

Promises To Keep

She promised. She *would* come. My Mommy. All warm.

I would feel her arms around me, lean my head on her breast.

She would pull down the hateful bars of the crib.

“Too big for a crib!” Me as loud as I could, but hardly making a sound.

Why can't I speak? Stamping my bare feet on the white sheet.

“Don't pull up the sides!” My voice cracking. “Please!”

But the chunky nurse pulls them up. Bad. Bad.

As though I don't count at all.

Frantic now. Trapped. Ugly room. Blank walls. Snotty green.

Three beds in the room.

And me. I'm the only one in a crib.

It's not fair.

Grown-ups at two of the other beds. Quiet talking.

Kids in the two beds get presents. Can't see what.

Then everybody leaves. Kisses. Waves. Other children quiet.

Ice cream for the curly blond head. Nothing for me.

Hungry. Stomach squawking.

Nasty nurse hands me a bowl and hisses, "Here, suck these ice chips.
Don't chew them." Yuk. Throat hurts. Can't swallow.

Where is she? "How many times have I told you?

She won't come," says Miss Superior.

"You have to rest, and anyway, visiting hours are over."

My heart beating so loud now, everyone must hear it.

No. No. It can't be. She will. She will. She promised!

Tonsils. She told me everything in advance.

How they would come and ask if I wanted to go for a ride,

but it wouldn't be a ride, it would be to something called the Operating Room.

And they would put something on my face and I wasn't to be afraid,

I should breathe deeply. It was something called Ether.

And then I would sleep and they would take out the tonsils

and then she would come.

And everything happened just as she said it would.

When they asked if I wanted to go for a ride I told them I knew it wasn't for a ride,
but was to the Operating Room, and they were surprised I knew.

Me so proud. Helping them lift me onto the long table. So grown up.

Then lying down, them making my arms tight under the covers,

and I couldn't move as we whooshed along, bright lights everywhere,

and a calming voice saying other make believe things,
but I said I knew it would be Ether.

“How do you know that?”

“My Mommy told me. She told me everything.”

Then even brighter lights and everyone so busy.

Then the thing on my face and me remembering to take deep breaths
and smelling the funny smell. Then nothing until waking up and the crib.

Lights out now. *I won't cry.* Then wet on my face. Can't help it. Crying now.
Face in the pillow so no one will hear. Dark. Small. Nurse looks in and laughs.

But wait. There! There! I hear her heels clicking on the floor outside, hurrying.

Her heels. I know it's her. It's got to be her.

Then, framed in the light of the doorway: She's here! She's here!

Her head surrounded by the light outside the door.

Her peering into the room, looking for me. *I'm here! Over here!*

And she's at the crib, lowering the sides. Her arms around me. My Mommy.

Her sweet perfume, her soft murmur. Her voice quiet, singing our lullaby.

“Lu la lu la lu la lu la baby.

Do you want the moon to play with?

Or the stars to run away with?

They'll come if you don't cry."

Her fingers through my hair, her hand moving my hair off my forehead.

Her fingers so cool and gentle.

Kissing me now, on my forehead, on my eyes. *Ahhh.*

"My Baby. My Baby. There, there," she soothes.

"They said it was after visiting hours. They said to come back tomorrow.

They tried to keep me away. But I told them I had to come."

"You see!" Triumph now. Nurse just standing there. Doesn't know what to say.

Visiting hours over? So what. Nestled in Mommy's arms. Laughing now.

"I *knew* she'd come."

"All right, now, sweetheart." Softly. "Time to rest. Lie down now."

"Will you make me *Ooos*?"

"Of course."

Then, helping me to lie down on my tummy,

Mommy smooths her hand over my back first up then down then up again.

She smiles at my compressing what she'll say next.

"Ooooshe lays down," she whispers as she strokes.

"Ooooshe lays down," as she comforts me with her light touch on my back.

“Will you stay with me?”

“I’ll stay until you fall asleep.

Then I’ll come back tomorrow and we’ll find out when I can take you home.

Now sleep, darling. Mommy’s here.”

“You’ll come back tomorrow?” I can feel myself giving in to sleep.

“You promise?”

“Yes, sweetheart. I promise.”

And I know she will come.

Because she promised.

###