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Seven, Love

Megan Thornsbury
College of DuPage

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Love is when you don't make Mommy cry. Some days, I don't say a single word and just smile, I whisper-play in my bedroom and try not to pinch my sister. Mommy loves me on whisper days and when Daddy Dan is gone. I know, because she pulls my head into her belly and says, "Mabel, I love you."

Dan says I'm a bad girl who needs butt-spankings. Mommy says he's my only Daddy I have and stop being bad to him all the time. I try being good. I laugh when he sits and tickles on me, but then I cry because I pee my pants. Dan hates crying. Crying gets more butt-spanks.

My neighbor Josh is my crush, and he's a fifth grader! He pops wheelies on his bike and lets me jump on his trampoline. Josh knows when I'm bad. He says he hears me squealing way inside his house. I'm grounded from playing with Josh because of the shiny ball bat he gave me to hit Dan with when he did the mean things on me. Mommy caught me sleeping with it between my legs, and sent me to Grandpa's house 'til she loved me again. My teachers don't believe my mommy loves me. It makes my face go stop-sign red and sweaty hot when the teachers sneak-talk about my yellow teeth, and ask who touched it when my pee-pee burns at bathroom break. I want my teachers as mommies.

I get to be seven today. I always change my year when it's summer outside. I'm getting to be seven at Grandpa's house today. He picked me up at bedtime because my Mommy had to call red and blue light men on Dan for smashing up the house. He pushed his whole hand inside the wall. Mommy didn't love him much because she was crying at him. Driving through the woods in dark to get to Grandpa's scares me, but he says it's just the country and there is nothin' to be afraid of.

When Dan smashes the house Mommy says he really loves us, he just drinks too much alcohol. He's weird for drinking that stuff! Grandpa pours it on my knees when I get all scraped up from bike rides, and it burns, why would he even want to drink that yucky-sting stuff?

Today, I called Mommy to go home for my seven party. I'm gonna get the hugest pink Barbie cake and open bajillions of presents. Mommy cried and said to talk to my Grandpa. I don't get a party.

Mommy doesn't love me. Grandpa says the baby in her tummy is giving her the pukes today. That stupid baby makes mommy sad because it got stuck in there when Dan did the tickle thing to her. He didn't stick me in her tummy! Grandpa said a birdy called the flying stork dropped me. I think that birdy got lost but I'm not gonna tattle because the stork would be put in trouble time. I get put in trouble time when I ride my bike too long in dark and street lights pop on. And last time, in trouble time I had to stick my nose in the corner and don't move! Dan spanked me with his long, snappy belt. My tears wouldn't stop making Dan mad so he yelled, "Go get in your bleeping bed, you little bleeping bleep!" I cried *soo* hard it made puke! There was the puke all over my bed but Dan said no getting out. I slept in that sour-stink puke. It smelled like my milk jug when Mommy runs out of pennies to get a new one, and we can't drink it. Even if birdy got lost I would be *soo* sad if he slept in his puke. Mommy pinky-promised me trouble time would stop; she's a big fat liar and now I don't get no stupid seven party. No one wants a bad girl like me.

The Oval Pot

[Dodi Dolendi]

The water pipes, in the house we rented, froze and broke in January of 1982. During Chicago's Big Freeze, as temperatures dipped to a frigid 26 degrees below zero and wind chills dropped to 80 below, my husband, Larry; our five-month old, Little Larry; and I moved to our new home: my in-laws' apartment on the second floor of the family building. We unloaded only the absolute necessities, as quickly as we could, because the threat of frostbite burned on our hands, feet, and faces. But the smile on Aunty Mary's face as we walked in the door and the aroma of whatever was simmering in her ever-present oval pot, warmed my heart. We were home.

She scooped Little Larry from my arms and shoed us on to take our things upstairs and hurry back down for dinner. No one ever refused a dinner invitation from Aunty Mary; it wasn't allowed. Refusal equaled insult and her food equaled delicious. Therefore, her kitchen was always filled with family, friends, great food, and fun. I marveled at her ease in the kitchen—both with cooking and feeding the masses. In my mind, Aunty Mary was the Patron Saint of the Kitchen.

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