

The protocol

Your children deserve the best.

Ralph Greco

"First time?" Mrs Samulsen asked.

"No, ah ..." Mrs McVane replied, poking her index finger into her magazine, "... ah, we ... we're old patients."

"Can't be too old," Mrs Samulsen chuckled. "I'd have seen ya ... I'm Samantha."

"Ah," Mrs McVane coughed. "Julia. Julia McVane."

"I hope you don't think I'm too forward," Mrs Samulsen said, leaning forward in the hard-backed chair.

Mrs McVane leaned back in hers.

"I mean, I don't usually get to talk to any of the other moms; everybody's in and out so fast," the taller lady explained. Flicking her fiery red ponytail to the quiet nurses' station at their left, she continued: "Forget talking to them, you fill out the monthly report and bam ..." at this Mrs McVane jumped "... they just slide that window shut."

"Yes," Mrs McVane said, attempting to light her eyes on the magazine tented on her leg.

"Doctor Reilly is the best though ..." Mrs Samulsen continued. "... I never felt he was pushing it on us, you know? He really worked to get Billy, that's my boy, he's five, the right one for our needs ..."

The verbose woman suddenly stopped, sat back, smiled and said: "... ADHD?"

"Oh, yes?" Julia asked.

Her magazine flopped into her lap.

"Well he is expensive, but, well ... I don't see why you have to necessarily hide your wealth," Mrs Samulsen continued. "I'm not saying flaunt it, but ... I hope I'm not talking out of turn here?" and here Mrs Samulsen finally took a breath. "Shouldn't parents want the best for their children?"

"Yes. Yes of course."

"I, well ... maybe I'm letting my mouth run a little too much."

"No, no, I ..."

"I mean, Billy was getting to the age where we couldn't not have him on something," Mrs Samulsen continued to the pretty dark face facing her. "I didn't want him missing school, having to repeat a course ... not make a team he wanted to be on."

"Of course."

"God knows we weren't going to be one of those couples."

"It's so sad that that still happens."

"It breaks my heart! I mean, who suffers? Keeping them off ... well, they just never fit in and you know how cruel kids can be."

"It really is a quality-of-life decision," Julia said.

"I mean, Billy is in an accelerated track, took him no time at all to be right in step with the rest of his class."

"Yes, everyone benefits."

"Sorry," Mrs Samulsen said, sitting back in her chair then sighing. "Like I said, there's never anybody here to talk to."



"How old is your son?" she added a minute later, her eyes still closed.

"He's ten. Ten," Julia heard herself say.

"You must have started him years ago?" Mrs Samulsen said, opening her eyes. "I really am preaching to the converted."

"Two thousand," Julia offered, turning to Mrs Samulsen to continue. "My husband's very active in the private science sector. He understood the protocol concept even before it went mainstream."

"Damned if I can understand it," Mrs Samulsen said and both women laughed. "But I know it works."

"Jack says ..."

"... like allergy treatments, building an immunity, right?" Mrs Samulsen finished then chuckled. "That's about as much as I understand it."

"You understand it fine," Julia smiled.

"Going to keep me in suspense, or you gonna tell me what you gave him?" Mrs Samulsen said after another ten seconds of silence.

Julia inhaled and regarded the magazine in her lap one last aching time.

"Well there really were very few things available mail-order at the time," she said looking up again. "A little dyslexia, maybe some hyperactivity, but you couldn't get much. There's no Doctor Reilly in

Greenpoint, I can tell you that."

Mrs Samulsen smiled wide, opened her mouth, but Julia continued.

"When we moved we finally decided on a low-grade reading problem — for Jacob, that's my son — but we've since matriculated him into full-blown dyslexia."

"Well, they have whole tracts for that nowadays," Mrs Samulsen said, beaming. "Yes, he's fit in perfectly."

"Do you have any other children?" Mrs Samulsen asked. "I mean, we only have little Billy but I always wonder if we'd give a second child the same protocol."

"Well, we might adopt, I don't kn ..."

"They say it's harder with them when they're not your own," Mrs Samulsen continued. "But they can still make pretty good progress inhibiting if they get them early."

"So how often do you have to come?" she added.

"Dyslexia takes a while to stick. We gave him three shots a week when he was younger, but now it's mostly maintenance," she said, the voice coming out of pretty lips obviously not her own.

"We're still in the early stages. I mean, the ADHD we chose is pretty extensive," Mrs Samulsen countered. "But like we said, you have to do what's best no matter the cost."

"Don't let anyone else tell you different ... Samantha?"

Mrs Samulsen — Samantha — beamed and placed her soft pale hand over the dark forearm of her new friend.

"Jacob you bring Billy outside now, okay?" the nurse said from behind the partition.

The single white wooden door that led from the waiting room into the doctor's examination room opened to the two women. Standing in the doorway was a bright-eyed little boy of no more than five, a mess of red curls surrounding his bobbing head. He was smiling, holding the hand of the bigger boy standing next to him, a handsome child with skin the colour of muted chocolate and eyes the same deep rich green as his mother's.

"Isn't that darling?" Mrs Samantha Samulsen said.

"We are blessed," Mrs Julia McVane agreed.

Ralph Greco is a freelance writer and ASCAP licensed musician, living in the wilds of New Jersey.

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