

All Peanut Butter

Taylor Moore

The smell of peanut butter filled the hot shed. Alabama summers have a way of making any smell expand across any room. Jacob and I were playing 'run over the doll.' A game we devised because I loved my Polly Pockets and Jacob loved his monster trucks. The only game we could think of was laying my Polly Pocket down and letting him run her over with the monster truck.

"But, Serena," my mother would later ask, "Don't you love her?"

Of course, I loved her. Of course, I didn't want her to get run over by a monster truck. In fact, I was horrified the first time Jacob even suggested running her over. The only reason I agreed to it was because he said, "Don't worry, I will save her before the truck runs her over." Imagine my surprise when he, in fact, did not save her. I cried and stepped on his big dumb monster truck until it was destroyed. I ran into my babysitter and Jacob's mom, Miss K's, sewing room and cried and cried and she was almost sympathetic until Jacob ran into the room with his broken monster truck.

"Serena, why would you break his truck?" Miss K asks, pinching the spot on her nose in between her eyes.

"He hurt Polly, that's why!" I lift up Polly to show Miss K the scuff on her pretty face.

"Mom, she agreed to it!" Jacob says.

Miss K looks at me and back at her 12-year-old and leans her head back, with one hand on her hip. "Serena, boys are rough. These are the types of games they like to play. I am sorry about Polly, but you really should have known better. I am going to talk to your mother about this, and she is going to have to pay me to buy another truck for Jacob. Do you think she is going to be happy about that?"

I drop my head as tears well in my eyes. My hands are sticky from the peanut butter crackers we were eating, and dirt from the shed. I wipe my eyes smearing a mixture of dust and dirt on my face. I bite my lip hard, mostly because I hate Miss K. Also, because Miss K doesn't like crybabies, especially if that crybaby just broke her son's remote-controlled monster truck.

"No, Miss K, my mom will not be happy to pay that money."

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My response did not seem to be wanted. I think it was one of those questions that are asked, but you don't answer.

"Just get out of here and go play. I will deal with this when your mother picks you up."

I run back out to the shed faster than Jacob, too fast, because I trip over my flip-flop and scrape my knee. I let a tear come out, because it hurts real bad, but also because Miss K never takes my side.

I feel a hand on my back. "Serena, I am awful sorry about Polly. No one could come and save her. I had my hands on the control and... I mean you had to know that no one was gonna help Polly."

Jacob's sandy brown curls are matted with sweat, and his blue eyes have a look of sincerity to them. After all, what was I thinking? How did I think that he would be able to control the monster truck and save Polly?

"It's OK, but maybe we can just play with Polly for a little bit? And maybe we could just not run her over for a little bit?"

"Sounds good. We should go back to the shed and keep playing. We can take turns playing with Polly and cars. Maybe we could even make Polly drive the cars!" Jacob says.

I beam up at him. I had never thought to put Polly in one of Jacob's cars. Maybe I could be like a cool girl race car driver. I nod at him with excitement, and he helps me off the ground and brushes off my knee. He can be so kind when he wants. This is what makes him my best friend. Well, that and the fact that he is the only other kid at daycare most days.

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We spend what seems like hours in the shed talking about how Polly is going to be the best race car driver. Miss K brings us out more peanut butter crackers and apple juice. She seems to be softening towards me again because when she sees how messy my ponytail has gotten, she offers to braid it back for me. I eagerly agree to the braid, because braids are my favorite. Miss K sits behind me pulling my hair back tightly. It hurts, but I wasn't going to say anything, not when we are getting along so well. Miss K really does not like being corrected.

"Jacob, what are you doing now with Polly?" I could feel her glaring over my shoulder at Jacob who was searching around in his "toolbox."

"I am looking for tape, mom, so Polly won't fall out of the car."

"Honestly Serena, I really don't think Jacob meant to run Polly over. Look at how nice he is to her?" Miss K pulls my braid tighter.

"Yeah...he is real nice to her." I feel myself smiling, forgetting how just a little while ago Jacob was so willing to hurt Polly.

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“All done.” Miss K stands up. “OK, Serena, I will come back out here around five to get you inside and get you cleaned up for your mom.”

Miss K walks over and kisses Jacob on the head several times and leaves.

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The shed feels like one of those sweat rooms and is real dirty, but it is Jacob’s new favorite place to play. I don’t mind it, except for how hot and dirty I get. Miss K has been bringing us snacks and juice, though, so I don’t really see a point in playing somewhere else. The smell of peanut butter and dust bunnies mixes in the air. I always leave smelling and my mom always jokes that it is the ‘Serena perfume.’

“Serena, most girls like dolls that look like them. Why do you like Polly so much?” Jacob asks.

I look at Polly. Her blonde hair and pale skin stare back at me. My frizzy brown hair and olive skin don’t match. It is the first time I really realize we don’t look the same.

“Um, I just like her. My mom got her for me, and we always play with her, and it is fun, and I don’t know.” I grab her from Jacob and touch her plastic ponytail trying to see why I like her so much.

“She is a girl though, so, you know...” Jacob yanks her back from me. “So you have the same parts...I guess.”

I blush. “Yeah...maybe. We should put her back in the car and test it out.”

“You do have the same parts, don’t you?”

The look in Jacobs eye’s matches the look he had when he ran Polly over. It looks like someone different is dancing around in his pupils. Someone mean. I look around the shed for an answer to his question to appear.

“Well, yeah.”

“I learned all about that a few weeks ago when school was still goin’.”

“Learned about what?” I wipe the palms of my hands on my shorts.

“Well, I have different parts than you. Like I have a penis, and you don’t.”

“That’s really gross!”

“Not really, but whatever. I guess you are just a baby and don’t know about that stuff yet.”

I feel myself flooding up to my eyeballs with embarrassment. I know boys and girls are different, and that is just how it is; my mom told me that. Jacob thinks I am a baby, and I really don’t want to be that.

“No, I know about that stuff...I just—”

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“Oh well, you probably have never seen one.” He tips back his head and laughs at me.

“So, what’s your point?”

“Well, you want to be my friend is all, right?” Jacob tilts his head to the side and waits for me to answer.

“Jacob, you are my best friend I thought?” I look at him confused. After all, I did think we were friends. When school is going on we always say ‘hi’ to each other and sometimes he notices that I swing by myself and is nice and swings with me. When we are here, he always lets me play with him. Way more than he plays with the other kids that come on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

“Well, I thought so too, but I just want to play different games is all. I don’t know; your games are just getting kind of babyish.”

I shift around thinking back to how upset he was when I broke his monster truck. After all, he wanted to play that game too, and he acted fine when we were attempting to play ‘Polly, the race car driver.’

“No, we are friends! I can play different games and put Polly away. I am not a baby.” I grab Polly from him and stuff her in my pocket.

“OK, then, I have a new game. Let’s play truth or dare.” He stands up. “You can truth or dare me first!”

I giggle as I think of something. “OK, truth or dare?”

“Dare.”

“I dare you to eat all the peanut butter crackers on the plate.”

He walks over to the plate of about six peanut butter crackers and I shriek with laughter as he begins shoving them in his mouth. I feel so satisfied with myself seeing as how he looks so silly with all the crackers in his mouth.

He chugs both glasses of apple juice and wipes his mouth clean on his arm. “OK, my turn, truth or dare!”

“Truth!” I chose carefully because I didn’t want to have to eat dirt or anything.

Jacob drops his head. “That’s not fair.”

“Yes-huh, the game is truth OR dare.”

“Yeah, but only little chicken babies choose truth. I thought you said you weren’t a baby?”

I furrow my brows; of course I am not a baby. “Fine. Dare.”

“OK, I dare you to show me yours.”

“Show you my what?” I look at him confused.

“You know, the same stuff you cover up on a Polly.”

“Oh...I don’t think my mom or Miss K would like that.” I back up to

the wall of the shed.

“Well, good thing they are not here. C’mon just do the T-shirt then. I really want us to be friends still.”

Tears begin flooding my throat, and I feel that weird balled-up feeling. I look down at my chest and back at Jacob. I still want him to be my friend. I probably won’t have any if he tells everyone at the end of the summer that I am a chicken baby.

“Are you gonna do it or not?”

I look back down at my chest. I guess I am not that different-looking than Jacob. I mean we are both just flat. It’s not like I look like Miss K or my mom. I close my eyes and lift up my yellow shirt and count in my head to three and yank it back down.

Jacob erupts in laughter. The kindness in his eyes from when he helped me up off the ground earlier returns. “OK, I guess you are not a baby after all Serena.”

Part of me feels relief, and the other part feels something I have never felt but is similar to when I wrote on my mom’s wallpaper with her red lipstick, and she had to take three extra shifts at the diner to get new wallpaper.

“Truth or dare, Jacob?” I urge.

“Dare.”

I look around, and I can’t think of anything. “I dare you to hold your breath for me counting to fifteen.”

That seems like something hard. So Jacob does it, and I count to fifteen, and he breathes out.

“That was so easy! OK, Serena, truth or dare.”

“Truth.”

He rolls his eyes. “Fine, that’s your one truth for the game. Would you let me kiss you?”

I don’t want to answer. I reach into my pocket and feel Polly’s slick ponytail on my thumb.

“You kiss your mom and you love her? I am your friend, and you love me?”

I nod because I do love my mom, and Jacob is my friend, and we are supposed to love friends.

“OK, then, yes or no?”

“I guess...”

Jacob begins to crawl across the shed slowly and sits in front of me and crosses his legs like mine. “Close your eyes, Serena.”

I want to get up and go inside, even though Miss K said I get to come

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inside at five. I know Miss K will be upset if I tattle on Jacob, and Jacob will make fun of me. So, I close my eyes.

I feel him lean forward and put both his hands on my shoulders. He leans his head in too fast, and I flinch, but he still puts his mouth on mine. He gets slobber on my top lip.

“Serena! It’s time to come inside.” I hear Miss K out the back door.

He finally takes his mouth off mine. One tear escapes from my eye.

“Don’t tell anyone.” Jacob grins and wipes off his mouth like he did with the peanut butter crackers and juice. Then he gets up and runs into the house.

And all I smell is peanut butter. It’s all just peanut butter.