

NOTES

Mental illness refers to a wide range of mental health conditions—which include disorders that affect a person’s mood, thinking and behavior. Examples of mental illness include clinical depression, bipolar or anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors. In her heart-warming, yet, at times, humorous short story, Sandy Maranto introduces us to Matthew, a young man, who doesn’t understand the complexities behind his mother’s roller-coaster of emotions. This selection should be performed by a male and be entered in either Prose Interpretation or Dramatic Interpretation. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performers when to turn the pages of the manuscript.

Dad always says, “When it comes to money, the first one to talk—loses.” With that in mind, I try to keep my mouth shut. Concentrating hard to avoid blinking, I stare down Freddie Wilkinson. After releasing a pent-up sigh, Freddie says, “Well, I know if I keep it, I can probably get at least \$200 for it in another ten years.”

“Then keep it,” I say, acting like a tough guy who doesn’t really care, but I do care. I care a lot. In Freddie’s jacket pocket is one of the rarest Pokémon cards known to prepubescent boys and only the coolest of cool girls: the holographic Charizard card. There is no way I am leaving without it. Negotiations over Pokémon cards are often intense, but I am an expert in body language. Freddie’s body is telling me that my victory will be legendary. Throwing both hands up into the air as he shakes his head, Freddie says, “Okay, I tell you what. I’ll sell you this Charizard card for five dollars, but you also have to write my next two book reports.”

“TWO BOOK REPORTS?! ARE YOU CRAZY?!”

Truth is - I would have written six book reports for that card, but it’s vital that I appear incensed by his offer. If I don’t act like I think he’s asking too much for the card, then he’ll know he could have gotten more. He might even back out of the whole deal. When it comes to negotiations, even when you’re the clear winner, it’s important to let the other guy think he’s won.



As a twelve-year-old boy giddy over a prized Pokémon card, I take my time walking home. Every two minutes or so, I find a place to stop, sit and stare at my latest acquisition. Disoriented by my heightened state of elation, I fail to notice Mom when I first walk in the house.

“Where have you been?” she barks.

Unlike most dogs I encounter, Mom’s bite is worse than her bark.

“What do you mean?” I ask, careful to keep my distance from her.

“I think it’s a pretty straightforward question, Matthew. Where have you been?”

Most days, she doesn’t even seem to notice when I’m in the house. Most days, when I got home from school, Mom is sleeping. Not today. Mom walks into my bedroom, picks up my backpack and takes it with her. Less than five minutes later, she storms back in and demands to know, “Where is it?”

“Where’s what?”

“Don’t play dumb with me. Where is the card you stole from Freddie Wilkinson today?”

“The card I *stole*?”

“Yes, dummy, the card you stole!”

“Mom, are you talking about the Charizard card?”

“I don’t know what it’s called, but I know you stole one of Freddie Wilkinson’s Pokémon cards today. I had to listen to his witch of a mother tell me what a screw-up my son is just ten minutes ago. So where is the card, Matthew?”

Recognizing the sincerity in the bewildered, hurt look on my face, Mom suddenly turns from anger and accusations to warmth and concern, “Okay. Let’s just calm down for a minute. Sweetheart, tell me your side of what happened?” Dad and I have a secret nickname for Mom: the Faucet. She pulls me close to her, “Oh, I’m sorry, Matthew.” I sink into her and cry. “Sweetie, just tell me what happened.” Gently stroking my hair, she quietly says, “It’s going to be okay.”

We stay like that for about five minutes. I never speak.



Just as my crying stops, Mom pushes me to the floor, jumps up on my bed and screams, “OH MY GOD! MATTHEW! OH MY GOD!”

“WHAT IS IT?”

Breathing heavily, she whispers, “It’s a spider. Near your dresser.”

Expecting Spiderzilla, I smirk when I see the innocuous looking creature that has literally sent Mom to seek higher ground. “Mom, you’re scared of *that* spider? That’s ridiculous.”

“Matthew, please, just kill it.”

“Really?”

“MATTHEW!!! KILL THE SPIDER!!!”

“All right.”

With one swift downward motion of my foot, Spiderzilla’s baby cousin finds its casket on the bottom of my shoe. I look at Mom. She looks at me. Instantly, we both know how absurd her fear of that particular spider was. We laugh. But we aren’t just laughing. We’re communicating. That laughter is her way of saying how sorry she is for jumping to conclusions and making me feel small. That laughter is my way of telling her that it’s okay—that I forgive her.