

REBEL EARTH

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SAMPLE

The wooden door, pulled by the spring at the top, slapped the wooded frame as it closed. Without turning, Miriam called over her shoulder, hands still wet in a sink full of dishes. “Is that you, Wilmont? Make sure your shoes are clean before coming in this house or you’ll have to wash the floors.”

When no reply came, Miriam called again. “Wilmont? Wilmont. Answer your mother.”

“Mom,” came back in a weak voice, causing Miriam to immediately take her hands out of the sink and make her way to the door across the wooden flooring, dripping water and soap as she went. When she came to the door, a gasp flew out of her lips. Standing just inside of the door, Wilmont leaned on the wall, head resting against it, while blood ran in a slow, steady stream from his nose. His face looked pale and his eyes were unfocused.

“Wilmont! What happened?” Heedless of the soap, she ran to her son and placed her hands on either side of his head.

“Don’t know,” came the slurred voice. “Just started.”

“Sit down.” All but carrying the boy almost her size to a chair, she leaned his head back over the back of the chair. “Did you get hit or something?”

“No.”

Miriam looked into the boy’s eyes and shook her head. “Stay right there!”

Running to the door, Miriam grabbed a set of keys from a peg in the wall and hurried through the door. She looked frantically around the farm.

“Agnar! Agnar!” she yelled.

A middle-aged man poked his head out of the barn door. “What?” It came with as much irritation as it did question.

“Wilmont’s bleeding again!”

“Again?” The man walked out of the barn, wiping his hands on his overalls. “What he do this time?”

Miriam ran to the man. “He didn’t do nothing. And he doesn’t look good. His eyes are wandering around and his speech is slurred.”

“Just put him in bed,” the man said with a dismissive wave of his hand.

“NO! No, Agnar, we are not ignoring this. This is my son and we are going to get him treatment!” Her finger poked point-blank in the man’s face, threatening as any gun.

“You want to take him to those heretic doctors? Not my family. What would the neighbors say?”

“When it comes to my son, I don’t care! Everyone goes to them, you know that.” Miriam poked her husband in the chest. “Even the town council goes to them when the town doctors can’t do anything. Everyone knows that. Agnar, this is serious! He needs to get looked at.” Miriam stomped her feet and put her hands on her hips.

“I ain’t taking no son of mine to no heretic doctor!” Agnar said with equal force.

“Then I will! So either help me get him into the truck or stay out of my way!”

Agnar turned back to the barn. With a huff, Miriam turned, quick stepping back to the house. Once inside, she grabbed a small towel and hurried to Wilmont.

“Hold this under your nose,” she said, placing the towel there. With her arms under his armpits, she lifted the boy to his feet, putting her arm around him for support. “Come on, I’m taking you to the doctor.”

“Pa be mad?” the boy asked as his head lolled forward.

“We’re not going to worry about Pa right now.”

Almost falling three times, Miriam managed to get Wilmont into the truck. Once behind the steering wheel, she plugged in and turned the key. The engine came to life with barely a whisper. Pushing “D”, she slammed the accelerator to the floor, though the vehicle accelerated in a smooth manner that ignored her urgency.

“Damn it! I’m in a hurry, you stupid truck!” she yelled.

“*Is this an emergency?*” a voice asked from the console.

“YES! It is an emergency!”

“*Would you like to proceed to the nearest medical center at the quickest safe speed?*” the voice asked in a calm voice.

“Of course I would!” Miriam yelled back.

Automatic belts wrapped around Miriam and Wilmont as the vehicle accelerated. The steering wheel lost all resistance as the vehicle drove itself down the dirt drive, slowing enough to make the turn onto the road at the last moment. Miriam put her hand on her son’s chest. As she looked at him, she swore to herself that he looked paler than before.

“Hold on, honey, we’ll be there soon.”

Braking hard, the truck stopped in front of the entrance to the Chicago Medical Assistance Center, located just outside the barrier-wall of Chicago. Miriam had been struggling with her seat belt for a quarter of a mile, trying to get it off. With the vehicle fully stopped, the seat belts disengaged themselves from the passengers.

“*The facility has already been informed you are coming,*” the console said in the same calm voice.

“Thank you,” Miriam replied as she exited her door and ran around the vehicle. By the time she reached Wilmont’s door, a robotic personal conveyance and a man were almost there.

“I’ll get him out, ma’am,” the man said. “Just in case his condition requires it.”

“Please hurry!” Miriam held the door, restraining herself from helping the man but not managing to stand still. Once the conveyance was occupied, he secured straps around Wilmont and it tilted horizontal. Patient secured, the device headed back into the medical center. Miriam watched, following.

“What are his symptoms?” the man asked.

“He’s been getting nose bleeds for no reason. He also gets dizzy and he slurs his speech when it happens.” Miriam could not help looking past the man at the retreating gurney.

“What about his eye sight?” the man led her to the medical building at a calm walk.

“I don’t know, we normally make him lay down for a while. Guess I never thought about his sight.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll get him to a diagnostic platform right away.” As they walked through the double-doors, the man indicated some seats with his hand. “Please, take a seat. An assistant will be right with you.”

“Can’t I go with my son?” The first quiver of worry came into Miriam’s voice.

“We’ll let you see him as soon as possible but right now you would only be in the way. He will get treated faster if you stay here.”

Breathing in and pulling herself together, Miriam nodded. “Okay, but please hurry.”

As the man left, Miriam looked at the seats but couldn’t bring herself to sit down. There were no windows to the area where they had taken Wilmont so she paced the floor. It wasn’t until she had crossed it several times before she noticed that two other small groups of people also sat in the waiting area. They were both dressed in the Puritan fashion but she did not recognize anyone. They each gave her a strained smile when she looked at them and she managed to give one back, but no one started a conversation. The same worried look that must have been on her face was clear on the other ladies in the room.

As she thought about the others in the room, a lady in a white blouse and pants came through the door and walked toward Miriam. The lady held a easy smile on her face. Miriam didn’t wait for the woman to speak.

“Do they know what’s wrong with Wilmont yet?”

“He’s being diagnosed now. When it is done, a doctor will come out and talk to you. Please, will you sit with me?” The woman made a smooth motion to the chairs.

“I.. I don’t think I can,” Miriam said, shaking her head.

“I know you’re worried but I’m sure your son will be all right. I’ve seen worse come in that door.” The woman’s eyebrows raised with a quick motion at the statement. “I’m Chalene by the way.”

“Chalene?” Miriam shook her head. “I’m sorry, this whole thing has me totally upset. I didn’t mean to react like that.”

“You’re fine. I know you’re worried. Would you like something to drink?”

“No, I can’t...” Miriam stopped herself and took a calming breath. “Yes, thank you. I probably better. Just some water.”

“Of course.” Chalene walked over to a wall and opened a door, removing a bottle of water. She twisted the top off as she walked back, handing it to Miriam.

The drink Miriam took was slow. When she finished and looked at the bottle, over half of the water was gone.

“Guess I was thirstier than I thought,” Miriam said. She started to hand the bottle back to the lady.

“Keep it. You’ll feel better if you don’t dehydrate.”

“I suppose so.” Miriam felt weak to the point of exhaustion but sleep sounded like an enemy.

“Please, let’s sit down.” The woman walked the few steps to a chair. Sighing, Miriam followed. For some reason she now felt like she could sit down, taking the seat next to the lady.

“Thank you for being so kind. I was so worried—still am I guess.”

The woman grinned. “I could just say it’s my job, which it is, but I like helping people who come here. I don’t know how to heal people but I do seem good at making them feel more comfortable while they wait.”

“I’d say that’s just about as important.”

Taking another drink, Miriam finished the water in the bottle. As she looked in amazement at it, a woman in a long white coat walked out of the door they had taken Wilmont through. Miriam looked up with expectation. The woman walked over to her:

“Are you Wilmont’s mother?” the woman asked.

“Yes. How is he?”

“Would you come with me please? We’ll talk in private.”

Her hands shaking and bottle forgotten on the chair, Miriam stood and followed the woman to a door at the side of the room. As she walked there, she stole a glance at the people in the room, receiving sympathetic looks in return. The door led to a room with four fully-padded chairs and a small table. The woman gestured toward one of the chairs and sat in a facing one. Miriam sat down, her knees threatening to give out as she did so.

“I’m Ordanza. I’m a doctor here. It’s a good thing you brought your son in when you did.”

“He’s alive?” Miriam felt a wave of relief wash over her. Tears

threatened.

“Yes, but he’s in serious condition. He has a tumor in his head pressing on the left optic nerve. You know what a tumor is, correct?”

Miriam nodded. “Yes. I’ve seen them in animals.”

“Your son’s tumor needs to be removed. We can do it here but we need your permission.”

“Of course, of course. I.. I didn’t bring any money to pay for the operation..” A new worry showed on Miriam’s face.

“We don’t charge you for our services.” A kind smile filled the woman’s face.

“Can he go home afterwards?”

“The surgery, while relatively simple to perform, is quite traumatic to the body. We need to keep your son here at least overnight. It would be dangerous if he was moved too much.”

“But I can stay until you are done, right? And then come back tomorrow?”

“Of course. If you’ll excuse me, I’ll get the procedure started.” The woman stood. “You can stay in here if you want or sit in the waiting area. Excuse me.”

It was only a half-hour later when Miriam was led to another small room, but this one held a bed and equipment. Wilmont was in a bed asleep, a round bandage on the side of his head. It was much smaller than Miriam would have expected.

“How is he?” Miriam asked the man manipulating a holographic display.

“He’s fine. We need to keep his head still for a while so we will keep him asleep until tomorrow.” The man looked up after a few seconds. “You can kiss him gently if you wish.”

“Thank you.” Miriam did just that and then squeezed his hand. “He’ll be fine now?”

“Good as new.”

“Can I stay for a while?”

“Of course. Someone will tell you when you need to leave but you have plenty of time. There is a hotel across the road that you can use for free if you wish.”

Miriam pulled a chair over to the bed and sat, holding Wilmont’s hand. When the man left, the tears flowed freely.