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### The Prodigal Daughter

It is an early weekday morning, and the Singer house is in its usual frenzy as my sister and I get ready for school, and mom attempts to comb our hair, pack lunches, clean up and send us off to school on time and in our best behavior. It is hectic for my mother, for she also needs to be dressed and ready for work after she gets us off to school. My sister and I are five years apart and I, being six at that time, was the baby of the house, the brat, as kindly noted by my older sister Bethany, who then was eleven years old. I would not say I was a spoiled brat, traditionally speaking, but I suppose the youngest of the house usually gets their share of special treatment. My mom was not quite a traditional mother. While other mothers gave their children cutesy nicknames like pumpkin, I was given the cutesy name, *cabronita*. This is a made-up name, but the base of it is an actual word in the Spanish language that can be translated in many ways, slang and non-slang, none being very cute at all. However, in my mother's translation it meant something of an endearment.

Despite my sister's perception of me, I was not a brat on most occasions. Though this particular morning, I was taking my position as the baby of the house to its fullest advantage as I refused to brush my hair. My mother attempted to bribe me in a meek, sweet voice.

"Sweetie if you let me comb your hair I will make you pancakes," she said with a hopeful smile.

"No! I hate pancakes!" I shouted back, which of course was far from the truth.

“But baby, you look so cute with your hair brushed. Don’t you want to look cute for school?” my mother kindly nudged.

My sister, being less patient and understanding sneered, “Yeah, you look ugly; no one is going to want to play with you.”

“I don’t care!” I screamed, “I hate you guys! You guys are ugly!” Then I began to cry just for the sake of adding a dramatic finish.

Needless to say, that morning I arrived to school with my hair a mess and with a terrible pout on my face. With tear stained cheeks my mother sadly wished me a good day at school as I got out of her car; my sister glared at me with complete annoyance written all over her face while she waited to walk me to my kindergarten classroom. As school passed I played with my friends—they still played with me despite my nest of hair. The sourness of that morning had disappeared, and I was in a good mood after school. My sister did not mention that morning, but I could feel that she was still slightly annoyed with me as we walked home together.

I was young, but recall this moment very vividly; it seems to be engraved in my memory quite deeply. That same day after school, my sister and I were helping my father replace her bike tire. My mother usually did not get home until evening, but that day she was a little later than usual, which did not strike much alarm, for it was not uncommon for her to stop by the grocery market before arriving home. When my mother finally did get home, she came straight out to the back where we all were and in her hands were a bounty of treats and on her face a smile only a mother could produce. Her eyes had a slight gloss as she looked down at me. I stared at her blankly not understanding exactly what was going on. I mean, even I knew that I acted horribly earlier that day. My sister also looked very confused as to why my mother was presenting all these goodies to me; clearly, she had not forgotten that morning either. “Are those

for me?" I asked very politely yet with a hint of confusion. She nodded and smiled sweetly. Then from under her arm she pulled out a small ratty stuffed animal which looked more like a bunny rabbit but was in fact a puppy dog. It was love at first sight. At this, my eyes grew wide and glossy, for guilt had come over me and it weighed heavy on my heart. I smiled back at her shamefully. I did not deserve these gifts. I did not deserve her. That moment lasted only until my sister blurted out, "Are you kidding me? She was horrible this morning! Why are you rewarding her when she acted like such a brat to both you and me?" I looked over to my sister. She glared at me vengefully, and then went inside shaking her head in disbelief. All the while my father sat there on the ground confused at what was going on around him, and I hoped that neither my mother nor my sister would tell him how I acted that morning. I was stricken with guilt and shame, but my mom took me inside, and I helped her make dinner. It was like that morning never happened.

I still have Ruffles, which is what I named him, after my favorite television program at that time. He sits happily on my bed, now a bit worn, matted, and thanks to my friend's dog, now he has neither eyes nor nose. However, it is still a constant reminder of my mother's unconditional love. The incident that morning seems so minor now knowing what would come later in life. Yet, like that day when I undeservingly was welcomed back into my mother's loving grace, there have been times later in life when once again I have been forgiven with open arms and the prodigal daughter returned.

When I was ten years old, my mother was surprised with another daughter and I was demoted from the baby of the house to the dreaded middle child. My family would often tease me for this. I understood the relationship between my mother and me would change forever. The dynamic of mine and my mother's relationship did change, but she was always forgiving.

Her forgiveness no longer came with a sweet smile or a cute stuffed animal, but it was always there. Ruffles is kept and cherished as a tangible reminder of the depth of my mother's love for me.