, Uncle Peter who always visits us is twice the size of Daddy! I think it's because he eats too many candies and snacks when he comes over, and he keeps giving me candies that he had 'specially bought' for me and you but the candy is the same as what mum and dad give him, and he thinks that we don't notice. Remember the time we played that game with him for a whole month? Of course you do; you're the one who thought up of it! Wasn't it funny seeing him give us the same candy every time he visited us

during that month? He kept saying how pretty the wrapping was. He must be pretty forgetful not to recognise the same wrapping that we specially picked out and kept putting it back into the candy jar every time he ‘gave’ it to us. It was funny that Mummy and Daddy didn’t know either. They never talked about it anyway.

Hm? What kind adventure are we going on? Oh yeah! Sorry. I forgot to tell you. Well, Daddy says it’s a place where people teach kids like me, and we can learn to do fun things like count more numbers, read cool books and become smart like Daddy is, but I think that it will be a long, long time before I can be as smart as Daddy. Or Mummy. Mummy is smart too, but not as smart as Daddy is. But she cooks a lot better, and can heal you when I squish you too hard or something falls out. So they’re about the same, I guess. Daddy also says that we can see other people like us too, so we can make more friends like Tiffany. Oh, and Hershey too of course. You love Hershey don’t you? You guys will be the best of bestest friends till you get old like grandpa and grandma! But I don’t know what old bears look like...oh well. Maybe Daddy will know. He knows almost everything. Except some things Mummy does, like stay out late when he’s still at work. Maybe he doesn’t know Mummy very well because the time I asked him whether he knew everything in this whole wide world, he grinned and said yes, but then looked at Mummy and added a ‘maybe’. Maybe I should tell him to do the daisy thing Mummy always does in the garden where she picks one petal off at a time and says ‘yes’ and ‘no’.

I’m bored, Teddy. Do you think we’re there yet? Daddy says it shouldn’t take too long, but he might be late for work and his boss will nag at him for being late. Hm. What game should we play, Teddy?

Oh? *That* game? But I don’t know how much time we have until we get there...and it only works if Mummy or Daddy notice. Hm. But it sure is a fun game to play...’specially when they look really surprised when I go ‘boo!’ and laugh. Heehee! Okay. ‘Fake sleep’ game starts NOW!

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Have they noticed yet, Teddy? I want to peek but...

“She’s asleep.”

Yes! That didn’t take too long.

“Oh.”

“...”

They’re not saying a lot, Teddy. It’s the best when they’ve just said something about me and I ‘wake up’, but lately, they haven’t been talking about anything a lot. Are you sure this game will still work out?

“I hope she isn’t playing her little ‘game’. Remember the last time we were caught talking about her silly way of tucking in all her soft toys before going to bed? That was embarrassing.”

Ohh! They remember! Uh-oh, Teddy...do you think they’ll realise that I’m not really asleep??

“Wait; let me check.”

Eep! I hope Mummy’s not going to tickle me or something. Help me, Teddy!

“...I think she’s asleep. Isabelle? Helloo? The ice cream truck is coming...”

What! Where?? No wait – it must be a trick! Right, Teddy? There’s no ice cream truck! Right?

“She’s asleep. Nothing can keep that girl from the ice cream truck.”

Phew. So it *was* a trick. Mummy’s getting smarter...

“First day of school. That certainly brings back memories. And finally, I can get some rest at home. I’m not complaining, but it can be tiring to watch that she doesn’t get her soft toys all dirty and drag them all over the house. I still remember that awful day...honestly, you don’t know how easy you have it, just sitting in front of a computer all day and signing papers.”

“Hey...working isn’t a breeze either you know. Besides, she’s a growing girl. She’ll learn how to take care of herself soon enough, so we should enjoy looking after her while we can.”

Hey, I can take care of myself now! Right, Teddy? And I didn’t mean to make the house messy that day. You guys just got too excited looking for cute snails.

Huh? Why is Mummy laughing?

“Take care of herself? That day seems really, really far away...really, I think you baby her too much. And I don’t think you should encourage her in her silly game. I mean, a 5-year-old still talking to her soft toys as if they were alive? Talk about disconcerting! No one’s child does that anymore! Well, except Kate’s.”

“You just don’t have an imagination, Mara.”

Daddy sounds annoyed. I hope they don’t fight again. The game doesn’t work if they end up fighting.

“Hey, you can’t say that. I’m just saying she’s too old to be doing these things, okay? I want the best for her...what if everyone teases her in her new school? Sure, they say they’re strict with bullying, but no one said anything about teasing.”

“You worry too much. She’s adorable that way; no one teases an adorable girl. Besides, she has Tiffany to play with even if all the other kids don’t play with their imagination.”

This time, it’s Daddy’s turn to laugh.

“Like mother, like daughter.”

“Hey, just because Kate and I are best friends, doesn’t mean we believe our toys speak to us.”

“What, so tea leaves do?”

“That’s not even funny.”

Uh-oh, Mummy’s getting that scary tone in her voice again, like when she tells us off. I’m glad it’s not us she’s mad at. Can you see her expression, Teddy?

“Stop keeping that stiff upper lip, Mara. What are you so annoyed about nowadays anyway? It’s like you’ve been under this perpetual dark cloud that’s been turning on and off these past few months. Is something wrong?”

“No. Nothing’s wrong. What makes you think that?”

Daddy’s so smart that I have no idea what he’s talking about. The weather, maybe? Teddy, what do you think?

“I don’t know. But despite that, you seem to be having more fun lately.”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Well, I happened to bump into Melanie last week and she told me how easy it is to take care of our girl; that she can easily play by herself. Are you sure it’s safe to leave Isabelle alone so often? I mean, Melanie is really dependable and she’s a good girl, but won’t Isabelle miss us a lot then? It’s like the ‘absent parents’ scenario...”

“Oh that? It was just for the last few months, because Kate’s been dragging me around a lot to see different shops and try different restaurants. And the occasional party.”

“Really? But why don’t you let me take you and Isabelle out once in a while? I may be busy a lot but it doesn’t mean I can’t take time off to spend with you two. Come on, what do you say? Dinner this Friday? We can celebrate Isabelle having her first day in school...”

“Oh...I think I’m busy this Friday. I’ve promised Kate that I’d meet up with her. But one day, sure. Why not?”

“Great! It’s a deal, then!”

That’s strange. Even though Daddy sounds happy, he doesn’t have smile-lines on his eyes. Can you see them, Teddy? I thought not. Maybe he forgot again.

“Isabelle? You’re awake! And just in time, too – we’re here!”

Oopsy. I forgot about the game already. Teddyyyy, why didn’t you remind me?? Oh well. It’s too late now.

Wow. That’s a big school, Teddy. Really, really big. Have you ever seen anything so big? I wonder where Tiffany and Hershey are...

Are you still nervous, Teddy? Come here. It’s okay to be scared once in a while. A big hug, and it will fly away like the birdies in the air. Yes, just like birds...