

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

[good description]

[try to simplify]

["says" is fine for dialog]

Summary: "Hannah's Turtles" is a story about two women who develop a friendship through an Autistic girl named Hannah. Cassie is Hannah's mother and Jen is a behavior therapist that provides home based services to Hannah and her family. Cassie's husband David is serving a 24 month sentence in a mandatory rehabilitation facility due to crimes related to his addiction to prescription pain medication. Dave loves his family and spends his rehabilitation time learning all he can about his daughter's autism and understanding the root of the inner pain he was trying to medicate. Jen is in an emotionally and mentally abusive marriage and finds herself questioning the harm it is doing to her children. Through their growing friendship they find the strength to face the issues in their lives. In a dramatic turn they also literally save the life of the precious autistic girl that brought them together. Each chapter shares the voice of both Jen and Cassie as they tell the story of their precious Hannah.

?how old is Hannah?

CHAPTER ONE: Jennifer

The smell of fresh ~~baking~~ dough and Italian spices encircles my head, like something out of an old cartoon, pulling me through the pizzeria door. An ear-piercing screech cuts through the wafting aromas, followed by a baby's cry. A second later, a foam cup with a plastic lid comes crashing to the floor, ice and liquid ~~specify~~ flowing everywhere. Instinctively, I look to where all the commotion is coming from, and I see her sitting at a table near the window in the back. She shifts her toddler from one knee to the other as she tries to get her older daughter to focus on getting back to eating.

Cassie Mitchell - my potential client. [unclear which is the client, most likely the mother]

A man comes out from behind the counter wearing a shirt with the name Joe stitched neatly along the top of the left pocket ~~simplify?~~. I assume he is the namesake of [the pizza place]

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where we have agreed to meet][isn't that where she is?][did we previously know the place was named Joe's?]. He doesn't look the least bit put out as he reaches for the mop and pail, carrying them over to the spill.

"Sorry, Joe!" the woman apologizes. "Hannah didn't mean it. I moved her cup to the other side of her plate because Katie was trying to grab a piece of her chicken tender breading.[chronological] She just didn't want it there. I'm so sorry!"

"No worries, Miss Cassie. I get it all cleaned up for Hannah!" he assures her ~~in his thick Italian accent~~[give the reader some credit].

Careful not to step in his way, I take a minute before I attempt to skirt around the mess. The extra time allows me a closer look at this woman I might be working with. Despite the clear challenge of an active toddler and another child throwing a drink, she looks remarkably put together in an effortless, casual way. Fine, blonde hair is pulled back into a bun at the nape of her neck. Wispy bangs and loose tendrils fall to frame her delicate features. She pairs a light blue, peasant-style blouse with jeans and slip-on sneakers [Similar in age and style] my darker color choice of maroon blouse with black jeans rolled to just above the ankles and black ballet flats enhance our contrasts. Where her look is light and airy, mine is ~~what people might call~~ [simplify]earthy. My chestnut hair flows long over my shoulders and, despite the hairdresser's assurance that the layers would allow for movement, it just [still?] comes across as bushy. My violet-blue eyes are unique in that one quarter of my left iris is brown, a fact that I have embraced more as I have grown older. It's the only feature that adds interest to my otherwise ordinary looks. [try to make this more parallel]

there's a lot

I reach the table and she looks up with a welcoming smile.

"Hi, I'm Jennifer O'Shea," I introduce myself. "You must be Cassie Mitchell?"

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"I am," she responds. "Forgive me if I don't get up, but I am finally getting them both to eat, and that is a huge accomplishment! Please join us."

"Thanks," I say. "This must be Hannah. Hello, Hannah."

Hannah continues to peel the breading from her chicken tenders as if she didn't hear me.

"Hannah, look at me," her mother directs. Once she has eye contact, she continues.

[tenses] "Say, 'Hello' to Ms. O'Shea."

"Hello to Ms. O'Shea." Hannah repeats the words like a parrot, and goes back to peeling the breading from her chicken.

"You can call me Jen," I tell them both, again not getting any response from Hannah.

"Sorry you walked in on all this. I moved Hannah's drink to the other side of her plate so grabby little fingers couldn't reach it," she says as she lovingly nuzzles her baby's neck, "And she threw it. It's not meant to be fresh. In Hannah's mind, the cup just didn't belong there. I'm glad the place isn't crowded at the moment. ~~I try to plan eating out when there aren't many people around.~~ Unfortunately, most people don't understand. I get stares or comments under their breath about 'if that was their child what they would do'! Sometimes, I just want to scream that she's not being bad, she is aAutistic!"

"Well, I understand completely and you won't be getting any evil eyes from me," I reassure her with a smile.

"Food is definitely one of her issues, as I am sure you can tell," Cassie laughs slightly. I am certain she is trying to make light of what must be a daily battle. "She loves the chicken tenders from Joe's, but has to peel the breading off. I have tried to order them without breading, but she won't eat them that way. She will only eat the chicken tenders from here, but I have to

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“Anything for my friend Hannah,” Joe says as he hands Cassie a fresh cup of soda.

“Do you know how hard it is to find a place like this? You are the best, Joe!” Cassie quips.

“You be sure and tell all your friends how great we are here. It's good for business,” Joe says in a professional like-way. But you can see in his eyes that he has a special place in his heart for this family. [It should have been my first indication that they were going to be more than just clients to me as well. [why tell us this?]

“Is food a problem with this beautiful little one, too?” I ask reaching out my hand to Hannah's younger sister. “Did you say her name is Katie?”

“Yes, this is Katie and her food issues are almost as bad as Hannah's. Hopefully, that's just a toddler thing she'll grow out of before she turns into a chicken tender herself.” Cassie laughs for real this time.

“I remember when my daughter was that age,” I said. “I thought she was going to eat baby cereal forever; she loved the stuff. Baby oatmeal, rice cereal, barley cereal, swirl a little applesauce in there, and she was in heaven. She would have it for breakfast, lunch, and dinner if it was her choice,” I said. “She still eats it every now and then, but has expanded her palate to include other foods as well.”

“If Katie benefits from Hannah's eating program, then you are truly going to be a sanity saver for this Mom. How old is your daughter now?” Cassie asked.

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"My daughter Sarah is 5 and my son Cole is 8. They are great kids but not without their own issues," I ~~said~~ laughed. "Does Hannah have any other brothers or sisters?"

"No, just Hannah and Katie is plenty." ~~Cassie replied.~~

"Does their Dad live with you?" I have worked with a wide variety of families so I have learned to ask.

"Their Dad does live with us," Cassie says hesitantly. But quickly adds, "He is going to be away for a bit, though, for work, so it will just be us girls for now."

I could tell by the catch in her voice and the quick change in her face that there was more to it than she let on. But, as far as the information I need, it was plenty [enough?] for me to know he would not be a part of our immediate training.

I take mental note and don't pull out my yellow legal pad just yet; I want to get a feel for the family first. Other behaviorists like to gather all the facts and information in the first meeting. I understand that, but it is not how I like to work myself. I've always been a person that feels things out, and will lead with my emotions and instinct. In many cases, personal life being a classic example, [it?] can be [self- inflictingly][?] painful. [It?] also happens to be what makes me very good at what I do. ^Q The children and their families that I work with are people, not "cases". I like to get to know them and have them get to know me as well. If you make a connection with a family, they are going to be more willing to trust you when you ask them to do the hard stuff. In order to help these children, there is going to be plenty of the hard stuff to get through before it gets better. And it can get better! I believe this to my core or I wouldn't be in this line of work.

Home Based Service [why capitalized?] is completely different from ~~than~~ working with children in a school or center setting. You are entering the family's home, making changes to

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their routine, setting up the structure and schedules that are crucial for their child's success.

These changes may not come naturally to them, and it's not easy to rethink all the details of daily life and adapt to their child's needs. If you make a connection, it helps make it a little easier for them.

"So how is Hannah with Katie? Do they interact much?" I asked.

"For the most part, Hannah does her thing and Katie plays around her. Hannah has her self-stimulatory behaviors, or "stims" that she does when she is excited or anxious. She flaps her hands and likes to shake her head from side to side real fast. Katie thinks this is hysterical and laughs herself silly when Hannah does it. She even tries to imitate her, and I know I should probably be worried, but it's just so damn cute, I end up laughing right along with them!"

I start smiling myself, just thinking about it and I have truly made up my mind that I am going to like working with this family very much!

Cassie

"I guess that went pretty well, ladies," Cassie says as she gets her daughters settled into the car after their lunch meeting. "I mean, we didn't send her running off screaming, so all in and all I would say it was a good first meeting. I think I am going to like her. What about you Hannah Girl? Are you going to like your new teacher, Jen O'Shea?" Cassie asks knowing she is not going to get any response.

In the seven years since Cassie and David had Hannah, she has never had a conversation with her daughter. She has had what teachers will call successful communication, but not a real

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conversation. Hannah can answer questions about what she wants to wear, this or that given two choices. You can ask if she wants a hot dog or grilled cheese for lunch. She can take your hand and lead you toward something she is looking for. But as for the rest, Cassie has no idea ~~for the~~ ~~most part~~ what her own child is thinking. She doesn't know her favorite color, or what her favorite song is. Which Disney princess is her favorite? Does she really like that much ketchup on her scrambled eggs or is she trying to drown out the taste of the eggs like Cassie did when she was a kid?

JULIE

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who

I find autism fascinating. I would like to hear/read more about Cassie and Jen's interactions with Hannah. And, how do the turtles come into play? What were David's crimes?

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scattering? spilling? splattering?

The ^

emerged

A young mother

Try to avoid "get"

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Julie

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while I

chose a

choice of

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one:

Important or mention later?

is the woman

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Have Joe take the mop every at some point

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Tighten & redundant info
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Talking directly to the reader here?

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WHY DIDN'T THEY FIRST MEET IN HANNAH'S HOME?
DO YOU KNOW AN AUTISTIC CHILD? VERY REALISTIC PORTRAYAL.
THIS STORY WILL EDUCATE READERS, LIKE THE CURIOUS INCIDENT
OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME AND RULES.

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Connie

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WE LEARNED NOTHING INTERESTING ABOUT JEN IN 1ST CHAPTER

TOO MUCH DETAIL ON EXTERIORS, NOT ENOUGH ON INTERIORS

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TOO MUCH DETAIL - YOU MAKE ONE OF THIS LATER

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WAY TOO MUCH DETAIL

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CORSI

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IS THIS A SCENE BREAK? HOPE NOT.

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"I remember when my daughter was that age. I thought she was going to eat baby cereal forever; she loved the stuff. Baby oatmeal, rice cereal, barley cereal, swirl a little applesauce in there and she was in heaven. She would have it for breakfast, lunch and dinner if it was her choice," I said. "She still eats it every now and then, but has expanded her pallet to include other foods as well."

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YOU HAVE ALREADY COMMITTED TO PRESENT TENSE

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IS PERSONAL LIFE A CASE?

PREACHY
TALKING OUT
STRAW

good at what I do. The children and their families that I work with are people, not "cases". I like to get to know them and have them get to know me as well. If you make a connection with a family they are going to be more willing to trust you when you ask them to do the hard stuff. In order to help these children, there is going to be plenty of the hard stuff to get through before it gets better. And it can get better! I believe this to my core or I wouldn't be in this line of work.

Home Based Service is completely different than working with children in a school or center setting. You are entering the family's home, making changes to their routine, setting up the structure and schedules that are crucial for their child's success. These changes may not come naturally to them and it's not easy to rethink all the details of daily life and adapt to their child's needs. If you make a connection it helps make it a little easier for them.

FROM
A
BOOKLINE!

"So how is Hannah with Katie? Do they interact much?" I asked.

"For the most part Hannah does her thing and Katie plays around her. Hannah has her self-stimulatory behaviors, or "stims" that she does when she is excited or anxious. She flaps her

STILTED

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

hands and likes to shake her head from side to side real fast. Katie thinks this is hysterical and laughs herself silly when Hannah does it. She even tries to imitate her and I know I should probably be worried, but it's just so damn cute I end up laughing right along with them!"

I start smiling myself just thinking about it and I have truly made up my mind that I am going to like working with this family very much!

UGH
SACCHARINE

Cassie

"I guess that went pretty well ladies," Cassie says as she gets her daughters settled into the car after their lunch meeting. "I mean we didn't send her running off screaming, so all and all I would say it was a good first meeting. I think I am going to like her. What about you Hannah Girl? Are you going to like your new teacher, Jen O'Shea?" Cassie asks knowing she is not going to get any response.

SCENE BREAK?

In the seven years since Cassie and David had Hannah she has never had a conversation with her daughter. She has had what teachers will call successful communication, but not a real conversation. Hannah can answer questions about what she wants to wear, this or that given two choices. You can ask if she wants a hot dog or grilled cheese for lunch. She can take your hand and lead you toward something she is looking for. But as for the rest, Cassie has no idea for the most part what her own child is thinking. She doesn't know her favorite color, or what her favorite song is. Which Disney princess is her favorite? Does she really like that much ketchup on her scrambled eggs or is she trying to drown out the taste of the eggs like Cassie did when she was a kid?

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

Karen-

You've chosen a very difficult topic to deal with and not become drippy. The reader will live with some uncomfortable situations – Cassie having to deal with two children, one being autistic. It seems impossible, but you've introduced a therapist who has to step in and be the super woman who saves the day. Your job is to establish the difficulty, and then allow the reader to follow the progression of the family.

In your summary, I guess we'll follow two families learning to deal with problems. No simple task.

One suggestion is to help the reader understand where he/she is in the story. The opening paragraphs are a good example. Walk me through the movement in the pizza place. I was lost, and you can't have a lost reader.

Another problem for me – I'm weak in this area – in the first six pages, you've introduced six characters. Even if they're physically not in the chapter, the reader must account for another name. I had to stop and write a list of characters, just to keep them straight.

Good luck with this very aggressive novel.

Dave

Summary: "Hannah's Turtles" is a story about two women who develop a friendship through an Autistic girl named Hannah. Cassie is Hannah's mother and Jen is a behavior therapist that provides home based services to Hannah and her family. Cassie's husband David is serving a 24 month sentence in a mandatory rehabilitation facility due to crimes related to his addiction to prescription pain medication. Dave loves his family and spends his rehabilitation time learning all he can about his daughter's autism and understanding the root of the inner pain he was trying to medicate. Jen is in an emotionally and mentally abusive marriage and finds herself questioning the harm it is doing to her children. Through their growing friendship they find the strength to face the issues in their lives. In a dramatic turn they also literally save the life of the precious autistic girl that brought them together. Each chapter shares the voice of both Jen and Cassie as they tell the story of their precious Hannah.

CHAPTER ONE: Jennifer

The smell of fresh baking dough and Italian spices encircles my head, like something out of an old cartoon, pulling me through the pizzeria door. An ear-piercing screech cuts through the wafting aromas, followed by a baby's cry. A second later a foam cup with a plastic lid comes crashing to the floor, ice and liquid flowing everywhere. *(Where is Jennifer? At a table?)*

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

Standing in the foyer waiting for a table? At a counter, when her attention was drawn to the mess? I need to be grounded.) Instinctively I look to where all the commotion is coming from and I see *her* *(Don't be coy here. This is our first look at a major character. Calling her 'her' weakens the introduction. Use the description that follows. "I see a woman juggling a toddler on one knee and another daughter, distracted from her meal." Something like that.)* sitting at a table near the window in the back. She shifts her toddler from one knee to the other as she tries to get her older daughter to focus on getting back to eating.

Cassie Mitchell - my potential client. *(Is this a title to a chapter? Is the following from Cassie Mitchell's POV? Are you simply saying that the woman you've described is Cassie Mitchell her newest client. Why don't you just say that and avoid the confusion?)*

A man (Again, weak intro. Say Joe, the proprietor, or whatever. Just saying the man is weak.) comes out from behind the counter wearing a shirt with the name Joe stitched neatly along the top of the left pocket. ~~I assume he is the namesake of the pizza place where we have agreed to meet.~~ *(Duh!)* He doesn't look the least bit put out as he reaches for the mop and pail carrying them over to the spill.

"Sorry Joe!" the woman apologizes. "Hannah didn't mean it. I moved her cup to the other side of her plate because Katie was trying to grab a piece of *her* *(Katie's or Hannah's breading?)* chicken tender breading. She just didn't want it there. I'm so sorry!"

"No worries Miss Cassie. I get it all cleaned up for Hannah!" he assures her in his thick Italian accent.

Careful not to step in his way, I take a minute before I attempt to skirt around the mess. *(Again, I'm not grounded in a place. Where is she in the restaurant?)* The extra time allows me a closer look at this woman I may be working with. Despite the clear challenge of an active toddler

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

and another child throwing a drink, she looks remarkably put together in an effortless, casual way. Fine, blonde hair is pulled back into a bun at the nape of her neck. Wispy bangs and loose tendrils fall to frame her delicate features. She pairs a light blue, peasant-style blouse with jeans and slip on sneakers. *(New paragraph)* Similar in age and style *to me*, my darker color choice of maroon blouse with black jeans rolled to just above the ankles and black ballet flats enhance our contrasts. Where her look is light and airy, mine is what people might call earthy. My chestnut hair flows long over my shoulders and despite the hairdresser's assurance that the layers would allow for movement it just comes across as bushy. My violet-blue eyes are unique in that one quarter of my left iris is brown, a fact that I have embraced more as I have grown older. It's the only feature that adds interest to my otherwise ordinary looks. *(The speaker's self-description is three times as long as the object of her curiosity. A bit self-absorbed.)*

I reach the table and she looks up with a welcoming smile.

"Hi, I'm Jennifer O'Shea," ~~I introduce myself.~~ *(Redundant.)* "You must be Cassie Mitchell?"

"I am," she responds. "Forgive me if I don't get up, ~~but I am finally getting them both to eat and that is a huge accomplishment!~~ Please join us."

~~"Thanks," I say.~~ "This must be Hannah? Hello, Hannah." *(She sits?)*

Hannah continued to peel the breading from her chicken tenders as if she didn't hear me.

"Hannah, look at me," her mother directed. Once she had eye contact she continued. "Say Hello to Ms. O'Shea."

"Hello to Ms. O'Shea." Hannah *said* ~~repeated the words like a parrot, and~~ went back to peeling the breading from her chicken.

"You can call me Jen," I tell them both, again not getting any response from Hannah.

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

~~"Sorry you walked in on all this. I moved Hannah's drink to the other side of her plate so grabby little fingers couldn't reach it."~~ ^{Repeat} ~~(Delete)~~ she says as she lovingly nuzzles her baby's neck, ~~"And she threw it. It's not meant to be fresh. In Hannah's mind the cup just didn't belong there. I'm glad the place isn't crowded at the moment. I try to plan eating out when there aren't many people around. Unfortunately most Most people don't understand. I get stares or comments under their breath about if that was their child what they would do! Sometimes I just want to scream that she's not being bad,. she She is Autistic!"~~

"Well I understand completely and you won't be getting any evil eyes from me." I reassure her with a smile.

"Food is definitely one of her issues as I am sure you can tell," Cassie laughs slightly. I am certain she is trying to make light of what must be a daily battle. "She *Hannah* loves the chicken tenders from Joe's but has to peel the breading off. I have tried to order them without breading but she won't eat them that way. She will only eat the chicken tenders from here, but I have to stop on the way and get her fries from her favorite fast food place. I am so glad Joe here understands and lets us bring them in. "

"Anything for my friend Hannah," Joe says as he hands Cassie a fresh cup of soda.

"Do you know how hard it is to find a place like this? You are the best Joe!" Cassie *quips* *(quips? odd comment)*.

"You be sure and tell all your friends how great we are here. ~~It's good for business,~~" Joe says ~~in his all professional like way. But you~~ ^{You} can see in his eyes that he has a special place in his heart for this family. *It should have been my first indication that they were going to be more than just clients to me as well. (Confusing sentence. Referring to Joe? Or Cassie?)*

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

"Is food a problem with this beautiful little one too?" I ask reaching out my hand to Hannah's younger sister. "Did you say her name is Katie?"

"Yes, this is Katie and her food issues are almost as bad as Hannah's. *(Cassie said.)* Hopefully that's just a toddler thing she will grow out of before *she turns into a chicken tender herself.*" *(Confused. Who is eating the tender? Is Katie a tender eater herself? I thought it was Hannah who peeled the tender.)* Cassie laughs for real this time.

"I remember when my daughter was that age. *(I said)* I thought she was going to eat baby cereal forever; she loved the stuff. Baby oatmeal, rice cereal, barley cereal, swirl a little applesauce in there and she was in heaven. She would have it for breakfast, lunch and dinner if it was her choice," ~~I said.~~ "She still eats it every now and then, but has expanded her pallet to include other foods as well." *(I don't think a therapist would involve her own family so soon into the relationship.)*

"If Katie *(also)* benefits from Hannah's eating program then you are truly going to be a sanity saver for this Mom. How old is your daughter now?" Cassie asked.

"My daughter, Sarah, is 5, and my son, Cole, is 8. They are great kids but not without their own issues,," I laughed. "Does Hannah have any other brothers or sisters?"

"No, just Hannah and Katie is *(are)* plenty." Cassie replied.

"Does their Dad live with you?" I have worked with a wide variety of families so I have learned to ask. *Good point*

"Their Dad does live with us," Cassie says hesitantly. But quickly adds, "He is going to be away for a bit though, for work, so it will just be us girls for now."

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

I could tell by the catch in her voice and the quick change in her face that there was more to it than she let on. But as far as the information I need, it was plenty for me to know he would not be a part of our immediate training. (good insight.)

I take mental note and don't pull out my yellow legal pad just yet; I want to get a feel for the family first. Other behaviorists like to gather all the facts and information in the first meeting. I understand that, but it is not how I like to work myself. I've always been a person that feels things out and will lead with my emotions and instinct. In many cases, personal life being a classic example, it can be self-inflictingly painful. It also happens to be what makes me very good at what I do. The children and their families that I work with are people, not "cases". I like to get to know them and have them get to know me as well. If you make a connection with a family they are going to be more willing to trust you when you ask them to do the hard stuff. In order to help these children, there is going to be plenty of the hard stuff to get through before it gets better. And it can get better! I believe this to my core or I wouldn't be in this line of work.

(This is a long paragraph of self-promotion. As the story goes on, the readers should watch her in action and come to the same conclusions without being led or told how to think.)

Home Based Service is completely different than working with children in a school or center setting. You are entering the family's home, making changes to their routine, setting up the structure and schedules that are crucial for their child's success. These changes may not come naturally to them and it's not easy to rethink all the details of daily life and adapt to their child's needs. If you make a connection it helps make it a little easier for them. (More table setting. Let the story evolve without the lecture.)

“So how is Hannah with Katie? Do they interact much?” I asked.

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

“For the most part Hannah does her thing and Katie plays around her. Hannah has her self-stimulatory behaviors, or “stims” that she does when she is excited or anxious. She flaps her hands and likes to shake her head from side to side real fast. Katie thinks this is hysterical and laughs herself silly when Hannah does it. She even tries to imitate her and I know I should probably be worried, but it’s just so damn cute I end up laughing right along with them!”

I start smiling myself just thinking about it and I have truly made up my mind that I am going to like working with this family very much!

Cassie

1st person?

“I guess that went pretty well ladies,” Cassie says as she gets her daughters settled into the car after their lunch meeting. “I mean we didn’t send her running off screaming, so all and all I would say it was a good first meeting. I think I am going to like her. What about you Hannah Girl? Are you going to like your new teacher, Jen O’Shea?” Cassie asks knowing she is not going to get any response.

In the seven years since Cassie and David had Hannah she has never had a conversation with her daughter. She has had what teachers will call successful communication, but not a real conversation. Hannah can answer questions about what she wants to wear, this or that given two choices. You can ask if she wants a hot dog or grilled cheese for lunch. She can take your hand and lead you toward something she is looking for. But as for the rest, Cassie has no idea for the most part what her own child is thinking. She doesn't know her favorite color, or what her favorite song is. Which Disney princess is her favorite? Does she really like that much ketchup

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

on her scrambled eggs or is she trying to drown out the taste of the eggs like Cassie did when she was a kid?

(In this last Cassie section, the two paragraphs are disconnected. Both are important, but could you work the disappointments of the second paragraph into an active one-sided dialogue with her thoughts as a narrative within the dialogue? This would be the place to show the difficulty and emptiness of having an autistic child. And, also, your writing chops. Let us live with the characters, rather than being told about them.)

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

Summary: "Hannah's Turtles" is a story about two women who develop a friendship through an Autistic girl named Hannah. Cassie is Hannah's mother, and Jen is a behavior therapist that provides home based services to Hannah and her family. Cassie's husband David is serving a 24 month sentence in a mandatory rehabilitation facility due to crimes related to his addiction to prescription pain medication. Dave loves his family and spends his rehabilitation time learning all he can about his daughter's autism and understanding the root of the inner pain he was trying to medicate. Jen is in an emotionally and mentally abusive marriage and finds herself questioning the harm it is doing to her children. Through their growing friendship they find the strength to face the issues in their lives. In a dramatic turn they also literally save the life of the precious autistic girl that brought them together. Each chapter shares the voice of both Jen and Cassie as they tell the story of their precious Hannah.

Jen's Comments

CHAPTER ONE: Jennifer

The smell of fresh baking dough and Italian spices encircles my head, like something out of an old cartoon, pulling me through the pizzeria door. An ear-piercing screech cuts through the wafting aromas, followed by a baby's cry. A second later, a foam cup with a plastic lid ~~comes~~ crashing to the floor, ice and ^{soda} liquid flowing everywhere. Instinctively I look to where all the commotion is coming from, and I see her sitting at a table near the window in the back. She shifts her toddler from one knee to the other as she tries to get her older daughter to focus on getting back to eating.

Cassie Mitchell ~~is~~ my potential client.

A man ~~comes out~~ from behind the counter wearing a shirt with the name Joe stitched neatly along ~~the top of~~ the left pocket. I assume he is the namesake of the pizza place where we have agreed to meet. He doesn't look the least bit put out as he ~~carries~~ ~~reaches for~~ the mop and pail ~~carrying them~~ over to the spill.

Comment [PHS 1S1]: Use em dash, not hyphen.

Comment [PHS 1S2]: Use stronger verb

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

"Sorry, Joe!" ~~Cassie savsthe-woman apologizes.~~ "Hannah didn't mean it. I moved her cup to the other side of her plate because Katie was trying to grab a piece of her chicken tender breading. She just didn't want it there. I'm so sorry."

"No worries, Miss Cassie. I get it all cleaned up for Hannah!" he assures her in his thick Italian accent.

Careful not to step in his way, I take a minute before I attempt to skirt around the mess. The extra time allows me a closer look at this woman I may be working with.

Despite the clear challenge of an active toddler and another child throwing a drink, she looks remarkably put together in an effortless, casual way. Fine, blonde hair is pulled back into a bun at the nape of her neck. Wispy bangs and loose tendrils fall to frame her delicate features. She pairs a light blue, peasant-style blouse with jeans and slip-on sneakers.

Similar in age and style, my darker color choice of maroon blouse with black jeans rolled to just above the ankles and black ballet flats enhance our contrasts. Where her look is light and airy, mine is what people might call earthy. My chestnut hair flows long over my shoulders and despite the hairdresser's assurance that the layers would allow for movement it just comes across as bushy. My violet-blue eyes are unique in that one quarter of my left iris is brown, a fact that I have embraced more as I have grown older. It's the only feature that adds interest to my otherwise ordinary looks.

I reach the table and she looks up with a welcoming smile.

"Hi, I'm Jennifer O'Shea," I ~~say~~ introduce myself. "You must be Cassie Mitchell?"

"I am," she responds. "Forgive me if I don't get up, but I am finally getting them both to eat and ~~that~~ ^{that's} is a huge accomplishment. Please join us."

"Thanks," I say. "This must be Hannah? Hello, Hannah."

misplaced modifier

Comment [PHS 1S3]: Shorten this. Too much description, it slows the story down.

Comment [PHS 1S4]: Use exclamation points sparingly.

keep dialogue tags as "say" or "said" - these tend to just disappear which is what you want.

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

Hannah ~~continuesd~~ to peel the breading from her chicken tenders as if she didn't hear me.

"Hannah, look at me," her mother ~~directsed~~. Once she ^{has} had eye contact she ^{continues} continued.

"Say ~~H~~ello to Ms. O'Shea."

"Hello to Ms. O'Shea." Hannah repeated the words like a parrot, and ~~went-goes~~ back to peeling the breading from her chicken.

"You can call me Jen," I tell them both, again not getting any response from Hannah.

"Sorry you walked in on all this. I moved Hannah's drink to the other side of her plate so grabby little fingers couldn't reach it," she says as she lovingly nuzzles her baby's neck, "And she threw it. It's not meant to be fresh. In Hannah's mind, the cup just didn't belong there." She looks around the restaurant. "I'm glad the place isn't crowded at the moment. I try to plan eating out when there aren't many people around. Unfortunately most people don't understand. I get stares or comments under their breath about if that was their child what they would do." Sometimes I just want to scream that she's not being bad, she is Autistic!"

"Well, I understand completely. ~~and-y~~ You won't be getting any evil eyes from me." I reassure her with a smile.

"Food is definitely one of her issues as I'm-am sure you can tell," Cassie laughs slightly. I'm-am certain she's is trying to make light of what must be a daily battle. "She loves the chicken tenders from Joe's but has to peel the breading off. ^{I've} I have tried to order them without breading, but she won't eat them that way. She will only eat the chicken tenders from here, but I have to stop on the way and get her fries from her favorite fast food place. I'm-am so glad Joe here understands and lets us bring them in. "

"Anything for my friend Hannah," Joe says as he hands Cassie a fresh cup of soda.

Comment [PHS 155]: You start in present tense. But then shift to past tense.

Keep verb tenses consistent

You write "I have" but you read "I've" out loud. Use more contractions.

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

"Do you know how hard it is to find a place like this? You are the best Joe!" Cassie ~~says~~ ~~quips~~.

"You be sure and tell all your friends how great we are here. It's good for business," Joe says in his all professional like way. But you can see in his eyes that he has a special place in his heart for this family. It should have been my first indication that they were going to be more than just clients to me as well.

"Is food a problem with this beautiful little one, too?" I ask reaching out my hand to Hannah's younger sister. "Did you say her name is Katie?"

"Yes, this is Katie and her food issues are almost as bad as Hannah's. Hopefully that's just a toddler thing she ~~ll~~ ~~will~~ grow out of before she turns into a chicken tender herself." Cassie laughs for real this time.

"I remember when my daughter was that age. I thought she was going to eat baby cereal forever; she loved the stuff. Baby oatmeal, rice cereal, barley cereal, swirl a little applesauce in there and she was in heaven. She would have it for breakfast, lunch and dinner if it was her choice," I ~~say~~ ~~said~~. "She still eats it every now and then, but has expanded her pallet to include other foods as well."

"If Katie benefits from Hannah's eating ^{plan} ~~program~~, then you are truly going to be a sanity saver for this Mom. How old is your daughter now?" Cassie asked.

"My daughter Sarah is ~~five~~5 and my son Cole is ~~eight~~8. They ~~re~~ ~~are~~ great kids but not without their own issues," I ~~laughed~~. "Does Hannah have any other brothers or sisters?"

"No, just Hannah and Katie is plenty," Cassie ~~replied~~.

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

"Does their ~~D~~ad live with you?" I have worked with a wide variety of families so I have ^{I've} learned to ask.

"Their ~~D~~ad does live with us," Cassie says hesitantly. But quickly adds, "He is going to be away for a bit though, for work, so it will just be us girls for now."

I could tell by the catch in her voice and the quick change in her face that there was more to it than she let on. But as far as the information I need, it was plenty for me to know he would not be a part of our immediate training.

I take mental note and don't pull out my yellow legal pad just yet; I want to get a feel for the family first. Other behaviorists like to gather all the facts and information in the first meeting. I understand that, but it is not how I like to work ~~myself~~. I've always been a person that feels things out and will lead with my emotions and instinct. In many cases, personal life being a classic example, it can be self-inflictingly painful. It also happens to be what makes me very good at what I do.

The children and their families that I work with are people, not "cases". I like to get to know them and have them get to know me as well. If you make a connection with a family, they are going to be more willing to trust you when you ask them to do the hard stuff. In order to help these children, ^{there's} there is going to be plenty of the hard stuff to get ~~th~~rough before it gets better. And it can get better, ^I I believe this to my core or I wouldn't be in this line of work.

^{you're} Home Based Service is completely different than working with children in a school or center setting. You are entering the family's home, making changes to their routine, setting up the structure and schedules that are crucial for their child's success. These changes may not come naturally to them and it's not easy to rethink all the details of daily life and adapt to their child's needs. If you make a connection it helps make it a little easier for them.

Comment [PHS IS6]: This is too much like a text book and pulls me out of the story. This info can come in when Jen starts working with Hannah.

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

"So how is Hannah with Katie? Do they interact much?" I asked.

"For the most part Hannah does her thing, and Katie plays around her. Hannah has her self-stimulatory behaviors, or "stims" that she does when she is excited or anxious. She flaps her hands and likes to shake her head from side to side real fast. Katie thinks this is hysterical and laughs herself silly when Hannah does it. She even tries to imitate her, and I know I should probably be worried, but it's just so damn cute I end up laughing right along with them."

I ~~start~~ ^{smile} smiling myself just thinking about it and I have truly made up my mind that I am going to like working with this family very much.

Cassie

"I guess that went pretty well, ladies," Cassie says as she gets her daughters settled into the car after their lunch meeting. "I mean we didn't send her running off screaming, so all and all I would say it was a good first meeting. I think I ~~m-am~~ going to like her. What about you Hannah Girl? Are you going to like your new teacher, Jen O'Shea?" Cassie asks, knowing she is not going to get any response.

In the seven years since Cassie and David had Hannah, she has never had a conversation with her daughter. She has had what teachers ~~will~~ call successful communication, but not a real conversation. Hannah can answer questions about what she wants to wear, this or that given two choices. You can ask if she wants a hot dog or grilled cheese for lunch. She can take your hand and lead you toward something she is looking for. But as for the rest, Cassie has no ~~idea for the most part~~ what her own child is thinking. She doesn't know her favorite color, or ~~what~~ her

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

favorite song is. Which Disney princess is her favorite? Does she really like that much ketchup on her scrambled eggs or is she trying to drown out the taste of the eggs like Cassie did when she was a kid?

Comment [PHS 157]: This is all "telling", try showing this instead.

Susan

G: 23

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

Summary: "Hannah's Turtles" is a story about two women who develop a friendship through an autistic girl named Hannah. Cassie is Hannah's mother and Jen is a behavior therapist that provides home based services to Hannah and her family. Cassie's husband David is serving a 24 month sentence in a mandatory rehabilitation facility due to crimes related to his addiction to prescription pain medication. Dave loves his family and spends his rehabilitation time learning all he can about his daughter's autism and understanding the root of the inner pain he was trying to medicate. Jen is in an emotionally and mentally abusive marriage and finds herself questioning the harm it is doing to her children. Through their growing friendship, they find the strength to face the issues in their lives. In a dramatic turn, they also literally save the life of the precious autistic girl that brought them together. Each chapter shares the voice of both Jen and Cassie as they tell the story of their precious Hannah.

Lisa Genova

Comment [s1]: Quick note. This is a nice summary of the story, but you'll also need to create a one or two sentence summary for when you query your book. Something to think about.

CHAPTER ONE: Jennifer

good setting for starting the story

The smell of fresh baking dough and Italian spices encircles my head, like something out of an old cartoon, pulling me through the pizzeria door. An ear-piercing screech cuts through the wafting aromas, followed by a baby's cry. A second later, a foam cup with a plastic lid comes crashing to the floor, the plastic lid popping off, ice and liquid flowing everywhere. Instinctively I look to where all the commotion is coming from and

Comment [s2]: Personally not crazy about this comparison, plus it kind of confused me; I think you can delete it. I like the rest of the sentence.

> tightening language

Turning my head, I am almost certain that this commotion is coming from my potential client, Cassie Mitchell. A mother, her daughter and baby I-see-her are sitting at a table near the window in the back. She shifts her toddler from one knee to the other as she tries to get help her older daughter to focus on getting back to eating.

Cassie Mitchell—my potential client.

A man comes out hustles from behind the counter, wearing a shirt with the name Joe stitched neatly along the top of the his left shirt pocket. I assume he is Joe is the namesake of the

- make language more casual
- stay in the scene → don't need excessive description pulls reader away
- watch tenses

WOMEN'S FICTION: HANNAH'S TURTLES BY KAREN CORSI

pizza place where we have agreed to meet. He doesn't look the least bit put out as he reaches for the mop and pail carrying them over to the spill.

"Sorry, Joe!" the woman ~~apologizes~~says. "Hannah didn't mean it. ~~I moved her cup to the other side of her plate because Katie was trying to grab a piece of her chicken tender breading. She just didn't want it there. I'm so sorry!~~"

Comment [s3]: Too much explanation

"No worries, Miss Cassie. I get it all cleaned up for Hannah!" he ~~assures~~says ~~her~~ in his thick Italian accent.

Careful not to step in his way, I take a minute before ~~I attempt~~attempting to skirt around the mess. ~~The extra time allows me a closer look at this woman I may be working with.~~ Despite the clear challenge of an active toddler and another child throwing a drink, ~~she~~the mother looks remarkably put together in an effortless, casual way. Fine, blonde hair is pulled back into a bun at the nape of her neck. Wispy bangs and loose tendrils fall to frame her delicate features. She pairs a light blue, peasant-style blouse with jeans and slip on sneakers. Similar in age and style, my darker color choice of maroon blouse with black jeans rolled to just above the ankles and black ballet flats enhance our contrasts. Where her look is light and airy, mine is what people might call earthy. My chestnut hair flows long over my shoulders and despite the hairdresser's assurance that the layers would allow for movement it just comes across as bushy. My violet-blue eyes are unique in that one quarter of my left iris is brown, a fact that I have embraced more as I have grown older. It's the only feature that adds interest to my otherwise ordinary looks.

Comment [s4]: Tell us here why she thinks it's her client. Just one sentence is enough-doesn't have to give away everything, but tell the reader something

I weave into the story

I reach the table. ~~and~~sShe looks up with a welcoming smile.

"Hi, I'm Jennifer O'Shea," I ~~introduce myself~~say. "You must be Cassie Mitchell?"

"I am," she ~~responds~~says. "Forgive me if I don't get up, but I ~~am~~ finally getting them both to eat ~~and that is~~ a huge accomplishment! Please join us."

Comment [s5]: Pick one feature and then introduce the rest of this description throughout the scene. This is too much info regarding what everyone looks like; pulls the reader out of the story.

Comment [s6]: When you edit, look throughout your story for words that you can combine into a contraction; it makes the speech more casual

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"Thanks," I say. "This must be Hannah? Hello, Hannah."

Hannah continued to peel the breading from her chicken tenders as if she didn't hear me.

"Hannah, look at me," her mother directed. Once she had eye contact she continued. "Say

Hello to Ms. O'Shea."

"Hello to Ms. O'Shea." Hannah repeated the words like a parrot, and went back to peeling the breading from her chicken.

"You can call me Jen," I tell them both say/said, again not getting any response from Hannah.

Cassie sighs. "Sorry you walked in on all this. I moved Hannah's drink to the other side of her plate so grabby-little-fingersKatie couldn't reach it," she says as she lovingly nuzzles her baby's neck, "And-and she threw it. It's not meantShe doesn't mean to be fresh. In Hannah's mind the cup just didn't belong there. I'm glad the place isn't crowded at the moment. I try to plan eating out when there aren't many people around. Unfortunately most people don't understand. I get stares or comments under their breath about if that was their child what they would do! Sometimes I just want to scream that she's not being bad, she is Autistic!"

"Well I understand completely. Y-and you won't be getting any evil eyes from me." I reassure her with a smile.

"Food is definitely one of her issues, as I am sure you can tell," Cassie laughs slightly. I am certain she's trying to make light of what must be a daily battle. "She loves the chicken tenders from Joe's here, but has to peel the breading off. I've tried to order them without breading, but she won't eat them that way." She sighs and brushes a stray hair away from her face. "And, sShe'll only eat the chicken tenders from here, but I have to stop on the way and

Comment [s7]: Quick description of Hannah (age and one feature). Then tell us how Jennifer interacts with her. Does she touch Hannah? Lean over to talk to her? Etc.

Comment [s8]: "doesn't" if you are sticking with present tense

Comment [s9]: Again, "directs" if you are going with present tense. But in most cases, you should just say "said" or "says" depending on tense

Comment [s10]: This is where you can tell us Katie's name

Comment [s11]: This seems like a lot for her to say when she's trying to deal with a toddler and her baby. I would go back and forth on this-break it up into chunks and have her and Jen go back and forth with shorter sentences

Comment [s12]: good

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get her fries from her favorite fast food place. I'-am so glad-grateful that Joe here is so understands-understanding and lets us bring them in. "

Comment [s13]: Don't get me started on giving little kids fast food...

"Anything for my friend Hannah," Joe says, as he hands Cassie a fresh cup of soda.

Comment [s14]: How old is Hannah?

"Do you know how hard it is to find a place like this? You are the best, Joe!" Cassie quips.

"You be sure and tell all your friends how great we are here. It's good for business," Joe says in his all professional-professional-like way. But you can see in his eyes that he has a special place in his heart for this family. It should have been my first indication that they were going to be more than just clients to me, as weHtoo.

"Is food a problem with this beautiful little one, too?" I ask, reaching out my hand to Hannah's younger sister. "Did you say her name is Katie?"

"Yes, this is Katie. H-and her food issues are almost as bad as Hannah's. Hopefully that's just a toddler thing she'-will grow out of before she turns into a chicken tender herself." Cassie laughs for real this time.

(put physical tag here) "I remember when my daughter was that age," I say. "I thought she was going to eat baby cereal forever; she loved the stuff. Baby oatmeal, rice cereal, barley cereal—, swirl a little applesauce in there and she was in heaven. She would'-have had it for breakfast, lunch and dinner if it was-had been her choice," I said. "She still eats it every now and then, but has expanded her pallet to include other foods as well."

Comment [s15]: Say or said-again, watch tense

"If Katie benefits from Hannah's eating program, then you are truly going to be a sanity saver for this Mom. How old is your daughter now?" Cassie asked.

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"My daughter Sarah is 5 and my son Cole is 8. They ~~are're~~ great kids, but not without their own issues," I laughed. "Does Hannah have any other brothers or sisters?"

Comment [s16]: Laugh?

"No, just Hannah and Katie is plenty." Cassie replied.

Comment [s17]: Physical tag? Does she set her mouth, roll her eyes, raise her eyebrows?

"Does their Dad live with you?" I ~~have~~ worked with a wide variety of families; ~~so I~~ have learned to ask.

"Their Dad does live with us," Cassie says, hesitantly. ~~But-She~~ quickly adds, "He ~~is~~ going to be away for a bit though, for work, so it will just be us girls for now."

I ~~could tell by the catch in her voice and the quick change in her face that there~~ ~~There~~ was ~~obviously~~ more to ~~it-this story~~ than she let on. But as far as the information I need, it was plenty for me to know he would not be a part of our immediate training.

Comment [s18]: Already just told us this

I take mental note and don't pull out my yellow legal pad just yet; I want to get a feel for the family first. Other behaviorists like to gather all the facts and information in the first meeting.

~~I understand that, but it is~~ ~~It's~~ not how I like to work ~~myself~~. I've always been a person ~~that feels things out and will~~ ~~who~~ leads with ~~my~~ emotions and instinct. In many cases, personal life being a classic example, it can be self-inflictingly painful. It also happens to be what makes me very good at what I do. The children and their families that I work with are people, not "cases". I like to get to know them and have them get to know me as well. If you make a connection with a family they are going to be more willing to trust you when you ask them to do the hard stuff. In order to help these children, there is going to be plenty of the hard stuff to get through before it gets better. And it can get better! I believe this to my core or I wouldn't be in this line of work.

Comment [s19]: 'who' instead of 'that' since you are referring to a person here, not a thing

Comment [s20]: ?

Home Based Service is completely different than working with children in a school or center setting. You are entering the family's home, making changes to their routine, setting up the structure and schedules that are crucial for their child's success. These changes may not come

Comment [s21]: The rest of this feels like backstory. You can weave this in slowly as the story moves forward. Right now, having all of this here takes away from the conversation.

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naturally to them and it's not easy to rethink all the details of daily life and adapt to their child's needs. If you make a connection it helps make it a little easier for them.

Comment [s22]: Same here; work it in later slowly and stay with the conversation.

"~~HS~~ how is Hannah with Katie? Do they interact much?" I asked.

Comment [s23]: Ask or asked?

She glanced at Hannah. "For the most part, Hannah does her thing and Katie plays around her. Hannah has her self-stimulatory behaviors, or "stims" that she does when she is excited or anxious. She flaps her hands and likes to shake her head from ~~side-side-to-side~~ real fast. Katie thinks this is hysterical and laughs herself silly when Hannah does it. She even tries to imitate her, ~~and~~ I know I should probably be worried, but it's just so damn cute, I end up laughing right along with them!"

I start smiling myself just thinking about it and I have truly made up my mind that I am going to like working with this family very much!

> too formal

Cassie

"I guess that went pretty well, ladies," Cassie says, as she ~~gets her daughters settled~~ settles ~~her daughters~~ into the car ~~after their lunch meeting~~. "I mean, we didn't send her running off screaming, ~~so all and all I would say it was a good first meeting~~. I think I ~~am~~ going to like her. What about you, Hannah Girl? Are you going to like your new teacher, Jen O'Shea?" Cassie asks, knowing she ~~is~~ not going to get any response.

Comment [s24]: Implied

Comment [s25]: Does she look her daughter in the eye when she says this? Touch her?

In the seven years since Cassie and David had Hannah, she ~~has~~ never had a conversation with her daughter. She has had what teachers will call successful communication, but not a real conversation. Hannah can answer questions about what she wants to wear, this or that given two

Comment [s26]: She's 7-tell us earlier

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choices. You can ask if she wants a hot dog or grilled cheese for lunch. She can take your hand and lead you toward something she is looking for. But as for the rest, Cassie has no idea for the most part what her ~~own~~ child is thinking. She doesn't know her favorite color, or what her favorite song is. Which Disney princess is her favorite? Does she really like that much ketchup on her scrambled eggs or is she trying to drown out the taste of the eggs like Cassie did when she was a kid?

She does know that Hannah LOVES turtles! She was given a DVD for her birthday when she was 2 years old all about turtles. It showed turtles swimming in the water and explained how turtles hatch from eggs and how they grow. It told about the different types of turtles and how they make their homes/nests. Kind of an odd gift for a two year old, but it came from David's younger brother who knows pretty much nothing about little girls and it was educational. Hannah must have watched the DVD a million times. She could talk right along with the video word for word. She would recite parts of it out loud when she got excited or frustrated. Cassie and David originally even thought Hannah was advanced doing all this at 2 and 3 years old. Later, however, they were told this was called scripting and was quite common for children on The Autism

Spectrum.

This is an interesting premise for a story, and you've got a good scene to work with.

Make the dialogue more casual, make sentences choppiier (they just met), take out the telling and weave it as showing into the story.

Comment [s27]: 1-this is all good info, but a bit of an info dump here. I would leave this paragraph out and introduce it slowly. Have you read "Love, Anthony" by Lisa Genova? I think it's more important to focus in the previous paragraph on how Cassie reacts when her daughter ignores her.

Comment [s28]: Again, this is all tell instead of show. Have them get home and Hannah asks for the video (or the mother knows to put it on). Show us instead of telling us that Hannah wants to watch it. Show us how Hannah acts when she watches the video.