*Pharmacy Mother*

The pharmacist grimaced for me as I searched for my credit card.  Numbers tumbled around in my head as I pulled amounts from one account to replace negative amounts in others.  The brief calculation wrung the final reserves of my calm that had been under siege since this morning.  A shiver went through my body as I recalled the deep, barking sound that had served as my alarm earlier today.

                                                             \*         \*         \*

The beastly sounds of forced breathing had come from Mia’s room, wrenching the cobwebs of sleep from my mind.  I jumped out of bed.  Mia sat on the side of her bed; her little chest laboring so hard to bring air in and out of her lungs.  Her fists were striking her thighs as if she could fight her lungs to take in gulping breaths; but the worst- the worst was the barking cough that came with each exhale that strained through a puckered mouth.  Her face was red, her eyes gigantic in her face, but the obvious white ring around her lips signaled crisis.  How does one explain to a four-year-old that her illness is scary even for me, especially as she searches my face for her comfort?  I bundle Mia into her comforter, grab pink blankie, and rush to the ER.

“A new medication came out that was working miracles for chronic asthma,” the ER doctor stated.  “Mia’s ER visits will be a thing of the past.”

Taken daily the medication prevents attacks.  It *prevents.*  We would gain *whole* nights of sleep without the dread lurking in the shadows, waiting to strike when we were most vulnerable.

                                                             \*        \*        \*

Coming back to myself, a warm flush of panic grows from my hairline, little beads of sweat collect, and heat washes down my face until I could feel it in my toes. *Ok, if I only pay interest on the card this month…cut back driving on days off…this will be ok.*My shoulders slump, my lips puff out with a huge sigh.  *I’m behind on Mia’s medical bill from the last ER visit, but they were paid last month, so… that can go without paying.*  I attempt to maintain a straight face as I glance up at the pharmacist and hand her my card.  I am embarrassed that a tear hits the counter as the reality of our unending bills takes hold.  My voice cracks and then gets stronger as I ask her about assistance programs.  Her sympathy is clearly written across her brow, which also scrunches in frustration.  She has not heard of any, but as we are going to be filling this medication regularly, she can do some research for me.  My attempt at a smile only reaches a grimace as she hands me the pills.  Mia is in the cart behind me and I’ll not have her believing there’s a problem.  I take a deep breath and turn to Mia.

          “Mommy, since I was such a brave girl today, can I get a toy?”

          “No, my love.  We won’t be able to get anything else today.  I’m sorry, baby