

Band-Aids Are Better

Icabu

“Oh, it never fails,” groused Vanessa Howard. She quickly rinsed the cookie dough bowl and gently balanced it in the dishrack. She wiped her hands on her apron and picked up the phone.

“Hello,” she answered. “Oh, hi, Joanne....” Vanessa froze as she listened to Joanne DeSoto.

“Vanessa, can you please watch Jennifer for me? The department called....there’s been an accident....some kind of collapse. I have to get to Rampart.” The stress in Joanne’s voice was sobering.

“Oh, no! Joanne, no...” Vanessa’s heart ached for her friend. “Of course I’ll watch Jennifer. Valerie loves to play with her. I’ll be right over.”

“Thank you very much, Vanessa. I really appreciate this.” Joanne’s voice cracked.

“I’m on my way, Joanne. Hang in there, Hon. Bye.” Vanessa’s hand trembled as she carefully hung up the phone.

She took a deep, calming breath. “Hey, Valerie, Mrs. DeSoto says Jennifer would like to come over to play. Wouldn’t that be nice?”

Valerie Howard looked up from her plate of cookies and milk, smiling from ear to ear. “Cool, Mom. We can play with my new doll house!”

“Yes, that’s a great idea. Let’s walk up to her house and you two can get started.” Vanessa reached out for her daughter’s hand.

It seemed to take forever to reach the DeSoto house, which was only six houses up the street. Vanessa put on her best calm demeanor and rang the doorbell.

As soon as the door opened, Valerie shot inside yelling for her friend Jennifer. Vanessa embraced Joanne warmly.

“Aw, Jo....” She whispered.

Vanessa kept Joanne's hand. "Do you need me to watch Chris, Hon?" She waited as Joanne composed herself.

"Um...no, Van. He was already at Billy Thompson's house." Joanne took a deep breath. "I've talked to Susan and she will keep him there."

Vanessa squeezed Joanne's hand. "Okay, Hon. I'll keep in touch with Susan."

Both girls appeared in the doorway. "Look, Mommy," Valerie held up a doll to her mom. "Jennifer has a new doll for the dollhouse."

Vanessa grinned at the blonde DeSoto girl. "Well, she is really pretty, Jen. You girls can start down the sidewalk. I'm right behind you."

Jennifer DeSoto took Valerie's hand. "I promise to be good, Mom," she said as they jumped down the steps.

"You listen to Mrs. Howard, Jennifer, and play nice," Joanne managed.

The ladies embraced again. Vanessa felt Joanne trembling. "Hang in there, Hon. I just know it will be okay."

"It has to be, Van. It has to be."

"Come on, Mom!" Valerie called impatiently.

"Yes, girls," Vanessa responded as she released her stressed friend. She slowly descended the steps and joined the giggling girls down the sidewalk.

"Look, Jen! We made cookies. D'ya want some?" Valerie invited.

Jennifer DeSoto looked up at Vanessa. "May I have some, Mrs. Howard?"

"Of course, Jen. Would you like some milk, too?"

"Yes, please."

Vanessa went to the kitchen to get the milk and a glass. She paused by the window and noticed an unfamiliar car at the DeSoto home; a gentleman was at

the door talking to Joanne. A lump came to Vanessa's throat.

"Can I have some more milk, Mom?" Valerie called out.

Vanessa cleared her throat. "Yes, Hon. I'll get you a new glass."

At the table, she poured the two glasses of milk with a smile as the girls chatted amiably about the dollhouse.

"It has an upstairs and a downstairs and a garage for the car. I don't have the car yet..." Valerie rambled.

Vanessa left the table chatter to return the milk carton to the refrigerator. Again, she paused at the window. She held her breath as the unfamiliar vehicle drove past with Joanne in the passenger seat, face buried in her hands.

The girls ran off to play dolls. Vanessa continued with the dishes, replacing the now luke-warm dishwater. She finally got the last glass put away, removed her apron, and hung it up on the closet door. She gazed out the window and her thoughts went back to when she received 'the call' from the Sheriff's Office – Vince's cruiser was involved in an accident and she had to go to Rampart. She was grateful that Joanne watched Valerie for her. She sighed as her gaze focused on the DeSoto home again. *So sorry to have to return that favor, Jo ...*

Vanessa sat on the couch reading a magazine, the phone on the end table by her elbow. Valerie and Jennifer came in and sat down with her.

"Are you finished playing with the dollhouse, girls?" Vanessa asked. She noted rather serious looking faces on the girls.

"Mrs. Howard," began Jennifer DeSoto. "Will my daddy be getting a Band-Aid?"

Vanessa's heart jumped. "What do you mean, Jen?"

"You know...when you get an owie...and you put a Band-Aid on it," Jennifer struggled to explain.

"Like Daddy did, Mom," Valerie added. "The Band-Aid he had on his arm."

Vanessa gasped. In the cruiser accident, Vince had broken his shoulder and

forearm. He wore a cast and sling.

“Yeah,” Jennifer agreed. “Remember Uncle Johnny had the big Band-Aid on his leg? He stayed on our couch for a long time. He slept mostly, but then he started to play with us.”

Vanessa did, indeed, remember John Gage’s broken leg. Joanne felt so badly for him that she insisted that he stay with them. After a couple of weeks, Joanne bemoaned that it was like having a third kid in the house – but she had said it with a smile.

“I’m not sure if your daddy will have a Band-Aid, Hon,” she answered honestly.

“Well, I hope he does,” Valerie stated.

“Valerie, that isn’t nice,” Vanessa admonished.

“But, Mom,” Valerie insisted. “Lisa’s daddy didn’t get a Band-Aid and he never came home again.”

Vanessa was shocked. Lisa’s dad, Ray Constantino, was shot and killed at a robbery six months ago. A cold chill passed through Vanessa as she faced these six year old girls. She was amazed at how they coped with the heavy, dreaded side of having parents with dangerous jobs - breaking it down to something that they can equate in their daily lives.

“Yeah,” Jennifer agreed. “Having a Band-Aid is better.”

Vanessa couldn’t stop the tear that trickled down her cheek. She scooped up the girls in her arms and squeezed tightly. “Then let’s all hope for Band-Aids.”

Dedicated to all those out there that support the folks on the front-line.

Thanks to Karen for the beta read!