

Hello Kitty Shoes

Her silence was worse than the worst scolding. When she said nothing, she had reached that point where words would not be enough to fill the space between us. The silence was more painful. She kept on making dinner, busying herself around the kitchen, swallowing loud enough for me and the neighbors to hear that she would not say a word. She had her back turned to me, and she kept opening and closing cupboards, as if her own pots and pans were playing hide-and-seek with her. She was upset, but it wasn't my fault, not entirely.

"I'm gonna ask Molly's mom for all the girls' numbers, and I'm gonna call them all, I promise."

"Okay," was her flat response.

That curt reply was the first word she had uttered since I got home that afternoon after Molly's birthday party. I had insisted on wearing my brand new Hello Kitty shoes to impress all the girls. Mom had saved all year to buy those. I know she said Santa had brought them, but I was ten years old, and I knew she had bought them herself. I saw the receipt in the trash can, when I opened it quickly to drop a chunk of banana that had been bruised and looked absolutely disgusting. I saw it and I knew she had done what I never thought she would do. Every day she reminds us that we must appreciate what we have, that the four of us need to take care of our stuff, that ever since Dad was gone, things around here had changed.

Then I got Molly's invitation and I couldn't help it. I asked Mom if I could wear those brand new, spanking Hello Kitty shoes. They were the pinkest pink a girl could hope for. Perfect. Mom didn't think it was a good idea; she frowned and puckered her lips, but I was determined. I got to Molly's house and most of the girls were already there. They all looked down at my shoes and gasped. They were covering their mouths with their hands, and I took it all in as if in slow motion, enjoying every second, storing it in my memory to recall in the future if I ever needed to brighten up my day. Molly would accuse me of stealing her thunder, but I didn't care. She wasn't my best friend, Lily was. Molly was only my friend when she needed help because she hadn't done her homework.

Then Molly's mom asked me to take them off. Nobody was allowed to wear shoes inside the house – stupid rule. It's all because she doesn't want to clean the floor.

After the candles and cake, the girls started to leave. Lily's mom was picking me up and she was late. When Lily and I went to look for our shoes, I ran to the front door to reunite with my precious possession, but I nearly fainted. Hello Kitty was nowhere to be seen. Bye bye Kitty. This wasn't right. Who had taken the shoes? My new shoes, Santa's special delivery for being such a good girl, for doing my chores at home, for studying even when I hate Mrs. Albertson because she's ugly and mean and a bad teacher, for sharing my toys with Olivia even if she chews them, for never asking about Dad because I know the memories will make Mom cry.

And now I would disappoint Mom. My eyes moved around the room, but failing to spot my shoes, they became clouded with tears. Molly's mom said it would be alright, but she saw the pain in my eyes, and could not even offer a pretend smile. I was quite a frightful sight.

I put on a strange pair of shoes (which I was sure did not fit Molly anymore), and got on Lily's mom's car. I was in pain; those shoes were not my size. It was my fault, Mom was right, I should not have worn them to the party. She probably knew something would happen to them. Girls are always so jealous. But I couldn't help it. My other option was my blue leather shoes with a flower on top. I think they used to be black, but they had been passed from my cousin to my sister, then back to my cousin's sister, and now I was the lucky girl. That flower was not exactly blossoming anymore. Those shoes had second-hand written all over them. I knew it. Mom knew it. All the girls would know it too.

Then the phone rang, and Mom was forced to speak. She was not exactly making an effort to seem even remotely articulate.

"Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Okay, I see. Uh-huh. See you soon," I could hear from the living room.

She hung up, walked towards me, squeezed me tight, and the pain she was feeling seemed to melt away with every tear than ran down her face. I was ten years old, but I knew. She was sad, she was tired, she was lonely. I felt a piece of Dad in that hug too. Mom didn't say a word. But this time, the silence didn't hurt. Then she wiped her tears and said, "That was Molly's mother. She found the shoes. In Molly's room. She's bringing them here now."