

EUTHANIZING POPPY

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The summer breeze drew circles in the white clouds and sifted through the vacant lot filled with grasses behind Henry's home.

"I still don't get what you're trying to say," said Henry. He watched as Lanie tugged on the dandelion weeds beneath her feet.

"They're eu-than-ising Poppy," she said very slowly and importantly.

"Youth-and-izing," he whispered to himself. Youthandizing was a very big word, and Henry liked how they slid over his tongue in sleepy spirals. "What does that mean?"

"I'm not sure." Lanie's freckles bunched up over her cheeks as she scrunched her nose. "I think it has something to do with a shot. I really don't like shots. They hurt. But this shot- this shot is magic."

Once when he was three he had gotten a shot on his arm. It hurt.

"Anyway, Mommy said that after Poppy got eu-than-ised, she'll be okay again," Lanie said importantly. "Because it's magic and everything."

"Henry? Lanie? Dinnertime!" It was Henry's mom. "Lanie, your folks are expecting you home for dinner."

"See you later." Lanie jumped to her feet and started running to her house.

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After dinner Henry brought some important medicine to Grandpa. Grandpa was very old. He had his own room at the end of the hall, where he lay in a bed hooked to tubes and beeping machines. White machines. Everything was very white in Grandpa's room.

Henry's mom followed him into the white room. She held a bottle of white pills in her hand. Henry carried a cup of water.

"Hello, Grandpa! We have your medicine!"

Grandpa shifted his wizened brown face against the white pillow, but did not reply.

Henry's mom forced a big smile onto her face, her eyes opened wide, so wide Henry could see the whites against her bright blue irises. She looked very tired.

Henry's mom cupped Grandpa's mouth open and placed two shiny pills onto his tongue. She reached for the cup of water and gently tugged it from Henry's grasp, tilting it towards Grandpa's mouth. A little bit trickled from his chin and caught in the white stubble, but it didn't seem to stain his shirt.

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After school Henry and Lanie rode their bikes together down the neighborhood. Henry liked the way his neighborhood was shaped. The houses were pushed together in a perfect circle, with only one narrow street that opened, allowing cars to pass through, one at a time.

"Henry, today we're going to do it." She was acting especially proud today because she had gotten a pair of shiny white sneakers from her mom. They had rubbery soles and looked unusually clean and new next to her yellow shirt and ripped jeans.

"What are we going to do?"

"The road. We're going to go down the road."

Henry blinked. They had been warned to never go down the straight path that led out of the circular neighborhood. It was dangerous, and you aren't old enough, you'll fall and get hurt and get taken away by scary people and

"That's dangerous," said Henry. "There are a lot of cars and stuff."

“Pish posh,” Lanie scoffed. “I bet the adults are hiding something cool out there. They just don’t want us to see it. ‘Cause we’re kids and all.”

“I’m not a kid,” said Henry. He puffed out his chest because he had seen a big man on do it on TV.

“I know. So let’s go down the road.”

Henry paused for a moment. Lanie’s eyes bore into him.

“Okay.”

They pushed their bikes past each familiar driveway, rubber squeaking against the gravel and cement. Lanie hopped onto the pink seat and sped down the path.

Lanie was going very fast today. Henry pumped his legs faster, trying to catch up to her. It was very dangerous, and you aren’t old enough, you’ll fall and get hurt and get taken away by scary people and

A car screeched to a stop, and Lanie screamed. She fell off her bike, her elbows hitting the cement. The driver hurried out of the car. It was Henry’s mom.

“Why are you two here? I told you to never come here!”

Lanie was crying. Her elbows were bloodied. Wet tears dripped down her freckled cheeks and her new sneakers were brown. She looked like a kid. Henry’s mom softened.

“Come on, no more crying now. Up you go.”

Henry’s mom put Lanie and Henry in the backseat, then loaded their bikes into the trunk. They drove in silence for the rest of the way home.

By the time they stepped onto Henry’s porch Lanie had stopped crying. She huddled by herself, arms clutched gingerly to each elbow.

“You two wait in the living room,” said Henry’s mom. “I’ll grab some medicine for Lanie from Grandpa’s room.” Henry watched her hurry down the hallway and disappear into the white room, shoulders hunched. She looked very small.

Henry’s mom came back with a tube of Neosporin. She dabbed some of the clear cream on her finger, then leaned down swiped it gently onto Lanie’s elbows.

“Poppy’s coming home today,” Lanie told Henry’s mom. “You can come see her. She was eu-than-ised.”

Henry’s mom froze, and she yanked her hand back from Lanie’s elbow. Her hands trembled as she fumbled with the white cap. Henry realized that his mother’s eyes seemed very shiny and white all of a sudden. She looked back down the hallway, towards Grandpa’s room.

“Really,” she said slowly. “Well, that’s exciting.” Her voice shook as she screwed the cap back on.

Lanie peered at Henry’s mom closely. “Well, I’m going home now. Bye Henry.” She jumped up from the couch and ran through the open door.

Henry’s mom slowly sank down onto the couch. Her face was wet with tears. She did not make a sound. She looked very tired and lonely all of a sudden. She closed her eyes, and Henry felt big, big enough to say words like euthanizing.