

Nancy D. Tolston

1st Day

I started my period today and that was a relief. Not that I was really worrying about it but in the back of my mind there was a little drum beating softly the worry song. I colored my hair a few nights ago because I wanted a change, so I went to a warm brownish-red from my flat-matted brownish-black. The gray didn't do a thing and I was cool with that. It took four bottles to do my entire head since my dreadlocks are down my back. My son was one of the first to run to the car the next day to say that my hair in the daylight looked cool.

I dropped him off this morning to high school. His first day of high school, he wore his baggy black denims and the shirt that he has worn at least twice a week for the past year. (I will be so glad when that shirt wears out.) He didn't want to wear the new clothes. Not even for the first day. I was a little disappointed but I understood. He ain't his mama.

I thought back to his first day at kindergarten. He told me that he could go in by himself. He told me that I didn't have to hold his hand. He was mad because I was not obeying his words. I held his hand tighter as I walked him to his door, hoping that the teacher would take his hand and hold it the rest of the day until I could relieve her at three. I was four good months pregnant, two months into my dreadlock growth, owner of a 14-month-old female child with mood swings that were swinging pretty high that day from side to side. I had my afrocentric print dress on—it was snug but I didn't care and I walked my first-born male child into kindergarten. Tearful already, the morning was not helped by a chubby little woman who jumped out from behind a car taking pictures of us. My mother. "Ma don't," she continued to click. I was mad because she was not obeying my words.

Today I dropped him off. I had not gotten dressed for the day but just put on the ragged pair of blue jeans, a t-shirt and gym shoes. I tried to joke in the

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car. “Want me to take pictures?” I asked and he grumbled a no. I asked him did he know which class he was going to first. He answered something. I gave him the first day of school rules and then asked again did he know where he was going. We talked about other things but as we got closer to the school I became less interested in what he was saying and more concerned about what was coming next for him and for me. I had three tissues left in my abused tissue box under my seat. I bent down to reach for them as I slowly stopped the car for drop off. I told him it was time to get out not really wanting him to. I even jokingly said, “give me a kiss” only to get a louder grumbled “no” and a quicker jump out of the car. And then he did it. In the audiovisual department in my mind—in slow motion—he crossed in front of me, smiled, and waved. I waved and drove one tire rotation and began to cry wishing there were a teacher at the door to hold his hand.

I got home in time to disrobe two wrinkled daughters. They were busy stuffing their backpacks with new school supplies and they never asked did he get off to school okay? How do you feel mommy? They didn’t even notice my red eyes as they poured out their cereal wearing only bright pretty tops and panties and listening to their Cleopatra CD. As I ironed two Winnie-the -ooh jumpers that were not new.

The little chubby woman was not there to jump out from behind a car this morning, because we no longer reside in the same state. But I reached out and touched her once I got settled. We laughed over my tears as she admitted that she thought about him this morning. But the most important question from her was “did you take pictures?”

I wish I had.