

*You must do the things you think you cannot do.*

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

#### 4. THE WICKED WITCH

I was startled by a loud staccato knock directly above my hideaway.

*The front door.*

*Uh oh.*

I knew my mom was not going to wake up to answer the door. Her bedroom was upstairs and down the hallway. "Wait a minute!" I shouted from the crawlspace.

I crawled out the hatch and into the closet, where I stood up and navigated through the clothing to the closet door. "I'm coming!" I shouted once more.

I ran up the short flight of stairs to the landing and opened the front door. A tall thin woman in a dark green dress with white piping trim at the shoulders stood holding a brown leather satchel. Her auburn hair was pulled up on the back of her head in a bun, making her face look stretched. I shrank back from the threshold.

*Oh no! From the Principal's office!*

But she also looked like someone else . . . The Wizard of Oz . . . the Wicked Witch of the West! In disguise!

"Are you Lisa Turner?" she uttered in a low, guttural voice, emphasizing YOU. "May I come in? Where is your mother?"

The witch-in-disguise moved through the doorway and on to the landing without waiting for me to answer.

My heart was pounding. "I'll get my mom, I'll get my mom," was all I could utter. I ran up the stairs and down the hall to my mother's room as if being chased by a monster.

Bursting through the bedroom door I ran to my mother who was sound asleep. The clock by her bed indicated twelve noon.

"Mom, Mom, someone is here to see you from the school!"

Mom opened her eyes as I shook her shoulder urgently.

"Ok, Ok, give me a minute. Please go escort them to the living room. I'll be along in a few minutes."

I ran back down the hall. The wicked-witch-of-the-school stood on the landing, looking up. Yes, definitely she was looking more and more like the witch. A scowling, pinched face . . . about to yell . . .

"Uh, please come in, please come up to the living room and my mother will be out in a few minutes."

"Thank you." The woman walked up the stairs and followed me in to the living room.

"Have a seat, my mother will be right here."

At least my mother had taught me how to be polite in the face of adversity.

The woman chose a chair by the window and sat down, not saying a word. I didn't know whether to leave, stay where I was, or sit down. She wasn't saying anything more, so I stood uncomfortably, shifting from one foot to the other.

"Ah, let me check on my mom," I said in a low voice as I backed up slowly, expecting the Wicked Witch to fling a dart or spell of some sort. All the woman did was look out the window like a statue.

*She's weird.*

I retreated to the hallway, where I inhaled deeply. The time slowed to a crawl and it must have been at least 4 minutes before

Mom came down the hall.

The woman stood as my mother entered the room.

“Mrs. Turner, I am Miss Baker, the truancy officer from the Happy Hollow Elementary School Principal’s office. This is an official visit.”

“Please have a seat, Miss Baker,” my mother said courteously, with a smile, and sat down in the next chair.

*How can Mom be so composed and polite? The Wicked Witch is right here in our living room.*

“Would you like to speak privately or would you like Lisa to be present?” asked Mom.

“That’s fine, she can stay here. In fact, it might be good for her to hear this,” said the Wicked Witch of the School.

My face was flushed. My throat was dry. I sat down but wished I could run down the hall to my room. Could I sneak away? Could I crawl under the chair? Would they notice?

“Are you aware, Mrs. Turner, that this is the third day that Lisa did not show up for school this week?” Mrs. Baker looked very serious and uttered this statement with venom. I shrank farther back in my seat.

*Wow am I in trouble.*

Mom looked over at me with concern. “Lisa, I thought you were leaving for school this morning after breakfast? Didn’t we talk about this?”

I tried to make myself disappear into the upholstery seat cushion.

“Did you come back home and go to your fort again?”

I bit my lower lip and lowered my head. I was speechless.

*I let Mom down. What am I going to do now.*

“Mrs. Baker, I do understand that this is serious. Lisa is having

difficulty with her school subjects for a variety of reasons. One of these is a lack of discipline and oversight from me. Another is having to repeat a grade and being teased by the other children. Another is perhaps an absent father."

Mom turned to me. "Lisa, you can see that this is troubling. School is important. I'd like you to take the school bus from now on, and not walk to school. We'll talk more, ok?"

I nodded, still tongue tied.

My mother continued, "Mrs. Baker, please tell Mr. Garner and Mr. Charles that Lisa will now be riding the school bus. Add her name to the ridership list and call me immediately if Lisa is missing."

"Mrs. Turner, I will be happy to tell the principal and administrator of your plan and I think it is a very good idea. We have never been happy with the walk to school idea, especially with a child barely 12 years old and one on the small side, you never know what could happen." Mrs. Baker wrote furiously in a notebook she had pulled out of her satchel while she was talking.

I sighed and looked around nervously. Would the Wicked Witch never leave?

In my peripheral vision I spotted Eric, the chameleon, on the Rhododendron plant. His bright lime green head was nodding up and down, up and down. He cocked his head towards the Wicked Witch, moving his angular jaw back and forth. He took a few quick steps on the large leaf, and crouched.

*Uh Oh.*

Mrs. Baker began speaking again, but I wasn't listening.

"Alright then, but I will need . . . OHH!!"

Eric had jumped directly on to the Wicked Witch's green suit with the white piping, and blended right in. She jumped up, hopping on one foot and slapping at her dress.

"Get off, get off!" the Wicked Witch shrieked.

*Poor Eric, oh no!*

“Off, off, get off!” she shrieked as Eric went flying.

Miss Baker grabbed her satchel and ran to the stairs. “We will talk again,” she shouted from the landing. We heard the door slam.

Mom and I both looked down at little Eric, who had somehow survived the awful encounter with the Wicked Witch and had hopped back on to the Rhododendron leaf. He cocked his head to one side, then up and down.

We heard a car start and then roar up the street.

Mom looked back at me, trying very hard to be serious but with a sparkle in her eyes.

We both burst out laughing at the same time.