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**Genre:** Family, Adoption

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## The Three Boys

„Daddy!“, the young squeaky voice of my son drifted to me from the corridor „I'm back.“

I had to smile when he arrived at the door.

„Really? I wouldn't have guessed if you didn't tell me.“, I teased.

He pouted and walked away, presumably to put his book bag in his room.

„Wash your hands, we can eat then.“, I called and stood up to go into the kitchen

„I have a present for you, Daddy!“, the boy called and following his squeaky voice into the kitchen.

I glanced at him

„Washed your hands?“

He nodded and took his tongue between his lips, as he always did when he was nervous. Or musing.

Or concentrating. Or hungry...

„Sit down.“, I said, waving vaguely to the direction of the dining table.

„Can I give it to you now?“, he asked quietly and looked at his toes. Alarm bells rang in my mind. It was not the same kind of alarm bell that other parents knew well. It was not the ominous feeling they got when they didn't hear a sound from their child's room for a while and dreaded what chaos they would find inside. It was not the certain knowledge that you were being lied to. It was an alert that I didn't wish for any parent on the whole world. As I was used to – and had done numerous times before – I got down on my knees in front of him, to be on eye level

„Sam.“, he avoided my eyes „Look at me, Sam.“

He looked up underneath his fringe, even though I was kneeling I was still taller than the child.

„Did something happen?“

The tongue was back between the lips and I knew he was biting on it too. My forefinger came up and tickled the tip of his tongue. Samuel gave a nervous giggle and let the tongue hide in his mouth again. He slowly shook his head and I sighed.

„Okay, I'll serve dinner and you get the present.“

Samuel nodded readily and ran out of the room. With a sinking feeling in my stomach I set the table. Samuel needed a lot of time to come back but I knew he was only steeling his nerves. It took me a long time to learn to just let him be in those moments. He needed some time and peace. That was all. There was no reason at all why my eyes sprang to the door, wishing a certain small, black haired boy to appear there. Their wish was fulfilled hesitantly, when he arrived back. He was protectively holding a multi coloured booklet to his chest. I pulled out a chair for him and indicated it, then sat down myself. I chose the chair with the back to the door so Samuel could take his time without feeling pressured. Completely nonplussed I started putting food on my plate, as if I wasn't worried about him at all.

Slowly he came up to the table and put the booklet down beside his plate carefully, then sat down.

For a moment he attacked his lip with his teeth and then apparently came to a decision and held up the booklet for me.

I took it with a smile and turned it in my hand. In his childish handwriting the hand made cover read „The three boys“. I raised my eyebrows.

„That's for you.“, Samuel murmured and began to act like he didn't care as well and ate. I glanced at him again and then began looking at the booklet. The cover was a blue carton, the heading written in different colours. I could still see the line underneath it, that had been drawn to help keep the heading straight. He had put some effort into the Cover-Design. The border had a pattern that was slightly blurred the way I had thought him not long ago. The booklet was held together by simple yarn and filled me up with pride. My little son had put such effort in for me. Why had I been worried? He had surely only been nervous about my approval.

„This looks amazing, Sam.“, I praised.



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He looked up from his vegetables and shook his head „You didn't even open it yet!“  
„You know I peruse the cover in depth first“, I said „And this one is felicitous, professionell even.“  
Sam smiled proudly and a well known peace settled into my hear. I had done it right. I was so rare to be sure if you were doing it right with kids like Sam. But today, in this moment, I had.  
„Is it okay if I read it later?“, I asked and Sam nodded. The rest of dinner passed quietly. I was too cuious about the present and Samuel to excited about my judgement. We cleaned up and then settled down into our spaced in the living room, Samuel with his homework and I finally with the booklet. When I opened it I read the same heading as on the cover inside, but this time it was carefully crafted out with black ink on horizontally lined white paper.  
„Sam, did you write this with a feather and ink?“, I asked surprised as I realized that Sam had written the whole text first with pencil and then again with ink. Sam looked up with a dazzling smile and nodded „You really worked hard, thank you.“  
Sam lowered his head over his homework again but the smile stayed in place. I looked at the pages again. He must have tried really hard... I knew that his class had just crafted the writing feathers themselves and learned how to write with them. For primary school kids, who had just learned to write with a fountain pen without colouring their fingers blue this was no small feat. The booklets pages had been rounded carefully by childrens scissors. I could imagine Sam sitting there, tongue firmly between his lips, carefully rounding them page by page. And all of the confetti littering his desktop. The picture filled me with warmth, that I had never known before I met the boy. I pulled myself together and packed away my sentimentalities – just because I was a lector didn't mean I should loose myself in a child's booklet. I leaned back and began to read.



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### ***The first boy***

*The first boy was a sad child. He loved his mummy with all his heart and wished she could love him too. But his mummy was always very angry and very sad.*

*She often said mean things. To everybody really, but mostly to him. Sometimes the boy thought that „Maybe she' sorry.“, because every night she would cry. He couldn't be mad at her anymore then and forgave her. He felt so sad, because his mummy was sad. And he felt so angry, because she always was. He really wanted to help her but he just didn't know how.*

*So he stood still when she screamed at him – and she screamed a lot. He kept quiet when she said he was exactly like his father. The boy had never known his father, that's why he couldn't e mad about that. But she said it in a way that he knew she wanted to hurt him and it did. He heard everyday that he was stupid and unimportant and unwanted. She always said she wished he was never born. Every day she wished he wouldn't open his eyes.*

*She said these things often and with such certianty that the boy began to believe them. He was good for nothing, stupid and would never achieve anything and do nothing good. He was useless and lazy and couldn't do anything right. The world would be better without him.*

*The small boy cried so much that soon he wouldn't know why he cried. He would see someone on the street screaming at someone and tears would spring to his eyes. He knew how that felt. He would get mad when people argued and ran away. He hid from it, covering his ears and eyes. He didn't want to hear it anymore or see it. Never again.*

*But don't worry about the little boy. He went to a better place.*



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### ***The second boy***

*The second boy was a sad child. He loved his mummy with all his heart and wished she could love him too. But his mummy was always very angry and very sad. She often shoved him out of the way and grabbed him by the cuff of his neck if she wanted him to go somewhere. She pulled so hard that sometimes it was hard to breathe. If she wanted him to stand still, she'd grab his arm. In the evening he would see the arks her fingers left on his thin arm. Sometimes they would turn purple or yellow. It wasn't her intention for him to hit his head when she shoved him. She just wanted him out of the way. She didn't want to hurt him when she shook him until he felt dizzy. She just wanted him to listen. When she slapped him, than only because he was disobedient and insolent. All of this he would whisper to calm himself. But at night there was this voice in his head that said 'If she doesn't want to hurt you, why does she never apologize when it happens? If it is a mistake, why does she never help you up again? If it is always your fault, why does she do it even if you never did anything?' He had no answers. He only knew it hurt more inside than outside. When someone ran at him, he had to ran away until he felt save again. The small boy feared that other people would hurt him as well. If even his mother did, why wouldn't they? This is why he never sat by strangers and always walked an arm lenght away from people. This is why he hated crowds.*

*But don't worry about the little boy. He went to a better place.*



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### ***The third boy***

*The third boy was a sad child. He loved his mummy with all his heart and wished she could love him too. But his mummy was always very angry and very sad.*

*The third boy wished more than anything to be held and kissed by his mummy, like the other mummies did. He wanted her to stroke his hair and tuck in his shirt. He wanted her to tap the sand out of his shoes and clean his face with a napkin.*

*And when finally one day she did stroke him, he felt so happy. He was so glad. Everything would be fine now. His mummy would be like all other mummies now. Those mummies who smiled when they saw their children. But when his mummy stroked him in the dark, it wasn't the way they did it. No, and it didn't feel good at all. Why could he not be happy about it? Why did he feel like crying instead? He wanted to run from her hands but he was afraid that everything would be the way it had been before and he didn't want that either. Maybe his mummy just didn't know how to love children? Maybe this was the only way she knew how.*

*And when she whispered that this was all he was good for, he understood. That was all he could do and if he did it right, his mummy would be like all other mummies too. But no matter how much he tried to be still. No matter how hard he closed his eyes, it didn't change anything. He couldn't feel good about this and his mummy didn't change anything.*

*The little boy started to feel disgusted by other people. He didn't want to be touched by anybody ever again. He felt so filthy, he didn't want to dirty others. The small boy was so sad and so angry.*

*But don't worry about the little boy. He went to a better place.*

Here the the story was finished and the last pages had an afterword in blue ink. I recognized the pen stroked for Samuels hand writing with a fountain pen.

*One day a man cam and took him away from his mummy. The little boy cried, because he still loved his mummy. He didn't want her to be in trouble and he didn't want to leave her. But the man only shook his head.*

*He helped the little boy, so he learned to smil again and hug people and not to think so bad about himself. The man often praised him and said he was so talented and bright. In the beginning the little boy couldn't believe him – he would never be as clever as the other kids. But the man taught him many things and every time he learned something new, the man smiled and was happy for him. When the boy made a mistake he expected punishment, but the an never hit him or screamed at him. Slowly, very slowly he began to believe that he wasn't bad. The man was so happy every time he took his hand that he did it more often. He wanted to make this man happy, the way he tried to make him happy.*

*The man didn't let hi cross the road without taking his hand. When he hurt himself, the man put a plaster with funny motives on. This man laughed about his jokes and tucked him in at night. He told him stoerie and sat him on his lap. This man loved him the way the Daddys the boy had seen on the street loved their children.*

*And when one day the man asked him to become his son, the little boy couldn't have been happier.*

*Daddy, don't worry about me, I have come to a better place.*

*Happy fathers day and love from*

*Samuel*



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My mouth was dry when I read the last lines. I saw that my hands were trembling. Samuel was staring at his homework, not writing a single word. I was staring at the black haired head in front of me. I had to clear my throat before saying:

„Sammy“ he looked up „come here.“

The boy jumped up and came to me without hesitation. A step away – one arm length – he stopped and stared at his feet. His tongue was trapped between his lips again. With slow, deliberate movements I opened up my arms for him and he climbed onto my lap. You didn't just pull children like Samuel onto your lap, they had to come themselves. I held him and all words vanished from my lips as his head rested on my shoulder. He must have heard my heart beating frantically but it didn't seem to faze him. I wanted to kiss his head but was too unsure to do so. I didn't know what memories were connected with kisses for Samuel. My stomach lay in knots at this thought. I had my son in my lap and couldn't kiss him because his life had been so thoroughly ruined by his own mother, he may be afraid of it.

For some reason I wasn't angry with her any more. In the beginning when I took Samuel in and slowly learned of the abuse, I had hated her. I had hated her so passionately I feared walking into her on the street. I would have twisted her neck.. The little boy I wished to give a home couldn't bear being touched. He would flinch when someone put a hand on his shoulder or made a sudden movement. If I raised my arm he would stumble back a few steps in fear. The simplest thing had to be retaught to him.

I still vividly remembered the first bath I run for him. When he saw it he broke down crying and hid under his bed. I learned his mother had scalded him with bubbling hot water and scrubbed his skin until it scratched open. It took him a long time until he came out from underneath the bed and went back into the bathroom on trembling knees. He still had to test the water before taking off his clothes. But I couldn't frown about this any longer because now I knew what it cost him to even enter the room.

Every time I encountered these memories and barricades I'd curse that woman, that cold blooded biest. I could have never believed a mother to be capable of that. Had a grown man told me his mother had mistreated him in his childhood, I wouldn't have believed it. Mothers didn't do that. I would have said he must have misunderstood. I would have thought him a wuss, a weakling. Now I feel ashamed for thinking something like this couldn't happen to a boy. Samuel wasn't weak, he was unbelievable strong. Every day he fought ghosts so strong they'd beat many a grown man. Every day he went to bed with another victory. He was healing, step by step, every day.

I had just had to learn what had happened to his mother. It was too unbelievable, too fantastical that a mother could hurt her child like that. I learned a lot that left me cold and numb. It explained a lot. But no explanation in the world could justify what she had done to my son. To understand what had caused her to do it could not excuse it. But since then I couldn't hate her anymore- I pitied her. She hadn't been strong enough to do it differently for her child. Now I know how important it was to overcome that hatred. Never could I have been able to explain to Samuel that she was ill, that it had nothing to do with him, when I didn't understand why she had become like that. How could I explain to him that he had to do it differently one day when all he knew was this behaviour. I stroked his hair and he hummed contently.

„Sammy.“, he hummed again „Thanks a lot. That is a wonderfull present.“

He hummed. His psychologist had once said that abused children needed a lot of reassurance. But in this moment I needed it more than her. I wanted to make sure that he knew: „I love you, Sammy.“

„I know.“, he murmured contently and a little sleepy „When you love me, you say 'Sammy' to me.“ I had to smile, I had never realized it. I layed my chin on top of his head „I always love you, Sammy.“