



Finding the Culprit

by Craig Bouquin

Children seem to love fairy tales, and I think I know why. We read them fairy tales, watch fairy movies, and adorn their bedrooms with fairy tale wallpaper. Fairies are generally depicted as beautiful tiny winged creatures that flit around us sprinkling a trail of sparkling magic powder for our benefit and protection. I think these overrated, dust-spreading vermin are a mischievous lot that enjoy torturing parents.

Fairies exist only to entertain themselves. Nothing makes these sadistic, airborne vipers happier than watching adults squirm under the pressures of parenthood. I blame them for a multitude of difficult times I have had in raising my own children. For example, I think that the last thing a baby experiences just at the instant of birth is one of these flying nuisances sprinkling a bit of magic dust, waving their magic wand, and chanting the spell, “There are toys in your nose.”

This suggestion is embedded in all children, driving an irresistible urge for them to pick their... well... to find these promised toys. My middle daughter was born a great listener with a magnificent memory. I recall having a tough time breaking her of this hypnotic “nose mission” when she was a toddler. I blame the fairies.

She was a perfect little darling with twinkling eyes, beautiful blond hair with natural Shirley Temple curls, the cutest smile, and with her finger always in her nose. She was barely three, and we had been working on this problem with her quite a bit. It was getting pretty frustrating for all of us. It all came to a head one day. I’ll never forget this lesson in understanding of what other people’s perception of “doing the right thing” might be. That evening I was in the kitchen destroying something for supper. She came toddling past me with her one-eyed mangled dolly tucked under her arm as usual. I said “Hi Rosy” (my little pet name for her).

“Mif Pugeby,” she said (her little way of saying “Hi Daddy” with her finger in her nose). I sighed, disappointed in having to explain once again about better ways to take care of this “problem.” I put down the wet towel and opened the window to let the smoke out.

“Rosy?” I said firmly, “Is your finger in your nose again?” She snapped her hand quickly from her face to behind her back.

“Doe, I’mb dot bicking by dose.” She said with a snork. (My Rosy could paste on the best look of innocence, hands behind her back, twisting her feet, looking everywhere but at me. She was really good.)

“Then why was your hand on your face?”

“I had a itch,” she replied with an assertive nod, confident that she had me fooled.

“Now you go get a tissue, like we talked about before.”

She turned dejectedly, but stopped in her tracks, and through the wafting smoke I could see she put her finger back in her nose. “Rosy! What did I just say?” I barked.

“You said, ‘Get a tissue’.” She said, with building tension in her voice.

“So then, go!” I insisted. She turned and took a few more steps, stopped again, and back the finger goes. “Rosy! What are you doing?” Now I’m hollering. I extinguish the charred remains of dinner in the sink.

I walked over to her, and got down on my knees so I could look her in the eyes. Her lip began to quiver. I knew we were on the edge here. She looked at me with her lip in “full pout.” She had marble size tears clinging to her eyes, head slightly down, looking up at my tense face. (She turned me to mush, but I was trying to be strong.)

“Honey, why do you keep putting your finger in your nose?” I said. Her voice was cracking, and starting to get that, ready-to-cry, high-pitched squeaky tone.

“Cause you said not to pick my nose.”

“But you keep putting your finger back there, why?”

“Cause you said use a tissue.” This got really frustrating.

“Look, if you are not going to pick your nose, and you are going to use a tissue, then why do you need to stick your finger back in your nose?”

She started to cry, and she pulled her hand out from behind her back with the untidy entity in question proudly displayed on the end of her finger. Her tiny, pitiful voice bravely stammered through the tears, “You said, don’t pick my nose, so I was putting it back!”

I was stunned to silence. I stared back at her, motionless. I was panic stricken with the instantaneous understanding of her logic, and my lack of understanding that she was trying desperately to “do the right thing.” The next five seconds lasted forever. I tried to disappear, and go back through time to try this all over again, but that didn’t work. I tried to think of something to say, but my mind was full of static. The wisdom of age and sense of fatherhood I had taken for granted were gone, replaced with a great emptiness. I was mentally disabled. I belonged in a hospital, not here destroying the life of this innocent, beautiful child.

The shrill sound of the smoke alarm pulled me back to reality. My poor confused little girl was looking at me as if I “wasn’t right in the head.”

“You OK Daddy?”

I blurted out something like “Mif Pugeby!” and ran to stop the screaming alarm. I dragged a chair to reach the ceiling. Just then my wife and two other daughters walked in the door.

“Hi, we’re home! –What’s burning?”

“Mommy!” My little Rosy hollered, and ran to her.

“Hi sweetie—have you been crying?”

“Daddy made me cry”

“Mom! There is a rock in the sink.”

“What did you do to her?”

“He made me put a boogie in my nose.”

“It’s not a rock, it’s something nasty.”

“Daddy’s brain is broken.”

“It smells really bad.”

“You made her do what?”

“The burner is going on the stove, and there’s a wet towel on it.”

“Mommy, what’s Mif Pugeby?”...

“You don’t understand!” I remember yelling. This is where my mind has chosen to block out the rest of that day.

I do recall an odd, surreal dream I had that night though. I woke up in a sweat from a sound sleep. I remember the sensation of being irritated by a swarm of gnats, buzzing relentlessly around me, whacking my head with tiny sticks that left a trail of sparkles. I could hear the faint sound of them laughing and laughing.