

THE
DISCIPLINING
OF
Mom

ANITA M SHAW



www.SleepingDogPress.com
AN IMPRINT OF DREAMWLYND PUBLISHING
FAIR HAVEN, VT 05743

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Author's Note

THIS FUN TALE WAS supposed to be a short story. But, then the characters decided it ought to be longer. So here's a littl sample of the book.

There is child dialect in this story because many little kids do not talk like English professors. Each child has his or her own way of speaking. Sometimes they get it right and sometimes they don't. Sometimes they mix their baby talk with correct speech because they're learning. Some have a lisp. I find it adds to the humor and to the character of the story. Which is why I never apologize for using it. I just like to let readers know it's in here.

Ah, and yes, all of Reyia's family have names that start with R. Sorry about that . . . it's her father's fault!

Please enjoy!

Anita M Shaw

CHAPTER ONE

Monday

“**L**OOK, ROYCE, THE ONLY reason your brother shows up here is to insult you! He brags about his construction business like he’s *soooo* much better at it than you are, and mooches breakfast! *Tell him off!* I mean, my goodness, but buildings need a good roof as much as anything! What’s he thinking? And, by the way, I’m tired of him showing up almost every morning for breakfast! Doesn’t your mother feed him?”

“Ryshonna, don’t start! And so what if he wants a good breakfast? Not like he’s married, you know. Maybe he wants to give Ma a break!”

“Give *Ma* a break? He *lives* with your parents, Royce! There’s just the three of them! I have four kids to see off to school and a husband to get off to work! Where’s *my* break? Not that I’ve ever felt I needed one—too often anyway! Come on, Royce! Just because he’s your older brother doesn’t mean we should have to put up with his—”

“Man, Reymund *always* gets the bathroom first!” Rodney, one of my older brothers, slouched into the kitchen, interrupting the argument brewing between my parents. Scowling, he flopped into a chair across from me. “Thinks because he’s the oldest, and the girls all go ga-ga over his red curls, he has exclusive rights to it! He fusses longer than you do, Reyia!”

“I’ll roust him out if he isn’t down in ten minutes,” promised Mom, filling his plate with pancakes and sausages. “Jealous, are we?”

“Are you kidding? I’m glad I’m dark like Dad . . . no offense, Mom! You look great with red curly hair! It doesn’t matter to me the girls chase him more. I just want the bathroom!” Poking his sausages, he glanced at me. “Get your turn yet, ReyRey?”

I ran my fingers through my own red curls. “Does it look like I’ve gotten my turn yet?”

Rodney peered at me. “Nope. Guess not!” Popping a sausage into his mouth, he waved his fork at Mom and Dad. “Go on with your fight!”

Dad, who had tilted his lean frame back in his chair to signal Mom for seconds, frowned. “There’s no fight! And you can use the downstairs bathroom, you know.”

“All our stuff is in the *upstairs* bathroom, thanks so much!”

Mom plopped Dad’s refilled plate in front of him. “Back to our *discussion*!” Hand on a hip, she thrust out her chin obstinately. “Isn’t it funny how you can tell him off in practice to me, but when you have the chance to really do it, do you? No! Seriously, I’m *sick* of him treating me like I’m his personal cook and waitress!”

Dad hunched a shoulder, drawing in a long steadying breath. “It’s no big deal, Ryshonna.”

Mom gaped. “No big deal! *Royce*, I *swear*—”

All this use of their proper names instead of the usual *Babe* and *Hon* got to me. Hoping to defuse the tension, I broke in to get confirmation of transportation matters. “Mom, don’t forget we have—”

She cut me off. “Yes, Reyia, I know you three need a ride to the stable after school. Yes, I will be there! Yes, I will truck the horses to the show Saturday! Haven’t I said so? Although, I shouldn’t have to say so since I’ve entered it myself!”

“Just checking! Jeepers, if Uncle Willis is going to make you act like this, let’s just disown him!”

Dad’s stare could’ve chilled my milk. “Would you care to stay home from the show Saturday?”

“Well, Royce, Willis is an arrogant *jackass* . . . and you’re a *spineless jellyfish*!”

“*Whoooooaaaaa!*” chorused Rodney and me. Mom never said things like that. In front of us at any rate.

Four-year-old Ryleigh didn’t look up from her food. “Uh-oh, Momma in chouble!”

Reymund, perfectly groomed now, halted abruptly in the doorway, his silly *Mom-I-NEED-Your-Car-Tonight* grin frozen on his face. Glancing at Dad, I was amazed to discover that, instead of wrath, he was staring at Mom with considerable amused resentment. Mom stood there beside him, one hand on the table, the other on her hip, her blue-green eyes alight with defiance.

“How come . . . Well, *she* can’t . . .” Rodney sputtered, emotions riled. “Hey! If one of *us* said that, we’d be banished to our room for a *week!*”

“You just threatened to ground *me* from the show for saying we should disown him. It isn’t fair! Why can *she* be disrespectful? Twice!”

“She’s setting us a bad example, Dad,” declared Reymund. “Send her to her room! For a *month* if not for life!”

“Oh, give me a break! A month!”

“They’re right, Ryshonna!” Dad informed her. “I *wouldn’t* let them get away with that! I wouldn’t say grounded for a month, but yeah, a week. Wives’re supposed to stick by their husbands, aren’t they?”

Be supportive? You'd want that from me, right? Apologize—or else . . . ! What if I called your sister a *gossiping busybody* and you a—

“*Me, a what?* I’ve put her in her place so often, there’s no counting it! You can’t do it once! But I wouldn’t be grounding you for saying anything about Cassandra—and you *have* said plenty! Cassandra *is* a gossiping busybody! It’s why the rest of us call her Motor Mouth after all!”

“Well,” said Dad, laying down his fork and giving her The Look. “Be that as it may, I *am* sending *you*! Unless of course, you’d care to apologize?”

“Pol’gize, Momma! *Quick!*” Ryleigh glanced up now, concern in her blue-green eyes. “You d’wanna be in your room alla days! Who dunna take care of us?”

At that inquiry, Mom’s indignation suddenly melted. “All right then, *fine!*” She sounded like a little kid . . . like me, in fact. “You know everything I’ve said is true! But, hey . . . I can certainly live without having to cook, clean, or chase after kids for a while!” Her look and tone included Dad.

Out she went, shouldering Reymund aside. “Oh yes,” she called back tartly from the top of the stairs. “My car, my truck, and their keys are grounded with me!”

The horrified look on Reymund's face cracked me up. "*No!* Mom, you *can't!* I've a date tonight with Delora!" He rounded on Dad when the sound of the bedroom door firmly closing cut him off. "How long is she grounded? Just till tonight? A few hours? Five minutes?"

Dad shrugged. "Weren't you all in agreement with this? A week if any of you'd said that? What's the condition for getting off earlier if this was one of you? Huh? Gotta have an apology—an honest to goodness *sincere* apology. I don't see that happening for a while, do you? Get ready for school. You've about twenty minutes."

"But Dad! I *need* a car! Can I use yours? *Just* this once?"

Dad's eyes held a mocking light in them. "Not a chance, Rey! Get a job that pays!" He left the table, and a few minutes later, left the house. Didn't even go up to say, "I love you, Babe! See you later!" to Mom.

This was serious.

Reymund declared his date with Delora doomed, slumped dejectedly into his seat at the table, ignoring his breakfast. Rodney teased him mercilessly. Me, I ran upstairs to reason with Mom. Ryleigh followed me up.

"All you have to do is apologize," I pleaded.

“Yeah, ‘pol’gize, Momma! Jus’ say, I sorry, Honey. I won’t eber say it ’gain!” She leaned on Mom’s knees, staring up at her with a wide repentant gaze. So darn cute!

Mom couldn’t help but smile. But it didn’t change anything. “I can’t, Ryleigh. Not this time.”

“Mom, how are we getting to the stable after school? How can we go to the show if you don’t?”

“Reyia, how do things go when you’re the one confined to your room?”

“Mo-om! I’m just a kid! And besides, I apologize—”

“I a kid, too, huh, Mom!”

“Yes, you are! Reyia, it’s too bad about the inconveniences to you kids, but you did back your father in this—and I will not apologize! I’ve listened to Willis once too often put your father down. Insinuate that he hasn’t the brains to run a *lemonade* stand, never mind make a go of a *real* business. Say things like he shouldn’t have had kids . . . can’t take care of us if he can’t keep a job . . . So stupid when he knows your father’s done roofs for Fred Thomas’ company for years! Not his fault Fred took his business south! But he goes back to his Mommy and his Daddy, and tells them that stuff—and they believe it! Ooh, when he uses that smug tone, I’d like to drive a . . .” She broke off

abruptly, the grim intent fading off. “I won’t finish that. You’ll mention it to him, and I *will* be here for life! Not that I don’t have something with which to occupy my time!”

She made an expansive gesture toward a couple of easels set up on her side of the big room, some paintings and drawings leaning against the wall. She had several portraits and some landscapes commissioned that were in various stages of completion. Which her clients wanted—last week. Plus, we needed the money.

There’d been a dry spell where Dad couldn’t find clients. Which was where Uncle Willis drew his unfair conclusions that his little brother was a failure. Didn’t seem to matter to him that Dad had finally found people offering him jobs. Things had begun to look up for him and for us. You’d think he’d’ve been happy for us. For Dad—who’d started his roofing business after Mr. Thomas moved to Florida six months ago.

But no . . . he just kept mocking him anyway. Mocking all of us for all the things we did that he felt were a waste of time—Mom’s art, our love of horses, Reymund’s job at Ma and Pa’s Grocery . . . Dad’s new business . . . This was the first time I’d heard that Uncle Willis felt Dad shouldn’t have had kids.

Her expression softened, and she cupped my face in her hand. “I’m sorry, Reyia. I just don’t feel I’m the one who needs to apologize.”

“Well, you don’t have to for *everything*! Just for calling Dad a spineless jellyfish! Wasn’t that a bit of an exaggeration . . . and, you know . . . kind of . . . disrespectful?”

“Yeah, Momma. It not nice o’ you!” echoed Ryleigh, shaking her redhead sadly. Oh, so darn cute! Not even sure she knew what a jellyfish was.

Just was something icky about being the daughter of a spineless jellyfish. Something uncertain about knowing your mother felt that way about your father—her husband.

Since she did feel that way, and he hadn’t come up to give her his customary hug and kiss before he left for whose ever roof he was working on today, I was experiencing a good deal of uncertainty. For I hadn’t a clue about how to deal with the feelings this issue between my parents was conjuring up in me. And I wanted to do something about both my feelings and their dilemma. But what?

“Reyia! Ryleigh! Bus!”

“Oh, great!” I kissed Mom swiftly and flew to retrieve my backpack from my room. With my little sister in tow, I made the bus just as the driver was

reaching to close the doors. This guy waited for no one, not even a cute little kid like Ryleigh.

Was a perfectly lousy day. Had to borrow a brush to fix my hair. Forgot I'd needed paper and some new pens . . . and my math book must've been still under my bed where I'd tossed it last night, because it wasn't in my backpack. Couldn't concentrate on much of anything with my mind occupied with my parents' argument this morning. Such a relief when the bell rang at the end of the last class of the day.

You would have thought we could've found a ride to DreamWynd Equestrian Center since there were a few kids in our school who also boarded horses there. Some of them were in our riding club.

Since our club was made up of kids of all ages though, we wouldn't be able to connect with any of them until we were out of the building. So we dashed out to see if we could catch someone. We'd have to find someone willing to take the time to pick Ryleigh up from her school across the street. Fight those lines.

Kids rushed here, there, and everywhere trying to get to their bus or other ride. We saw Todd Tedmond heading for his mom's car, but by the time we got to that spot, she'd pulled away from the curb, cruised past the buses and out of the school

driveway. So it went with the other kids in our club. We just weren't in the right place at the right time.

Reymund, with problems of his own—Delora apparently having dumped him already for lack of wheels—didn't want to hear about ours. He, however, did find someone to drop him off at Ma and Pa's which was considerably closer to the school than the stables were.

Well, if all she cared about was the car, she wasn't worth anything herself anyway. I liked his other friend, Andie, better anyhow, and felt he should date her. She wasn't quite as gorgeous as Delora, but she *was* cute and a *whole lot* nicer! I say friend, because, while he liked her, he's never considered her more than that.

Just then, though, I didn't care about his troubles. It was a long walk, and we had Ryleigh. She waited for us in front of the school with her teacher, Mrs. Smith. Assuring us she could walk forever, we started hiking it to DreamWynd.

It was rather a warm, early June afternoon and about halfway to our destination, Ryleigh and I simply collapsed in the grass beside the road and declared ourselves dead. We were so-o-o thirsty.

"Come on, guys. There's water at DreamWynd. And, at least someone there will probably bring us home. Get up! It's not much further!"

“It’s miles and miles,” I exaggerated. “I feel like we’re in the middle of a—”

A red and black pickup truck approached, slowed, and stopped. Uncle Willis. Thought he’d still be working.

He surveyed us with that irritating smile of tolerant amusement as if we were three years old, and he observed lazily, “Hoofing it, huh? How come? Your momma forget you today?”

“No she didn’t forget us!” Rodney retorted. “She’s been grounded—”

“Yeah, her’s drownded!”

“By her clients,” I hurriedly interrupted, getting to my feet. I’d club Rodney later in private. Ryleigh was just a little parrot. “They want their paintings.”

He regarded me with that annoying mockery as if he didn’t believe a word of it. Turned out he doubted something else too. “I’m sure they do! A regular Michaela-Angelina she is, isn’t she?”

“*Better!*” I answered defensively, glaring at him. Wow, I was seeing him through my mother’s eyes at that moment. Weird. And I was understanding her feelings. Weirder.

He grinned unperturbed. “Get in. I’ll take you to your steeds. What’re their names? Trigger? Champ? Scout?”

“Yeah, right.” I didn’t bother to enlighten him. He wasn’t a lover of horses any more than Dad was, so where’s the point? In any case, a ride the rest of the way to the stable was entirely welcome. Even from Uncle Willis. He dropped us off at the end of the long white stone driveway of the center and went on his way.

Jeepers, couldn’t he have taken a couple minutes more and brought us the *whole way* to the barns?

Rodney hoisted Ryleigh upon his shoulders. “Just walk, ReyRey. Just walk. We’d still be way back there if he hadn’t come along.”

True. But still . . .

My practice session went much better than my day at school had. Hard to believe. I was sure my concentration would be about nil.

My uniquely marked red and white Paint, Jester, was in top form and I was right in sync with him. Most of us rode Western, but we also practiced some of the the things that required English tack. This show Saturday had a Western theme, so we were all tacked up accordingly.

“Nice work, Reyia! Just keep those heels down. You’ve got nice steady hands. Okay, people, canter and show me some flying changes of lead!” called Storm Van Kirk, our tall, auburn haired instructor.

“Spread out, people! You’ve got the space! Hey, hey, Ryleigh! You’re doing it! Very nice!”

Yes, Ryleigh rode her cream colored Welsh pony, KryssaGuen, like a little pro. She and a couple of the other younger riders were way past the walk-trot stages most kids their age would be in at the show. For such a little squirt, she performed with confidence and poise even at a canter.

After that, we practiced the obstacle course which Jester could probably have done with his eyes closed. Each show could feature different obstacles to challenge riders.

Storm tried to have a good variety so we wouldn’t be taken off guard the day of the event. Or, more likely, so our horses wouldn’t be. Some, like Jester, would ace the course no matter what new thing was there. Others, not so much. Anything to do with water, for instance, or crossing a bridge. If we had to drag a bag of empty soda cans or whatever. Some horses spooked at those things.

Like Nanci Jo Kester’s mount, Hopeful Challenge—a horse that actually belonged to the stable. This horse pretty much refused to do anything except step over the cavalletti poles. Most of us called her Hopeless because if she didn’t want to do something, she wouldn’t.

Which is often a trait of a stable horse since they were, much of the time, ridden by people who hadn't a clue how to control a horse. Some were lucky to even stay in the saddle! Many had never ridden before in their lives, or only when they came occasionally to enjoy an hour or two on one of the trails.

Nanci Jo wanted to buy Hopeless because she's a flashy Palomino. Built well, with a long, flowing, white mane and tail. So going by looks, I could see why she wanted her. But Nanci Jo hadn't a clue of how to make Hopeless mind any more than one of those occasional trail riders did. Seemed like she was as hopeless as Hopeless! Some of us wondered why Storm let her join the club. But, then, she'd allowed Ryleigh and other little ones to join, so it wasn't up to us.

Storm, seeing how our teasing was affecting Nanci Jo, told us if we couldn't call Hopeless, *Hopeful*, at least refer to her as *Hope*.

"Because there is always that for her!" she said. "And we need to show empathy and sportsmanship to our members and others. Nanci Jo doesn't need to keep hearing your snide comments every time she takes her turn. Yes, she needs to learn to control Hope. But I don't want to hear you people constantly putting her or Hope down. Clear?"

“*Hope!* More *hope* for all the little ones and their ponies,” uttered Rodney. “Nanci doesn’t make her do anything she doesn’t want to do.”

Nanci Jo, sitting close by, slapped Rodney with the ends of her reins. “*I try!*”

“All right!” Storm broke in. “No, Nanci Jo, you don’t. Not hard enough. She would do this whole course if you stopped letting her get away with things. If you actually expected her to do it. She’s not your boss! I’m not willing to sell you that horse until you show me you can control her better than you have been! And don’t think you can go asking Nick or Anetra to sell her to you! Trust me, they’ll be coming to me to find out if it’s a good idea!”

Todd Tedmond scoffed, saying, “Hopeless is never going to be anything but a stable nag! Can you really train her to be a show horse? Even for local ones? Not seeing it, Storm! Sorry!”

“Yes, it can be done. If she puts in the effort to do it! And again, I don’t want to hear that sort of talk. Unless you don’t want to be a part of the club anymore.”

Everyone decided they wanted to stay in the club, so that ended the snide remarks—for then, anyway. Because Hopeless continued to get her way with Nanci Jo.

So, finally, Storm told her to dismount. Taking the reins from her, she vaulted upon Hopeless' back and took her flawlessly around the course. Flawlessly. As well as Jester had done even. We were amazed.

"Wow!" breathed Rodney. "It's Nanci who's hopeless!"

"Yeah, we're not saying things like that either, Rodney!" Storm dismounted next to him. "We're going to be encouraging to one another. No more tearing down here! You understand? Does everyone understand that? We are a team! If you can't feel you can be a part of the team, leave the arena now."

No one did.

Todd pointed out, "Yeah, but you're way more experienced than any of us, Storm. Not a surprise, really, that *you* can make her mind."

Storm then looked at me. "Reyia . . ." And she held Hope's reins out to me.

At once, I slid off Jester, mounted Hope and urged her forward. She tried to play her tricks on me, attempting to bypass obstacles or turn and come back to the group. She got my firm correction each time, showing her she wasn't getting away with it. So finally, she straightened out and took the course in stride. Storm had me take her

around one more time, and this time she gave me no trouble. Another flawless performance.

Each of us in turn took Hope around the arena's obstacle course. If anyone refused, Storm jerked her thumb toward the arena gate. That changed their minds in a hurry!

Hope quickly showed us which riders she could bully and which ones she would obey. It wasn't just Nanci Jo who was hopeless with Hopeless. While they weren't asked to, Ryleigh and little Stacia Tollefson, Nick and Anetra's youngest girl, begged for a chance to ride Hope. While it wasn't a flawless run, they kept after her until she did what they wanted. Most of the teasing stopped right there.

"All right, then!" Storm faced us all. "Now you know where you stand—with *me* as well as Hope. You can all start to show some sympathy for Nanci Jo. Those of you who made her mind you, offer encouragement. Those of you who didn't—offer encouragement! You're in the same boat."

"Gotta show her who's boss!" stated Todd who'd been one of the more successful riders.

"Yes, but not in the way you did, Todd! Did anyone see me or Reyia *boss* her the way Todd and some of you others did? No, we had no need for a whip or to slap her with the reins. Leg pressure,

voice, hands . . . gentle hands . . . but firm. That's how I want to see all of you ride from now on.

"Spend time with your horses. Not only riding them in the arena or the pens, but trail riding, and more time spent just grooming them. Hang out with them in the pastures. Learn what's making them tick."

"That's a lot of work!" declared chubby Caroline Peters who was one of those Hope had bullied. She herself had just bought a horse from the Tollefsons. Just not one of the stable's trail horses like Hope was.

Storm just said, "If you want to make a connection with your horse, if you want to ride better, if you want to win competitions, you'll do the work."

"And again, when I say riding them, I'm not talking about just these club meets or your private lessons—those of you who have them. I'm talking about you riding the trails or practicing things on your own time. Invest in yourselves and your horses. All right then, walk them off, and I'll see you all tomorrow!"

She walked next to me as I started to walk on with Jester. "Reyia, nice work today. Love it if you'd work with Nanci Jo and Hope."

I beamed at Storm's praise and at her confidence in me to help Nanci Jo. But, truthfully, I wasn't sure

how I was to do that. Especially if I was expected to help her ride as confidently as I did in just a few days . . . yeah, I wasn't seeing it happening!

Besides, I was one of the younger riders. Todd Tedmond and Traci Woods were the oldest. And there were others aged between them and me—like Rodney. That she'd asked me first, I took it as a huge compliment. So I said I would.

Of course, if Mom was still grounded by the weekend, we wouldn't be going to the show or anywhere else. All this would be for nothing for us—me, Rodney, and Ryleigh.

I suppose though, if Nanci Jo got control over Hope, that would be a plus for our club. Could make it so the club as a team would have a better chance of coming home with more wins even without us.

Rodney and Messenger had done pretty well themselves, yet Storm was inclined to feel Rodney hadn't concentrated quite as he normally did. He responded grudgingly, "Doesn't matter—we're probably not going anyway!"

She looked surprised. "Why? What's going on?"

"Mom's . . . had something come up," I explained quickly. "So, she can't take us. And you know our dad works most Saturdays."

“Well, that’s too bad. But don’t despair!” Storm said. “We’ll get you there! It’ll just take getting an earlier start that morning.”

I wasn’t so positive. There were quite a few people from here who would be going besides our club members. Many of the adults would be participating at this event as well, including Storm herself. Maybe there wouldn’t be room in any of the trailers for our horses. No room in anyone’s truck or car for us kids. The niggling feeling that something was going to go wrong worried my brain.

Happily, we didn’t have to beg a ride home. Dad picked us up after practice. Hopping into the front seat, Rodney asked, “So, Mom apologize yet?”

“I haven’t been home yet. Why, she say she was ready to?”

“We haven’t been home either. But you talked to her this morning, right, Reyia?”

“And?” Dad glanced in the rearview mirror at me.

“She says she doesn’t think she’s the one needing to apologize. Says she’s tired of Uncle Willis putting you down like you haven’t the brains to even run a lemonade stand, never mind a real business, and like you’re not able to really take care of all of us. I don’t know . . . some of the things she said . . . Maybe—”

“Leaning her way now, are you?” His tone wasn’t accusing. Just curious.

“Yeah, a little. Uncle Willis happened to come along and bring us to practice. He was kind of a jerk.”

“He *was* a *huge* jerk,” Rodney stated and then said, “You were a jerk right back though, ReyRey. Proud of you!”

“Thank you! You were pretty good yourself!”

“Guess it’s a good thing I didn’t hear any of it,” Dad remarked. “I might have to ground the two of you along with your mother!”

“Oh, well, I’d be yakking with her about how to shut him up!” I retorted, half jesting, half serious.

Then, in altogether another tone, I confided, “I have to say, though, that I didn’t like the way she called you a spineless jellyfish. Kinda hard to think of your dad as someone you can look up to if he’s a jellyfish.

“But she believes in you, Dad. She just hates it when Uncle Willis makes it look like you’re a big time loser—like your business is going to fail any second. And after the things he said to us today, well . . . I hate it, too. You *should* tell him to kiss off! *Mom’s* on your side; *he’s* not!”

He met my gaze in the mirror a second. But for the rest of the way home, he was silent. Didn't even ask us what Uncle Willis had said to us.

When we got home, Reymund had come home from Ma and Pa's and was outside Mom's door, begging her with intense desperation to reconsider her rash decision to ground her vehicles. Rodney and I sneaked upstairs and hovered by the hallway table where we could watch and listen.

"Mom! You can't do this to me! Delora won't go with me if I don't have wheels! Please, *Please! Save my life!* I—"

Couldn't quite hear what my mother said, but Reymund's response was agonized. "Mo-om! I *have* asked for a raise. I *will* get my own car! But right now, I need *yours!* If I can't have it, it's kiss Delora goodbye! She's got her eyes on Garry Couper. He's got a sweet convertible!"

Plainly came back Mom's answer to that for she opened the door to confront him. "Reymund, I can't help that! While I go nowhere, my car and truck go nowhere! Whenever you've been grounded we never let the others use whatever you wouldn't be during that time—like your bike and skateboard, for instance. Not getting my car. Besides . . . *you* suggested the period of a *month*—or *life!* Deal with it!" With that, she shut the door.

“*Aauugh!* Mom! I didn’t mean it! Honestly, I didn’t mean it! Please, you can come out! I don’t care what you said! Well, it was kind of mean, the spineless jellyfish part, but—”

“But my car matters more! Reymund, enough! Go away!”

“*AAAUUGH!*” He beat his fists on the door, then backing away, he turned and bolted down the stairs.

Dad appeared at the bottom of them to order me to come find something for supper and to see what all the ruckus was about.

Reymund paused to glare up at me and Rodney for eavesdropping and to make a terse recommendation to Dad. “Keep her there for life! She’s ruined *mine!* Can’t believe she’s going to let this happen to me!”

He stormed out. In a minute, he was biking out of the driveway and pedaling madly down the street.

“How come,” I wondered, “he blames only her? You don’t let him use *your* car *ever!*”

“I’ve never indulged him,” answered Dad in a matter of fact tone. “My car doesn’t get driven by teens! He’ll get over it! Come on, let’s get some dinner going.”

Not what I wanted to do, but I followed him into the kitchen. “I’m sure he will—at some point! I hope he doesn’t turn out to be like Uncle Willis!”

“Can we stop harping on Willis for a while?” Dad went from cabinet to cabinet searching for supper ingredients. “Reymund’s nothing like him!”

“Early in his life,” I responded unimpressed. “Anything can happen!”

Dad really wasn’t good in a crisis. Or good as a cook at any time. I’m sure he was wishing he could pardon Mom long enough for her to come down for this chore. But as he seemed to be determined to stick to his guns, he plopped the chore on me.

I found the chicken Mom had marinating in the fridge. Everyone liked mashed potatoes, so some would have to be peeled. If we hadn’t insisted Mom be punished for her rash words, I could’ve been off doing something way more fun.

“Don’t forget a veggie or two,” Dad reminded me. “I’ll peel the potatoes, okay? Then I’ll leave it to you.”

Not sure why he thought I could handle it. I hadn’t done more than load the dishwasher sometimes!

He peeled the potatoes and set them on to boil. I kept pawing through the freezer, trying to decide what else to have. I finally settled on peas with little

onions. Those shouldn't be too hard to fix. I poured them into a pan, put in some water, and started them going.

Then, I wondered if I should start the chicken too. Should I make some kind of batter? Would she have cooked it in the oven or on the stovetop?

I plopped the chicken back into the bowl, rinsed my hands, and ran upstairs.

I needed some advice for this!

"Well, first thing," Mom said, "the peas can wait till the potatoes and chicken are almost done. They're going to be done way ahead of everything else. You don't need to drown them in water either. A little and cover the pan will do it."

"Oh." I'd covered them to the top of the pan with liquid . . .

"I've marinated the meat, so just cook it as is on the stovetop. Cook it on a medium flame so it doesn't burn. You want it juicy, not dry. Use a little oil with some butter. Wait to start it when the potatoes are getting soft but not mushy. So, yeah, start the peas when you start the chicken."

"Okay." I took a step back toward the door. "I hope it all turns out edible. Are you sure you don't want to come make sure nothing gets ruined?"

"Can't. You know the rules."

"But, Mo-om!"

“You’ll do fine, Reyia. Just don’t go off and leave it unattended!”

I eyed her accusingly. “You’re actually *happy* about this, aren’t you? You’re acting like it’s a vacation or something!”

She smiled, patted my head, and sent me on my way.

As the door closed behind me, I remembered that she’d said she certainly could live without having to cook, clean, or chase kids.

Heh! Some punishment! Wasn’t one for *her* at all, turns out!

Was for *us*!

Long story short, I followed her instructions, and it turned out better than if Dad had done it. When Rodney praised me up for a decent meal, I actually felt pretty good! Even Ryleigh declared it, “Bery dood!”

But then, I had to clean up the kitchen. I felt that Rodney and Dad could’ve done that part. But no. It was all mine.

They went out to the living room and turned on the TV. Reymund joined them when he finally came home. Well, at least I could hear it, so I didn’t feel *so* all alone. Before Dad headed down to his mancave, though, he sent Ryleigh off to bed.

She didn't stay there. "Reyia!" came her urgent whisper from the hallway entrance to the kitchen. "Reyia! I help you!" Flashing a quick glance over her shoulder toward the living room. Seeing Dad wasn't there, she scurried into the kitchen.

"Okay!" I said, smiling upon her. At least, *one* person in this family cared enough to want to help! Together, we cleaned off the table and loaded the dishwasher. Then I washed the pans in the sink, and she was able to put those away in their proper places.

"We's done, huh, Reyia. We did it!"

"Yes, we did. Thanks for helping. Ryleigh! I love you!"

"I love you too! Will you read me a story? Daddy didn't."

Of course, I should have said no, it's late. Of course, I said, "Yes, let's go!"

And I tucked her in and read her all her favorites until she fell asleep. Then, I went over to my side of the bedroom and sat down at my desk to do my homework.

About the Author



Anita's been telling stories since she was four and writing them since the fifth grade. In high school, she wrote fan fiction and westerns—usually when she was supposed to be paying attention to the teacher. As she is a lefty, left handed kids are featured in her work.

She's had the pleasure of speaking in classrooms and at workshops about writing in general and self-publishing.

She's currently working on a teen novel entitled *A Tale of Two Diaries* and a middle grade time travel novel called *Stagecoach at the Old Gristmill*, plus planning the next two middle grade Kingsley Twins stories which are entitled *Mystery of the Missing Malley* and *Dancing in the Rain with Gramma*.

She and her husband have four sons, grown now, and two granddaughters, plus a cute little Grandoggie named Tobi.

Anita has a passion for horses. While in the past she owned a small herd of horses and ponies, she doesn't own any presently. She trained her own animals and those of others and taught riding for a few years. Those days are sorely missed!

Besides reading, writing, and spending time with her family, Anita enjoys horseback riding, biking; bowling, hiking, woodworking and laser crafts, and playing card and board games with family and friends.

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