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Tummy Troubles

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Tummy Troubles

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Tummy Troubles

MADELINE QUINN

I punch him right in the stomach,
right there in the Kindergarten classroom.

He fights back. My plaid skirt moves around my waist like a merry-go-round as he punches me. It makes my tummy hurt. Our teacher rushes over. She rips him off of me. I try to say, "I punched him because he" -- My teacher looks at me sternly. She tells us both to go to the principal's office. My mom had told me to stay out of trouble.

My mom asks me, "Why did you punch him?"

"He called her retarded," I whispered.

I knew my mom hated that word.

I had learned this the day my step-brother absorbed it at school and heaved it all over the mac and cheese we were having for dinner. Mom jumped for my sister's ears but was too late. She told me that this word was a swear word. A swear word that was mean about my sister.

Mom brought our macaroni and cheese out to the driveway and told us to eat outside in the sun that night. She brought us chalk too. She told me she needed to eat dinner with my brother and dad, so it was just my sister and me. We put the soles of our shoes together and formed a diamond with our legs. I sang slowly so she could sing along as we sang,

row row row your boat...

I helped her bring the spoon of mac and cheese to her mouth. Her sweet grin covered her face.