

STRETCHED

Mom's not all the way in the car when she asks if she ever told me she had her pee-hole stretched.

“Uh, no,” I answer, nodding to remind her Lauren is in the backseat as Mom swings her other leg in, sets her purse on her lap and pulls hard at the door. You’d think it was made of concrete.

I have the air on all the way because it helps Mom breathe. I pointed all the vents in her direction before we left the house.

“Anyway,” Mom starts back up and I open my eyes big and nod again back at Lauren, but Mom says, “She’s not paying attention.”

“Oh yes she is.”

I adjust the mirror to look at Lauren more carefully. She is paying way too much attention to her handheld video game.

“Oh well.” Mom waves her hand and tells me how it

had to be stretched, and asks if I was living in Hawaii or maybe Mississippi or where when it was done?

“How do I know? This is the first I’ve heard of it.”

I check carefully behind the car as I back out. I have to concentrate extra hard with other people in the car. I have extra blind spots, but I know where they are.

“I think that’s when they found the extra pouch on my bladder, too.”

I have heard about the extra pouch. Mom says Aunt Muff has one, too, but I never called to ask. This all seems too personal to me.

“Mom, can we talk about something else? I don’t think Lauren needs to hear this.”

“Well, I was thinking maybe hers needs stretched, too. She doesn’t pee near enough.”

I pull up at the apartment gate and wait for it to slide and let us out. Mom is quiet while I wait for the light onto O’Conner, which is crazy busy, and by the time we hit the light at 620 she’s lost her train of thought, started telling me some other story, something about the old ladies in the building. But she remembers it when we’re seated at the Cracker Barrel, where I order for her because she drives the waitresses crazy.

“She’d like her eggs over medium,” I tell a young woman with freckles. “She likes a little yolk, but not too runny and no crunchy brown stuff on the edges.” I raise my eyebrows when I speak so the waitress knows I think it’s too much but could she just indulge Mom, for my sake.

“No problem,” the girl answers and takes up the menus. Lauren will have chicken fingers. I’ll have the special. I always do, because it’s getting too hard to actually read the menu and everything here tastes the same. Mom is halfway through her eggs when she remembers the pee-hole.

“Did you have to have surgery?” I ask, taking a bite of a corn muffin.

“No, I think he did it in the office.”

“Really? That sounds surgical to me. Didn’t you need anesthesia?”

I’m beginning to reconsider encouraging her to tell me her secrets. I used to just tune her out or change the subject, especially when we were eating. Now I hear about pee-holes and her first orgasm and about how someone dug up the family burial ground.

“I don’t remember. It hurt like hell.”

“I bet it did.”

I look at Lauren. Usually she would be giggly at any mention of “pee.” I can only assume she really has tuned us out—or she’s worried we might have it done to her. In any case, she asks to go to the bathroom when she’s done eating. I stand outside the door, listening to a stream of water hitting the bowl hard for a long time. When we come out, Mom is at the register paying, telling the cashier how perfect her eggs were and how nice the waitress was. I slip back to the table and throw down another three bucks for the tip to make it an even five.