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Submission for Arleen “Cookie” Faust Prize for Humor Writing

Arrested Development

There is nothing quite like the walk of shame. All parties in the vicinity glare as I walk down the corridor and back into the reception area. The parents grimace and the little kids just look confused when I walk up to the wicker basket and search for a blue raspberry lollipop. I have absolutely no problem giving the little kids a dirty look back. It’s a look that I would like to think conveys to them, “I’ve been going here since before your parents stopped playing spin the bottle in the basement of their friends’ houses. I am six of you.” We both stand at the basket, daring each other to go first. They splay their chubby phalanges over all of the wrapped lollies and stare me straight in the eye and down into my soul, and they do not like what they see. We keep our hands submerged in the basket in a Mexican standoff. They blow a snot bubble, never breaking eye contact and their judgment sears through me. They might not be able to hold scissors yet, but at least they aren’t twenty years old and still going to a doctor who has Winnie the Pooh wallpaper.

When Doris ushers me in we act like we are strangers, though in fact she and I are very well acquainted, as I am a medical marvel. When I was five I had a rare eye disease called Orbital Cellulitis, that about three percent of the population is afflicted with each year. Whenever I have to go over my medical history with my doctors and they see that little factoid on their sheet, they look up at me mystified as if they have seen a unicorn. They had heard the rumors, but never did they actually think they’d get to see it in person. I have had five endoscopies. When I was twelve I had my adenoids removed. I’m not even sure what adenoids are or precisely where the adenoids are located in the human body, but I’m pretty sure the way the doctors got
them out of me was similar to the Ancient Egyptian method of removing brains before burying a body; wherein they would take a long hook and stick it up your nose and pull everything out. I once had to drink a vat of barium. I have had about fifty-two CAT scans of absolutely every body part. I think my favorite procedure was the colonoscopy. Doris has seen me through sickness and through intermittent bursts of health and I would like to think that we have a special bond; Doris likes to act otherwise.

My favorite interaction with Doris was when I had Mono. When regular teenagers get Mononucleosis, it’s not a big deal. They sleep all day, they complain about how tired they are, they miss some school, they ask their friends not to punch them in their enlarged spleen, they make out with one another and pass it on, etc., etc. My teachers have always described me as a dedicated and rigorous individual, and I’d like to think that I carry that spirit into all that I do, including my illnesses. So, when I got Mono, I really got Mono. One of the litany of side effects to the disease was that one day my heart decided that it was going to pound one hundred beats faster than it was supposed to. My mom rushed me to the doctor, wherein Doris had to administer an X-Ray to my chest. We waited in the miniscule examining room, my mom clutching my hand, and I had convinced myself that it was time to write my will and testament. My mom could keep my Disney pin collection, but she was in no way allowed to read my diary. Doris marched into the room, her head tilted down at the file in her hands. My mom squeezed my hand and I stared unblinking at Doris waiting for her to tell us what was happening. Doris looked up from the X-ray and said, “Is there something that you are not telling us?” I looked at my mom in confusion. They must have found a tumor, or the alien from the movie Alien. Doris then continued on to say, “You did not tell us that you only have one breast.” Well Doris, that is because I do not in fact have one breast, I have two. Or at least I had two the last time I checked.
Doris looked unsatisfied with my answer so she asked me to pull up my shirt. She saw all she needed to see and said, “Never mind.” Doris and I have not discussed this moment again.

Doris tells me to take off my shoes and follow her into the hall to stand on the scale that has an Elmo sticker on it. I tell Doris that I am perfectly satisfied with my weight, but if it’s so important to her that she know, she can look, but she does not have to tell me. I think Doris sometimes pretends like she’s from some country that I would describe as Russia-adjacent, because it’s at this point that she acts like she has no idea what I’m talking about and she picks up a slight accent. Doris haphazardly fiddles with the scale, sliding the metal arrow back and forth, until it’s not wobbling too much, but is not perfectly still. I try to tell Doris that I think that it’s incorrect because she didn’t find the right place where the scale balances but she shrugs her shoulders and tells me my weight. I tell myself it’s only because my mom made me an appointment in the late afternoon. Had the appointment been one bagel, seven Twizzlers, three chocolate kisses, a vanilla latte, a celery stick, and two slices of pizza ago, the scale would have been much more accurate. Doris takes me back to the room and she tells me that Dr. Larsen will be in a moment. I think it’s sweet that Doris still keeps up this charade, as we both know that Dr. Larsen will most certainly not be there in a moment. I want to ask Doris if she notices that my mom has not joined me today, that I will be getting a shot all by myself, but Doris does not give me the time to do so.

I lay down on the examining table, pretending that it’s a chaise lounge chair in a therapist’s office. I stare up at the fluorescent ceiling lights until I see color spots. The room has one of those mini scales for infants and I wonder if I have time to try and see if I can fit myself onto it before Dr. Larsen comes in, and I decide that it’s best if I stay seated. I blow through most of the picture books on the windowsill, and am onto one about a duck named Stew who needs to
wear a life preserver whenever he goes in the water. Stew must do this because his duckling brother drowned and died in the water. Just as I’m about to find out what happens at the end of the story, if Stew must forever live life on the pond in a life preserver, Dr. Larsen enters. We do the normal exchange. She asks me how school is going, what year I am, what I plan on doing with my life, and I become acutely aware of the fact that I’m sitting on sanitary paper with the Alphabet on it. Dr. Larsen warns me about the dangers of drugs and unprotected sex and I assure her that I am the most boring college student that has ever existed. She gives me a wink, to let me know that she’s not like a regular doctor; she’s a cool doctor. She tells me that if there is anything I feel uncomfortable discussing with my mom, that I can tell her instead. I assure Dr. Larsen again that she does not in fact have anything to worry about, as I am to college students what Rose Nylund was to the rest of the Golden Girls, and she gives me the look of “Oh Mia, you think I don’t know what teenagers are like? I have seen it all!”

Dr. Larsen knows me quite well at this point, since I was basically a zygote when she first met me. She is well aware of my charades, but she still placates me until we’ve exhausted all of our options for small talk. I’ve gone through all of my questions, “Well why exactly is it called a ‘depressor’?” and “Have you ever had a set of conjoined twins as patients? Do they have to make separate appointments?” Dr. Larsen tells me she’ll be right back, and I know what’s coming. She Waltzes back into the room with the little blue tray and tells me that I will be receiving my Hepatitis vaccination, “Just in case,” she says. I would prefer that she limit my vaccinations to the absolutely necessary, but Dr. Larsen is a very practical woman. As she preps my arm, and Dr. Larsen at this point knows that I require an ice pack for numbing before any needle contact, I squeeze my eyes shut and ask myself why I still see my pediatrician. I tell myself that after this visit I will go find myself a doctor for adults, as I am a mature woman! I did
not need my mom to come with me to get my shot today. But then I realize that they don’t let you choose between Star Wars or Barbie themed Band-aids at an adult doctor’s office; they only have the brown cloth ones.