

What's he doing? Why is my car door open? The door can't stay open. There's snow blowing into the car. The wind – it's freezing.

He's a kid. Why is the skinny punk leaning over me? Why is he taking the key out of the ignition? He can't do that. Who does he think he is?

What's he doing now? How come he unhooked my seatbelt?

Why is he telling me that I've to get out of my car? This is my car. Why would I want to get out of my car? I've got to keep going. I've got to get to the party. Why am I stopped?

What does he mean am I hurt? Why would he ask me that? How did he get that scar?

What's that? That can't be the airbag – is it? Why is the airbag . . . when did my head start hurting? Where am I? Tell the kid to give you your key back so that . . .

What is it that the pipsqueak doesn't understand about me saying that I can't go with him? What's he doing now? Can't he see that I'm a whole lot bigger than he is? There's no way that I'm going to let him pull me out of my car.

He has got to give me my key back. If he doesn't . . . I rolled my car? No way. The car is fine. If he'll just give me my key back, I'll . . .

What does he mean that the bridge has ice on it? Did I get knocked out when . . . no – it couldn't have happened. What happened to that beer that I was drinking?

I need to keep driving. The party is tomorrow night. I won't make it to the party if I don't drive through tonight and most of tomorrow. Why doesn't the hairbrain get it that I have to get back on the road.

What does he mean that there's no way that my car is going anyplace – that it's sitting right now in a stubblefield? How did my car . . . how does he know that I rolled my car?

How come he doesn't feel the cold? The wind is making the car shake. No way am I going to leave my car. I can't see anything but snow blowing everywhere. Tell him to shut the door.

Why did it have to start to snow? Why didn't I leave yesterday instead today?

Maybe the meddling runt will take me someplace where I can get a rental. That was a derisive look that that little shrimp just gave me. No wonder he has that scar over his eye. He probably got someone so mad at him that . . . it looks like something that a bat would leave.

This telling me to get out of my car is really getting old. Why can't he just leave me? Where's my cell? I'll call 911 and . . . now you've really made him mad. What's his problem? Why wouldn't I be able to get someone to come out here to . . . of course I can see that it's snowing. So what if there's a snowstorm out there right now.

How does he know that I'm going to freeze to death if I stay here with my car? Like I'm going to be better off going with him? I should've listened to Mama T and bought gloves. My fingers are already freezing.

Why did he ask me if I can move my legs? I hope that makes him happy. They move. What about my arms? What does he want me to do with my arms? Of course they move – why wouldn't they? Why am I letting him . . . why won't he just go for help instead of trying to help me? Why does he want to know if I know where I am? Keep pushing me you impudent little half-pint and I'll . . .

Why does he want to know if I can walk? Is he blind? I'm standing aren't I? My chest – it really hurts. Where's his car? Why don't I see it? He must've been walking down the road when he . . .

Why is he looking around the inside of my car? How did my coat get in the backseat? I'm sure that it was lying on the passenger seat. Why are you letting him help you put on your coat? Why does my chest hurt so much when I move my arms?

What's it to him if I have luggage? He's not going to let up on you guy until you tell him. Doesn't everyone keep their bags in their car's trunk when they're traveling? My stuff can stay there. There's no way that I'm going to let this juvenile delinquent get his hands on my computer and especially on my camera.

That's the beer can that . . . where was it? Why is he putting the can in his pocket? What's he going to do with the rest of that six-pack?

Why can't I stop shaking? How hard is the wind blowing? The snow is stinging my face. I've got to get back into my car.

The trunk just opened. How could it open just like that? Remember guy – the kid took your ignition key. Why is he putting the unopened beer cans in the trunk? There's no way that that little twerp can carry my suitcase. It's bigger than him. Help him.

Where's he going with my suitcase? That wiry squirt has my computer and camera, too. There's no way that he can keep carrying everything. He must be stronger than he looks.

Are you going to let that mini mite boss you around? Okay – the car door is shut. Now what? Where did he go? This can't be good. I'm all alone. He took my stuff. I've got to get back into the car otherwise I'll freeze out here. My coat isn't helping much. I can't freeze to death. I've got to do something. He's back.

Now what? He wants me to put my arm around his shoulder and . . . there's no way that he can hold up my weight. How does he know that my legs will move? I ache all over. I'm so cold. This can't be happening to me.

Why am I listening to him? We're moving. My legs are working. Where's he taking me? How far off the road are we? I know – keep moving. He has to know that I can barely move. The wind is going right through me. I've never been so cold in my life. I sure hope that he's right – that we're almost there. How deep is this ditch anyway? I had to have gone through this ditch to end up in the field. Why can't I remember what happened? Is that the bridge that . . .

That's what he's driving? What is it? I'm supposed to get in that? How? At least he was smart enough to leave the motor running. It should be a whole lot warmer inside that thing than what it is out here. Now all you've to do guy is to figure out how to get into whatever this thing is.

How am I doing? Does he really want to know? Other than my chest feeling like . . . and like every bone in my body is broken, I'm . . . now what's he doing? Why is he opening up the . . . those yellow things are gloves? I'm to wear those things? They're ugly. Just thank him guy and put the things on your hands.

The air blowing out of the vent sure isn't warm. Great – the thing's heater isn't working right. What's he doing driving this heap if the heater . . . no one drives something in the winter with a heater that doesn't work – do they? Okay – a couple more miles north and then three miles west shouldn't take us that long.

What's that he's sitting on anyway? Is that a couple of phonebooks under that pillow? And he still can barely see over the steering wheel. How can he drive this thing? Are his feet touching the accelerator? They have to be – we're moving. Why doesn't he put the car in drive and . . . what's this shifting thing all about. Why is he stopping?

I'm to put on my seatbelt? Okay – I'll try. I can't. He's going to have to help me if he wants me to wear the thing. You need to tell him that your chest really hurts when you move your arms. Did he just call me a mama's boy? You little wiseacre – you're asking for it.

If it wasn't blowing and snowing so hard out there right now, I'd get out of this rickety contraption and . . . I've had it with that mousy little nerd making me do things, telling me what I'm to do and now calling me names. The little dork's voice hasn't even begun to change. Talk about having strikes against him. It makes sense that he always looks and acts so mad. Just be glad guy that you don't look like him.

That stocking cap – I remember it. The guy wearing it was putting gas in his wreck when I went inside that convenience store to use the restroom and to buy that six-pack. He has to believe me that he was just leaving when I came out of the store. I followed him because . . . he wasn't heading towards the Interstate? I passed him? Now I remember my car starting to slide. How did he know that I slid off . . . okay – I get it – I don't talk to him while he's driving. You don't know how really lucky you are right now Capt that . . .

Will my fingers ever stop aching and tingling? At least I can move them again. Why does he have his piece of junk packed solid with boxes? What? I'm not to move while he's driving? The freckled faced creep really needs to loosen up otherwise . . . what's his problem anyway?

At the speed that this old tank is moving going into the wind, hopefully we'll make it by dark to where he's going. At least the visibility isn't too bad. If he hadn't shown up when he did, what would've I done?

We're turning. Finally. He has to know that he turned onto a gravel road. Good grief – how's he keeping his crate on the road? If the snow whipping across the road is making it hard for me to see the road – how in the world can he see the road? It's going to be like this for the next three miles? There's no way that he's going to be able to keep driving this thing. Maybe if I drove . . . he's stopping. Why is he asking me if I see a mailbox? Why does he want me to know that there's a house about a hundred yards up that drive and that the family who lives there is home? He's getting out. What's he doing with my stuff? If he thinks that I'm going to . . . the guy is a real dufus. I'm not getting out of his rattletrap. That insolent twit is stuck with me whether he likes it or not.

I can't believe that he can see the road. If the only thing that he wants me to do is to keep my eyes on my side of the road, that's what I'll do. Where did all that snow come from anyway? Snow has already filled the ditch on my side of the road. What if he . . . this isn't fun.

If I could get to my camera, taking his photo while he is. . . he looks like he's almost standing up. Probably wouldn't go over at all. Just keep doing what he told you to do. And don't forget not to move. That idiot smart aleck will never make my list of friends. How's he keeping this thing on the road with all that wind?

Now what's he doing? Why does he have to get out of this thing to put it into a what? What's this about needing to turn a hub to . . . how does he know that we're going to be going through some snow ahead that'll be covering the road? So far – so good. Getting to the tops of the hills though and being out in the open – how's the little wimp keeping his piece of junk on the road? The wind feels like it's coming in waves. There has to be a hole someplace around my feet. There's snow coming up through the floorboard.

Why is he speeding up? Why did he do that? Talk about snow flying all over the place. What's he mumbling? Daddy G? Talk about a weirdo. He has to know that we're not moving. Okay – he's backing up. Now what? Not again. Okay – so this is the worst place that we'll have to get through. If we can get through this drift . . . he's backing up again. This isn't working. We're going to get stuck. He's telling me to do what? He's crazy. Tell him that you can't. There's no way that I can push anything the way that my chest hurts. Okay – I know what that look means. Why did I listen to him? Just push guy. He's going to make it. He did. I don't believe it. He better wait for me. I don't even get a thank you?

We must be there. I think I see a house. Now what? Why doesn't he want to take our stuff to the house?

She must be his mother by the way that . . . that's not my name. Why did she call me . . . where did he come from? He wants that insolent scamp to help to do what? What makes that anemic dimwit think that I'd want to go with him? Why is he staring at that little whippersnapper with such a surprised look? Just tell the poor guy that . . . that's a what? Coverall? There's absolutely no way that I'm going to put on something that even a clown wouldn't dare wear. And I can wear whose stocking cap? What?

*Thank goodness the door wasn't locked. He's alive. Thank you Daddy G. He doesn't have a clue where he is. He's probably in shock. I've got to get him out of his car. If he thinks that I'm going to leave him here in his car with the weather the way that it is – and what're you going to do with him once . . .*

*Where was this pretty boy going anyway in such a big hurry? He's for sure not around here. He better have insurance on this fancy thing that he's driving as it looks totaled. He had to have done some air time after going down into the ditch and then up the other side and through that fence. He had to have gone over at least once the way that his car's top is caved.*

*He's not bleeding anyplace. I can't help it that it's snowing and that the wind is blowing like it is. You've got to get him to get it that he's got to go with you. Get his ignition key. Now unbuckle his seatbelt. Why won't he get out of his car? You're not getting anyplace trying to pull him out of his car by his . . .*

*Doesn't he know that there's a blizzard moving into this part of the country? Why was he on this road? It's a county highway. He probably didn't see the sign warning about the bridge becoming icy. Thanks Daddy G for getting me across the bridge without . . . the county needs to get someone out here to put some salt or sand on that bridge before somebody else . . . like that's going to happen today.*

*If I hadn't stopped at the corner gas station up the road to make sure that old jeep still has at least a half a tank of gas in it when I get home, no one would know that a car had slid off the road, rolled and was sitting upright in a field with someone hurt in it. And if he did decide to get out of his car . . . no one is going to be driving around in this kind of weather.*

*He's still acting loopy. This thinking that he can get his car going again . . . that party sure seems to be a big deal to him. What was he doing in these parts? There's no place within fifty miles of here that'd be willing to rent a vehicle even if I . . . and what does he think that he's going to do with that cellphone? Let him figure it out that there's no tower close enough around here for him to get a signal.*

*Maybe he's hurt more than what he looks. What've you been going to school for anyway? Just because he isn't bleeding doesn't mean that he isn't badly injured. Ask him if he can move his legs. Talk about someone going belligerent . . . okay Daddy G – I hear you. I know – I'm the one who needs to be doing an attitude check. But . . . he has got to be feeling awfully sore. At least he can move his legs and his arms.*

*The seatbelt is going to leave his chest bruised for a few weeks. I wish that he remembered what happened. He must've somehow banged his head. You need to get him to listen to you. He sure is making it really obvious that he doesn't like you at all. I don't care. Okay Daddy G – I know that you care but . . . what you just did to me Daddy G has me thinking that you're never going to let me do what I really want to do. Over two years Daddy G and then you turn my world upside down. What do you want me to tell my folks when I get home? I really need you to tell me Daddy G as . . . stop thinking about yourself gal and . . .*

*Now that you've convinced the stubborn fool to get out of his car, you can't just leave him standing there. Can't you see that he's freezing? He can barely stand with the wind blowing against him as hard as it is.*

*Where are his bags? He has to be traveling with something. Why did he look at me like that? What's this? It's a beer can. I thought that I smelled beer when . . . knowing the sheriff – the guy isn't going to be a happy camper when he comes out here to write up an accident report and finds an open beer can. Just take the can with you. Put it in your coat pocket.*

*This key thing should have a button on it that'll pop the trunk open. Here's hoping that the trunk didn't become jammed when . . . wow – he's a long ways from home per that license plate. Good – the button worked. Nice suitcase. I better take his computer, too – and this camera. It had to have cost him a mint. Okay rich kid – I've gotten it that you don't like me which means that you probably don't trust me either.*

*Once I get his stuff in old jeep, I'll come back for him. He's not going to go anyplace. He can barely move. You know that you're doing the right thing taking him home with you but . . . here's hoping with the way that the snow is drifting that I can still get through the road going west.*

*The snow sure isn't letting up at all. It's getting colder, too. You need to get him in old jeep. I sure wish the thing's heater worked. The heat coming off the motor . . .*

*You didn't have to look that surprised guy to see me again. Did he really think that I'd leave him here?*

*What's this overgrown wuss' problem with putting his arm around my shoulder? I don't bite. Just keep encouraging him. You've got to get him to believe that he could do a whole lot better than what he's doing. You've got to keep him moving.*

*We made it. He could've looked a lot happier about what I'm driving. Just because old jeep looks like it's ready to fall apart doesn't mean that it's ready to stop running. The thing hasn't let anyone down since granddad gave it to pops and pops . . . I just wish that it doesn't like gas so much. It's a good thing that there wasn't any reason for me to do a whole lot of driving while I was in school.*

*You're going to have to help him get up into old jeep. He's definitely sore. These gloves will work to warm up his fingers. So they're not pricy looking. He has to put them on. It's won't kill him to . . . about time.*

*Okay Daddy G – I'm still counting on you to keep me on the road and to get me home safely. Thanks.*

*Why is he staring at me? So I'm sitting on a pillow that's on a couple of telephone books; I can still drive old jeep just fine. Can't he tell that we're moving? Oh no – he needs to put on his seatbelt. You're just going to sit there aren't you guy? Must be nice to live a privileged life where everyone waits on you. How can he not know that he really is a spoiled mama's boy? He knows that I saw that look that he was giving me. It's his problem that he's got a case against me. This being kind Daddy G to others – it sure would be nice for a change for you to have everyone be kind to me. Why don't you?*

*Now he has to start to remember what happened. I need to focus guy. I don't need to know right now that it's my fault that you wrecked your car. It's not my fault that he followed me. He should've been paying a lot more attention to where he was and what he needed to do to get back to the Interstate. This having to stop to use the bathroom – what about the beer?*

*Now that I need to concentrate on driving, he thinks that he has to do non-stop blabbering. Get him to stop right now Daddy G or . . . okay – maybe Daddy G I could've said what I said a little nicer but . . . what a baby. He's pouting. And how'd you feel gal if someone put you down like you just did to him?*

*I'm at the corner. Heading into the wind has been one thing but now heading west and the wind hitting the side of old jeep . . . I should still be able to make it home okay unless the snow has gotten too deep where there's always a drift behind our old neighbor's grove.*

*Just a little less than three more miles and I'm home. Why is he staring at me? What did he just ask me? You know what he asked you. He thinks that you're not going to be able to keep driving old jeep in these weather conditions so . . . he has really done it now. Get out and unload that oversize goon's stuff. He'll be fine with the family who lives in that house up that driveway. Why isn't he getting out of old jeep? Just let him stay. It's obvious that that pigheaded fool isn't going to get out of old jeep. He better though from now on keep his eyes on his side of the road and his mouth shut.*

*With the way that the wind has the snow streaming across the road, maybe I should've pulled into that driveway and hunkered down with that farmer and his family instead of trying to make it all the way home. I don't think that my passenger will be able to walk very far if . . . he doesn't seem to be hurting though quite as much as he did when I found him. If I hadn't noticed when I topped that hill right before the bridge that there were no longer any taillights ahead of me, I would never have been looking right after I crossed the bridge for a car in the ditch. If I hadn't noticed the car tracks going off the road and that there was a break in the fence . . .*

*He's staring at me. What's he thinking? Why did he just look back at his stuff? Was he looking for his camera? If he was thinking of . . . I should've made him get out of old jeep when I had the chance.*

*Please old jeep – stay on the road. The wind isn't going to get any stronger – is it Daddy G? If I go off the road, I'll never be able to . . . just put old jeep into four-wheel drive now instead of when . . .*

*That wasn't fun. If I ever get stuck with another vehicle that has four-wheel drive, I better be able to change into four-wheel drive from inside the vehicle instead of having to . . . it's way too cold out there right now to be fooling around getting a frozen hub to turn. There's no feeling left in my fingers.*

*Come on old jeep – let's go. This is crazy. There's no way that I can make it all the way home. Thanks Daddy G. I really don't need this right now. You and your life lessons that you claim are supposed to teach me to persevere. I know that you could've held back this blizzard until I got home. Why didn't you? Why didn't you let me know last month that . . . thanks a whole lot Daddy G for backstabbing friends.*

*Can't you Daddy G stop the wind from gusting so hard until I get home? Please at least Daddy G have some angels pushing old jeep on the other side so that I'm not blown off the road into the ditch on my side of the road. I know Daddy G – I'm to rejoice always. You sure haven't given me any reason right now Daddy G for me to have a whole lot of joy in my life. Why?*

*What am I going to say to the folks when I get home? Am I going to make it home Daddy G? I know that you're here with me but . . . please say something. I don't want to talk to him Daddy G. He's a bore. You know that. I'm not going to be able to help him other than to make sure that he's someplace warm until after the blizzard passes. It's obvious that he doesn't need any help. Those duds that he's wearing – they had to have cost somebody some money that's for sure. And whoever his mommy is, she sure isn't going to be happy that he wrecked that fancy boat of a car. That thing looked brand new.*

*Talk about someone looking like a sad sack. He needs to look at himself in the mirror. Okay – I know – I need to look at myself in the mirror. Is it really helping feeling sorry for yourself?*

*This is taking forever. I just don't dare go any faster. What do you want me to do Daddy G? I'd be home by now if . . . that doesn't look good. There has to be a couple of feet of snow already piled up in that drift. Just gun it and . . . don't stop old jeep – and don't go off the road. Keep moving old jeep. Don't stop. Okay gal – you're going to have to back up and try again. Why doesn't someone cut down those trees – especially since no one lives in that farmhouse anymore? Every year this spot gets like this. You do know gal that no matter how many times that you back up and try again, that you're not going to make it through the drift. The big bruiser could get out of old jeep and start pushing – you know. Maybe not having his weight in old jeep . . . and like how are you going to get him to get out of old jeep?*

*That was really kind of you to order him to get out of old jeep to push. Well – it's working. He's getting out. You've got him scared of you. You know that he's not going to be able to push. Just get a good run for the drift and . . . come on, come on, come on . . . keep moving old jeep. You're almost there. You made it. Great. Okay – thanks Daddy G.*

*It's about time that he . . . give him a break gal. It wasn't like you stopped right away after you got through the drift. You need to thank him for . . . just tell him that he doesn't need to put on his seatbelt – that in another quarter of a mile or so, we'll be at my house. It's going to feel so good to be in a warm, cozy place again. And what am I going to tell the folks when . . . I should've never told mom that . . .*

*Home. I made it. Thank you Daddy G. Looks like everyone has gotten home. I'm sure not looking forward to trying to explain why he isn't with me. I'll just leave the stuff out here in old jeep for now. They'll be plenty of time later to come out here to get everything.*

*It's really great to see mom, too. That's not his name mom. Does mom really think that . . .*

*You could've given me a hug Junior when you barged into the house instead of . . . this telling me that I'm needed out in the barn right now because . . . why did I tell Junior to take city boy out to the barn. He can't go out there in those clothes. Good idea – granddad's pet ice fishing coveralls will work. He can wear my stocking cap. Why is he staring at me like that with his mouth wide open? So my hair is a mess. So?*

I need to wake up. This can't be happening to me. You're hallucinating guy. Dreaming of a heifer having trouble calving – what does that mean? What's a heifer anyway? You really need to pull off to the side of the road and get some rest.

He called him Missy. He does look like a gal. He can't be a gal. Gals don't wear stocking caps. And what was she – he – whoever – doing on the road in that old thing? She could at least look like a Missy. And what would a Missy look like to you guy?

What's that look all about? What did I do to her that . . . why is she acting like she has known me all my life? How come she didn't tell her mother that that isn't my name that her mother just called me? Did she ever ask you what your name is? Did you ever tell her what your name is? Maybe she's too embarrassed to tell her mother that she doesn't know my name.

At least she – okay Missy, introduced Junior to me. He's her oldest bro? Poor guy – having to go through life looking like her. They sure don't look like their mother. Why is Junior still staring at his sister with that really perplexed or quizzical or whatever look? Was he really expecting her to go out to the barn with him?

I'm to take off my shoes and put on those boots? Why? So the boots are insulated – so? I'm not going out to the barn. I don't know what to do in a barn. You need to tell Junior that you've never been in a barn in your life – and that you've no desire whatsoever now to find out what a barn is like. My fingers and toes are still tingling and hurting plus my cheeks and ears still feel like they're burning.

There's no way that I'm going to put on whatever that is. It's granddad's? Granddad must be her mother's dad as . . . there's no way that I'm going to be able to get my feet through . . . okay – so that's why there's a zipper on the side of each pants leg. Tell Missy that you don't want to be out in the cold again. And how far do you think that'll get you? You don't have a choice. Just put on her stocking cap and get it over with.

How long have those two little ladies been standing there? Does she really want me to call her Chatterbox? She has to be Missy's little sis as . . . why does the other little girl look so scared?

It would've been nice to have had the kooky hothead tell me why she wants me out of her house. Her bro is still looking at her like she has gone off her rocker. Why won't she look at him? The first question that I'm going to ask Junior when . . . why is she shaking her head back and forth at me now? If she's trying to tell me that she wants me to go along with her charade of trying to make everyone think that we're friends – in her dreams. Why would she think that I'd . . . why not? She has been asking for it. I don't care that she probably saved me from freezing to death; no one can get away calling me a mama's boy.

Guy – you can't keep stalling. Just get this over with and then . . . did she just pour herself a cup of coffee? She did. Play games with me you little manipulating fiend. And now what's with that begging look? How can someone look so mad and so sad at the same time? Be glad guy that you're not staying in the house.

Get used to being called that name as that's the name I'm going to give if . . . she's going to wish that she never pulled my chain. If a lawyer isn't able to pull someone's chain, he has no business being a lawyer.

What am I doing? The wind – the snow – how does Junior know what direction to head? There's no way that he can see anything. I sure can't. Why did he just grab my arm? This can't be good. You're going to have to go where he goes as you've absolutely no clue where you are.

If I hadn't decided to make a restroom stop when I did, I'd be on the road right now heading east. I don't want to miss Capt's Christmas party. It was going to be the best Christmas gift that I've ever given Capt. I can't die now. I can't let Dotty down now after all that she has done for me. Why did I think that I needed to buy beer?

Junior better know where he's going. The snow has to be blasting his face just as hard as it is mine. I can't keep walking much longer. My chest feels like it's going to explode.

You blew it guy when you decided to head for Capt's place. See what it leads to when you always have to try to one up someone? You're about to get lost in a snowstorm this time. You don't have any recourse guy but to trust Junior to get you to the barn. This sure doesn't fit into the mindset that Capt has hammered into me since who knows when that I'm never to trust anyone. First having in the last hour or so that daffy shrew and now Junior in control of my destiny – I don't like. I don't like it at all.

It's a building. Is this the barn? Keep following him alongside whatever it is. That's a door. Great. And how are we going to get back to the house when . . .

This is what the inside of a barn is like? Good grief – this place stinks. How many cows are there? Why do they all have their necks . . . does that mean that they're stuck where they're standing? How can this be a healthy place with those cows doing their business where they're standing? Get me out of here.

Where's he taking me? We're going to where? West barn? How many animals are in this place? What kind of dog is that? The thing doesn't look very friendly. I don't like the way that the mutt is following us. There're cats around here, too? Guess I needed to know that.

This is the west barn? It's just an open room with a cow in it. Is that dumfounded look that those guys have on their faces because Missy didn't want to come out here to help with the heifer – or is it because she told Junior to take me instead? I sure hope that I'm there when she's forced to tell everyone around here that I'm not who they think that I'm supposed to be.

The older dude has to be Missy's father as . . . those look alike – are they twins? Talk about a height challenged family – they're making me feel like a giant.

Wonder why they're all looking so worried. It must be something to do with that cow that's . . . is the thing sick? There must be a reason why the cow is lying down. What does Missy's father mean that he doesn't see the calf's head yet? The calf will be the cow's first calf – so? She's been down since well before noon trying to do what? She's going to need some help otherwise . . . what kind of help is he talking about?

Why the ropes? Why is he looping one end of that rope around the cow's neck? Why is he tying the other end to that pole? How's that going to help the cow? He's not really going to . . . he did. That's a relieved look. Good – the calf is fine. Those are the calf's front leg's hoofs? There're going to have to do what? The calf is a big calf so there're going to have to pull it? Why is he tying a rope to the calf's hoofs?

My camera. It's still in Missy's bomb. When is the last time that I've gone someplace without my camera? The photos that I could be getting right now if . . . have you ever done something like this Doc? This is going to make Doc's day when I tell him. You have to Doc convince Dotty to . . .

He needs my muscle to do what? You need to tell those guys that you may look like you could have muscle but you can't even do a pushup now. And as sore as your chest feels right now – there's no way that you're going to be able to pull on that rope. Why is he tying the end of the rope to . . . that's called a two by four? Why is Junior opening that door? It must open up into some kind of shelter as . . .

I'm to do what? I'm to put the end of this two by four right outside that door's sill and . . . why can't Junior or one of those look alike do it? Just because they're short doesn't mean that they aren't strong – does it? Guy – if they're like their sister in any way, it probably wouldn't be wise to question what her father wants you to do now. Just put the two by four where he told you to put it. I get it now. While they're holding the cow down so that she doesn't stand up, I'm to use the two by four as a fulcrum against the outside of the door's sill to . . . does Missy's father really think that the calf will come out of the cow doing this? I get the feeling that he has done this before. No matter how much it hurts your chest guy, just lean right now as hard as you can against the two by four and just maybe . . .

Ow. That hurt falling outside that door on my face. What's that looking down on me? It's awfully big. It sure doesn't look happy. That's a bull? Don't bulls . . . I don't have to be scared of Brutus? Why doesn't someone get that big brute out of my face? Guess I'd have a grin on my face, too, if . . .



What was that thanks for? What did I do? Let Junior help you get to your feet. Don't let him know how much you're hurting. That's a baby calf. Come on – you can stand up little guy – I know that you can. They're going to help mother up and leave the little feller to . . . he made it. Or is it a she?

Why are they laughing at that calf? They're calling the calf Missy? Why? So the calf's white head has a black slash over one eye. That's cruel. Missy probably can't help it that she now has that scar over her eye. Guy – come on – if she has treated her bros like she has been treating you, you've got to believe that she has been in some serious knockdown fights.

I'm to do what while pops and Junior and one of the look alikes goes to the house? Chores? Why are they making me stay out here until whatever chores are done? At least my fingers and toes no longer hurt.

He's going to do what? And I'm to help him? Why? Am I supposed to know what he's talking about? What's silage? And why am I letting him put throwing down silage in my life experience portfolio? Why am I always letting people push me around?

Did he just say that I'm to climb up through that chute? You've got to tell him guy that you don't do climbing – that heights . . . like you really want him to know that vertigo is out to get you?

Why am I doing this? I can barely keep my toes on these bars let alone hang on to them the way that my chest hurts. I made it. You aren't back down yet guy. It smells like something has been fermenting up here. While he using that pick to loosen the silage from the side of the silo, I'm to use this fork thing to pitch out the silage through that opening that we just came through? That shouldn't be too hard.

This is work. Do they really do this every day? Do I want to get up early tomorrow morning to do this again? He can forget that. Just as soon as I can get back on the road, I'm back on the road. Capt won't be happy to see me again. I'm so looking forward to bursting Capt's pipedream that he has for me.

About time. That was work throwing down silage. Now to survive the climb down this chute. Guess if I fall, the pile of silage down there will cushion my fall. And why did he think that I needed to know that he's going to give each cow a pail of the silage before pops starts milking in a couple of hours?

There's more work to do before we head for the house? He's got to be kidding. He's not kidding. I'm so ready for a hot shower and a good night's sleep. Here's hoping that the snowstorm is gone by tomorrow morning. There's no way in the world that I'd want to hang around here any longer than I have to around that conniving trip of a gal. She's definitely the most random, craziest thing that I've ever been around.

Why am I supposed to be happy that we don't have to use the tractor and the manure spreader in this kind of weather to get straw from a straw stack? Like throwing straw bales down from this haymow is any easier? I'm to pull the straw apart and spread it between and under the cows? If he thinks that I'm going to get between those cows to . . . he's doing it so I guess I better do it, too. Doc is never going to believe this.

Sure – I'll take the rest of this straw to the west barn and spread it out there. It'll give me the chance to see if the baby calf is still doing okay.

This little guy or gal needs to let me spread this straw around. This straw should keep mother and baby nice and warm tonight. I'm glad that the little thing is enjoying life. I sure wish that I was right now. I feel like I've gotten myself in a trap. I need to escape this place.

Finally – we can go to the house now as the chores are done. We're going to eat lunch. It's lunchtime? What? It has to be way after lunch. I took off right after breakfast. I had to have been on the road at least five hours before . . . a cup of coffee sure would hit the spot right now.

It's snowing worse now than it was when I came out here. How can that be? A rope? I'm to hold on to this rope? It'll take us right to the house? Good. That didn't take nearly as long as it took to get to the barn. Where did that devious vixen go? Do you really want to see her again?

*Don't you dare mom say anything. She can't believe that he's the guy who was going to come home with me – can she? Okay – there's no way that mom would know that . . . but she has seen the nerd's photo. That obnoxious sap that came in with me doesn't begin to look like him. Go – hide out in the bathroom.*

*You do know gal that when Junior comes back to the house that . . .*

*What's with you anyway gal? You're digging yourself a deeper and deeper hole. Why are you doing this to yourself? You know that you want to be out in the barn right now. You're going to regret not helping pops with that heifer. What's that heifer doing calving anyway now?*

*Okay mom – I know that you're waiting for me to tell you something. She has to be really wondering why I wasn't out of the door heading for the barn just as soon as Junior said that pops needed help with that heifer. Mom knows that the barn is always one of the first places that I go to when I get home.*

*Mom is just going to have to wait. Staying in the bathroom is really helping – isn't it? You can't keep putting off telling her what he did to you? I was played a fool – and then I was called a prude. Why didn't she tell me everything a couple of months ago when . . . how could she dare say that's she was scared to tell me? Okay Daddy G – I hear you. Your perfect will though for my life Daddy G really stinks.*

*Poor Junior. He sure had a confused look on his face when I didn't jump to go with him. And he sure wasn't expecting me to tell him to take that sad sack with him out to the barn. The twins must be out in the barn, too, with pops. That preppy wannabe better not open his mouth otherwise . . . and what is it that you don't want him to say? Why didn't I go out to the barn?*

*Who was that young girl with Chatterbox? Where did she come from? Mom didn't say anything to me when I talked to her on the phone a couple of days ago about getting another foster kid. Like mom had a chance to say something when all that I wanted to talk about was the inconsiderate dunce coming home with me. Just because I went home with him over Thanksgiving weekend, what was it that made me think that he was going to ask me to . . . I'm such a total dud. You sure have messed up my life Daddy G.*

*You do know gal that you haven't said boo yet to Chatterbox. All you were interested in was getting bozo to put on granddad's coveralls. Talk about being deceitful – acting like a silly school girl with a crush.*

*He had to have been still woozy from his wreck otherwise . . . he looked absolutely ridiculous in those coveralls. If granddad wasn't so fat – always needing something that's extra-large, there's no way that that big oaf could've gotten the thing over what he's wearing. He looked like a grade school kid who is outgrowing his pants the way that the coverall's pants legs are on him. You're fortunate gal that those boots fit his feet the way that they do. I'm never going to hear the end of this.*

*You do know gal that you've been pretty rough on him ever since . . . it's not his fault what happened to you. How long do you plan to keep your pity-party going?*

*If I could go someplace else now in this blizzard . . . and where would you go? Your only option gal is to stay here. And the sooner that you tell mom about everything, the sooner you can move on with your life.*

*The twins are never going to let me forget how really naïve I've been. Maybe he won't say anything. Think about it gal – do you honestly want the city slicker to stay here through the Christmas holidays and over New Year's Day? And how would you go through the motions of pretending that he's someone special to you? You don't even know his name. Plus a guy like him who probably has all kinds of money and who gals have to be fighting over is never ever going to look at someone like me.*

*Come on gal – go tell mom. Have a good cry with her and . . . I better say hi first to Chatterbox before she begins to think that I don't like her anymore. Chatterbox sure must like whoever she is otherwise you know that she'd be knocking on this bathroom door to get you out to play something with her. Playing a game of Candy Land or something else with her will give me the chance to think. If you don't talk to mom though before the guys get back to the house . . . please Daddy G – start yesterday morning all over again for me.*

*Ask Chatterbox what her friend's name is. Did Chatterbox really just say that the girl says her name today is lazybones? Do I want to know what her name was yesterday? Her name was what yesterday? Don't ask her to repeat it. Why would she use such vulgarity as a name that she wants to be called?*

*Mom must've heard Chatterbox as . . . no one knows her a name? How could that be? She isn't the first kid who has been born at home. There's no birth certificate? Okay – the social worker doesn't think that her parents ever took her to a clinic to do the paperwork. She may be the oldest of at least four kids who were in the house where they found her? There're other kids? Would mom know where those other kids are right now? They're going to have to stay in different homes? And their parents. . .*

*I'll just sit here as long as it takes mom to tell me her foster kid's story. Mom is busting to tell me. I get the feeling that there's some pretty bad stuff in her story. When the sheriff went to her house . . . ask mom if she knows why the sheriff ended up going to her foster kid's house. The sheriff didn't want her father driving his pickup on the open road because the guy was drunk? That doesn't sound like the sheriff who I know. When did he stop locking up drunks? The sheriff found the drunk's house looking like a pigsty? There was trash and garbage everywhere?*

*Ask mom when the sheriff started doing compassion? I'm having trouble getting my arms around that one. Don't forget gal to call him about dodo's car.*

*I can say this about mom – she usually gets her stories right so . . . so when the sheriff as he was dropping off the drunk at the drunk's house saw a couple of kids playing outside the place, the sheriff decided to walk the drunk to the door to make sure that the house was in livable condition. That was when he saw what an awful mess that there was everywhere in the house? Ask mom if she knows where the guy lives – or if she knows who the family is – or . . . or just let mom tell the story.*

*How did mom find out that when the sheriff got home and asked his wife if she had any of the drunk's kids in her class, that she told him that she didn't think that there were any kids by the guy's last name in any grade in the school? Ask mom why the sheriff is making his wife teach? She doesn't have to teach? She's back teaching second grader because all of her kids are either married or in college? Okay.*

*So after the sheriff decided the next day to contact the county social worker, they went out together to the girl's father's place. Why would mom think that I'd remember an old run-down shack that's located about eight miles on the other side of town? The place looks like an old machinery graveyard? Just because in the summer pops was always taking her and us kids for long rides on Sunday afternoons . . .*

*There wasn't any food in the house? The house didn't have any heat? But it's going on winter. How in the world . . . the kids were emaciated. No wonder the girl looks so frail. There're still bruises on her body? No wonder she has such a haunted look. I'd be traumatized, too, if I was treated like she was.*

*How could someone not know that there were kids in that house? Guess no one did. So what mom knows is only what the social worker has told her – which is that the girl's family took up living in the house on that old homestead about four months ago – and that the guy apparently did odd jobs for farmers in that area. I can't believe that no one knew that he had a wife and some kids until the sheriff showed up at his place? If they were still at that place when this blizzard hit, they would've froze to death by now.*

*And being put in foster homes probably is the best thing that could've happened to the kids? It really is too bad that they aren't all in the same foster home but since no one could take all four kids . . . it must really be horrible to grow up in a home where there's constant verbal and physical abuse. I hear you Daddy G – thanks for blessing me with a home where . . . how can you Daddy G just hang out in a place watching a parent and/or both parents yelling at and beating their kids and not doing anything at all about it?*

*Chatterbox has been able to get her to talk to her? It makes sense that she'd trust a five year old. If she's especially scared of guys, the next couple of weeks are going to be a nightmare with Junior home and with the twins always being the twins. She disappears when the guys are around? She probably won't warm up to me. Why? She hasn't warmed up to mom yet? How can she not want to be hugged by mom?*

*And about what I'm to call her – she tells Chatterbox in the morning when she gets up what she wants to be called that day? Most of the names that she tells Chatterbox are . . . the guess is that they're probably names that her parents called her from when she was a baby? So if her day's name is unrepeatable, she seems to be okay with being called Frog Face? Frog Face? That's wrong to call someone Frog Face.*

*You're reading my mind now mom. Okay – she's twelve or so. Only Chatterbox has heard her speak? Okay – she listens to directions – if Chatterbox gives them to her. She has become Chatterbox's shadow? Mom actually seems happy as the upside of having this foster kid here is that she no longer has Chatterbox thinking that she has to tell her blow by blow everything that's happening – that the foster kid seems to be just fine with Chatterbox rambling on and on to her. I hope that this means that I'm not going to have to listen to Chatterbox and that Chatterbox won't be bothering that Ivy League pretender.*

*It's lunchtime? It's later than I thought it was. Great – she has some oliebollen dough already made up. Hot, deep fried dough balls sure do sound good – especially after rolling them around in some sugar. And there's hot chocolate. I didn't know that I was so hungry. You didn't stop on the road – remember. You were trying to get home before the blizzard hit.*

*I really should be out in the barn with pops helping him with that heifer. Pooch probably knows that I'm home and wondering why I haven't come out to see him yet.*

*Does mom know that she sometimes talks as much as Chatterbox? You can take a breath mom. The first time that she stops jabbering, tell her. Get it out of the way. Mom can't be oblivious to the fact that the guy with me isn't that two-timing loser.*

*The wind has to be picking up by the way the house is rattling. How did the folks do it with a wood burning furnace? A person I guess would get used to having to go down to the basement every few hours to throw some wood and/or cobs in the furnace. That was hard work filling up the grain wagon every couple of weeks with cobs and then unloading the cobs in the coal bin. I sure hope that there's plenty of propane.*

*Reading a book while sitting in front of that register over there – that's a memory that I'm always going to have from growing up in this house. How idyllic can a place be? I sure hope that mom is planning to fix for Christmas dinner one of those geese that pops shot.*

*What am I going to do about him? I still haven't called the sheriff. Mom would be all ears if I walked over to the phone now and called him. It's going to have to be later. Keep on deep frying those oliebollens.*

*Sounds like the guys. Get some plates. It's just pops, Junior and one of the twins. Where's . . . oh no – that means that he has the greenhorn helping him do his chores. At least pops is never going to have to wonder if one of his kids is going to want to stay on this farm.*

*That's good – the heifer had her calf. Why are they sneaking looks at each other? They can't fool me – they must've figured it out that he isn't the guy who was going to come home with me. You know gal that if they knew for sure that he wasn't the guy, they'd be . . . what happened in the barn then? The joker had to have said something. You need to ask the guys what happened. They're ready to burst. Whatever happened couldn't have been that funny. The guys just need to get their boots and coveralls off. I missed it? What did that ignoramus do that I missed? While pulling the calf, he . . . you really need to tell them that that isn't his name. Why is pops laughing so hard that he has tears running down the side of his face?*

*Okay – so they were holding down the heifer while he leaned on the two by four. That really would've been a hilarious sight when the calf came out to see him fall face first right outside the door into the lean-to. Did Junior just say that Brutus . . . Brutus was standing outside the door? That'd be Brutus to check out what was happening. The look must've been really funny that he had on his face when he looked up and saw Brutus' big head just inches away staring down on him. That'll teach me for staying here in the house.*

*It'd probably be a good idea right now gal to head for the living room before someone asks you a question about whoever he is? I could use some alone time. I'm so tired.*

Whatever those round things are that're on that table sure look good. They're oli what? I need to find out though before I take off these boots and get out of this red thing whether or not my stuff was brought to the house while I was in the barn. I don't see any of my things sitting anyplace around here. Where did that scary banshee go?

Where they talking about me? Those goofy looks on their faces . . . I've got to be looking ludicrous in what I'm wearing. You're like in a foreign country guy. Is this what living on a farm is like – sitting around a kitchen table drinking coffee and . . . I'm so out of place here. Show your face gal. I need help.

I sure don't want to go outside again. I could leave my suitcase out in the car for now but I really do want to get my computer and my camera out of the cold and inside where it's warm.

Junior doesn't have to get his stuff back on to go with me out to that thing that she drives. I should be able to . . . where did she come from? Why is she acting so weird? Why is it so important to her that she go with me to get my stuff instead of Junior? She's a mental case. You don't have a choice Junior but to stay here in the house while . . . but what about all those boxes – Junior could help us bring them into the house.

Does she know that everyone is staring at her like she has gone out of her mind? If she does, she doesn't seem to care. Isn't there someone around here who has the nerve to ask her what her problem is?

How hard does the wind blow around here? It sure is making a lot of howling, moaning sounds. Let's get this over with.

I'm to tie this rope around my waist? Okay – she's got a rope around her waist, too. I would never have gone this direction. This walking right into the blowing snow . . . I can barely breathe. The snow is already up to my knees. The cold wind is brutal. It's going right through me. What am I doing out here?

What just hit my arm? That neryv . . . just hang on to her hand guy. Like I've got a choice?

You know guy that instead of staying in your car that you would've sooner or later gotten out of your car and . . . just be glad that she decided to stop. But it's still her fault that I'm freezing to death right now. If she hadn't caused me to follow her when I came out of that convenience store, I'd be in my beautiful new warm comfortable car heading east. How am I going to make it to Capt's Christmas Eve bash? I can't miss it. I can't. It's looking like Dotty that you're going to get your wish.

Her vehicle can't be parked this far from her house – is it? At least the wind will be on our backs when . . .

Finally. Now to get my things out of her wreck and . . . isn't she going to take some of her boxes to the house? Either she can't hear me or . . . she's ignoring you guy.

You can't let her carry your suitcase to the house. Take it from her. Let her carry your camera or your computer bag. I've really had with her trying to emasculate me. I get the feeling that she even has her family detouring around her. She definitely doesn't lack spunk. Going through some tact management classes though would . . . yah – like you really believe that she doing something like that would help her?

If you aren't careful guy, the wind is going to pick you up and . . . that didn't take long. Isn't anyone going to ask her where her stuff is? Talk about an elephant in the room. One would have to be blind not to see that she's really out of sorts about something.

It sure feels good to be out of that red whatever it is. If it'd just been another size or so larger . . . hot chocolate? This is hot chocolate? This is what hot chocolate tastes like? It's really good. And those donut hole ball looking things – I'm to just go ahead and eat as many as I want?

Why is everyone exchanging looks instead of . . . talk somebody. Why is her mother . . . why the wink?

Now what? Why does she want me to go with her? Okay – it's good to know where the bathroom is.

Give her a break guy. Just because she has made you her pawn doesn't mean that . . . she may not have a nefarious bone in her. Yah – sure. I sure don't blame the guys for wanting to get back to the barn.

This is the living room? The stuffed chair over there is where pops always sits? No one better ever call me pops. And your mom always sits in that rocker? I can sit in the other stuffed chair or on the couch? The other stuffed chair will work just fine. Now what?

If I stay sitting here in this chair, I'll fall asleep. It's really comfortable. Where did she go? Guess I'm supposed to stay here and twiddle my thumbs.

Capt. You need to hope that you never ever see me again. What you did was unconscionable. If I hadn't kept that envelope all those years . . . what made me all of sudden want to go through my junk box? It wasn't like I didn't have exams to study for or that argument to write. Staying on the school campus or heading home just weren't options for me the ten days before Capt's annual Christmas party. Why did I have to be such a bonehead to follow that fruitcake?

I wish that I could've captured that look on the local newspaper's editor's face when I walked into his office. Talk about someone seeing a ghost. It sure did look like the poor guy was going into cardiac arrest when he first saw me. You should be used to it guy being called someone who you aren't. Why hasn't she told someone around here that the name that they're calling me isn't my name?

It could be a long night if the windows in this house are going to be constantly rattled by gusts of wind. That groaning sound being made by the wind . . . the last time that I heard that sound is when I thought that I should get some photos of what it's like when a hurricane comes ashore. I'm really glad that I'm inside this house right now and not outside in that whipping wind. I'd be a lot happier though if I was in my new wheels motoring east.

When Capt finds out what I did to my car, it'll make his day. He'll for sure try to figure out a way to cash in especially if the insurance company decides that it's not going to come through with what Capt will think that it should. And I was going to be an ambulance chaser, too. I sure had my head in the sand.

Guy – how could you've forgotten so quickly that Capt didn't put up the money for you to buy that car? You had it all planned out Capt didn't you? You were going to have me become your meal ticket weren't you Capt? This always reminding me Capt that because you're paying all my school bills and all my travel costs plus things like my computer and my camera – that right after I graduate and pass the boards that I'm to be your partner in your hole in the wall that you call a firm. Dream on Capt.

If I hadn't kept that envelope and if I hadn't wanted to get out into open country with my new car, I'd probably be sitting in Capt's house right now. I'd probably be drinking a beer while listening to Capt bemoaning the fact that he hadn't been able to get in on the big one yet.

You need to stop guy thinking about Capt as there's nothing that you're going to be able to do about him or to him as long as you're stuck out in nowhere. Face it guy – you're going to be here for a few days the way that it's snowing. Besides – you know that you not showing up for his Christmas party is going to make Capt a miserable bear. Good.

Inside this house sure has a peaceful, cheerful feel – just like in Mama T's house. I hope that Dotty isn't stuck in this snowstorm, too. I need to start listening to Mama T. She sure is getting around a lot better when I left than what she was when I first saw her. By the time that I get back there in about three months, she should be back in her house with Dotty. I sure could go for a Mama T hug right now.

And to think that one old yellowed envelope that was sent almost twenty years ago with a postmark that I could barely read could suddenly bring sense to my life. I've no idea why I kept and where I kept that envelope before it ended up in that shoebox. I'm sure glad that I didn't tell Capt what I was really going to do. If he knew that I was going to head to the Midwest town that was on the postmark instead of where I told him where I was going to go to take some beach photos . . . how could Capt have done what he did?

Why is there an oversized window in this room? All I can see outside that monster window from where I'm sitting is snow being blown in all directions. What's this about having pictures hanging on walls? Mama T has pictures hanging on the walls of her house, too. I don't remember Capt ever having any kind of picture hanging on any wall in any house where he has lived. Trophy wives are the only thing that I know that Capt collects.

Dotty sending me a birthday card every single year – and then you Capt making sure that each one got intercepted after the first one got through – so help me when I . . . where did they come from? Are they just going to sit there on the couch and stare at me? You could make a face at them. That worked really well didn't it guy? The older girl couldn't get out of this room fast enough.

I should be doing something. Why don't you get your computer? It's probably still sitting where I put it when I took it in the house. Download the photos that you took when you were with Dotty and Mama T.

Is there something wrong with me being in the kitchen? Why did she look at me like that? Was that look a cry for help? There's no way that I'll be able to escape her if she decides she needs to talk to me. She knows where she left me to hunker down. So – what's stopping her from talking to me? I've never had any trouble before with a gal trying to wiggle her way into my life. That's probably the only good thing that Capt ever told me not to do – not to get involved with a gal until I've finished with my studies.

Looks like she and her mother are getting dinner started. Ask them if they need help. That was a really condescending look. Just let her be. She can't help it that she is like she is. I pity the poor guy if there is one who just might find her likeable or even attractive. Just because you wouldn't think twice about . . .

Did she really think that I thought that there'd be some sort of internet connection here? I don't even see a telephone in this house. The TV looks like something that can only be found in an antique store. Okay – I shouldn't have rolled my eyes at her. What would you've done if she had started crying instead of looking like she really wanted to smack you? She sure is on edge about something.

How can Missy's mother not sense that her daughter is going off the deep end? Maybe Missy is like this all the time? Missy definitely has a handle on producing drama that's for sure.

Why did her mother just smile at me like that? Was that an I feel sorry for you smile or . . . that couldn't have been an I'm really happy that you're in her life smile – was it? She needs to know right now that I've never been in her daughter's life and that I never ever intend to be in her life.

Did that nutcase just motion to me to get out of the kitchen? That impertinent deranged spitfire . . . okay gal – I'll play your game for now but sooner or later, you're going to wish that you never ever treated me like I'm a little kid. You didn't have to give her that look you know. What's wrong with you guy? She probably saved your life.

There must be an outlet around here someplace in this sitting room. Here's one. Here's hoping that the computer will open up. So far, so good. Now – the camera. It's working. Whew – what a relief. It would've been awful if my two best friends had let the cold get to them.

Here comes company. Nothing like photos to attract kids. If you went over to the couch guy, the kids can sit on the couch with you. This one – if she's like her big sis, isn't scared of anything. The other girl sure isn't ready to . . . I've seen that look. It was when I looked at myself in the mirror when I was her age.

See if they'll sit one on each side of you. How about that – they're doing what you asked them to do. Find those photos that you took of kids when you made that trip last summer in Latin America. They might be interested in seeing the brightly colored clothes that the indigenous kids wear there.

Here they are. The photos have definitely gotten the older girl's attention. You need to slow down the slide show. Just set the computer guy to let the older girl change the photo when she wants to change it. She's got it – that was quick. That's a smart little lady sitting here.

*No – no – no – if Junior sees all those boxes . . . no one needs to know that I've packed up all my stuff – at least not yet. That obnoxious hardhead needs to just sit down and eat lunch instead of insisting on going right now to old jeep to get his suitcase. You don't have a choice gal – you need to get on your coat and boots. I should've brought in that big brute's things while he was in the barn. Where's your head gal?*

*Guys – they need to be outlawed. This staring at me with that who are you look is getting on my nerves big time. You do know gal that you made a fool of yourself again by the way that you demanded that you had to go with that arrogant interloper to old jeep instead of letting Junior go with him.*

*Why doesn't someone just ask me what's wrong with me? What makes you think gal that someone in your family will after all those times that you've pushed back at them suddenly dare now to . . . they're not going to confront you about something now. Why is everybody always scared to tell me something about me?*

*There's all kinds of stocking caps around here that he can wear instead of mine so . . . come on gal – just let him keep wearing yours. It makes him look the turkey that he is. And what does the way that you've been acting make you? I don't care. Everyone can think what they want to think.*

*Thanks Daddy G for an excuse to get out of this house. There's no way that I can tell anyone what a fool you've made me be. Why did you let happen yesterday happen? You're really cruel.*

*Where's he going? If I hadn't made him tie that rope around his waist . . . we shouldn't be out here. I can't see anything. Grab his hand. Talk about ironic – holding the hand of a complete stranger within a couple of hours of meeting him. Yes Daddy G – I know – he and I always held hands if we were sitting or standing next to each other when we prayed for a meal or when the campus study group prayed together. How could you Daddy G make me think that the campus outreach leader . . .*

*There's old jeep. Thanks Daddy G. And please don't let the door be frozen shut. Thanks. Here's his stuff. Now what does he want? Take my boxes to the house? My boxes are none of his business. My boxes are just fine with staying here. Just grab his suitcase and . . . just let the spoiled brat carry his own suitcase.*

*And when do you plan to take to your room those boxes that you have in old jeep – or do you plan to sleep in what you're wearing? For now, just get this insensitive bum back to the house. For someone gal who always knows exactly what she's going to do next, you've really gone indecisive. Please Daddy G – get me out of this mess. Make this a bad dream Daddy G. Please.*

*The guys need to go to the barn. The cows need to be milked. If they're thinking that a guy who could be on the front page of any fashion magazine is the guy who I was thinking was coming home with me, they're bigger fools than I am. At least the guys will have something to talk about while they're doing the milking.*

*How can he not notice how quiet it has gotten here in the kitchen? This can't really be the first time that he has drunk hot chocolate – can it? Under what rock has this guy been living? Those oliebollens are sure disappearing in a hurry.*

*It can't stay this quiet. Someone has to say something. Don't the twins have something to argue about? Ask Junior how he likes college. I've got to get them to talk about something otherwise they're going to start asking him questions. He wouldn't dare open his mouth – would he?*

*I sure wish that I could've gotten a picture of him while he was wearing my dorky looking stocking cap and granddad's lucky red fishing coverall. Does he know that he can dress down while he's traveling instead of in a sharp looking getup? Talk about being a misfit here. He has to be running with a money crowd.*

*You really need to get him out of the kitchen before one of the guys decides to say something to him or heaven forbid – asks him a question. That wouldn't be good at all. The bathroom. Show him where it is.*

*I should've thought of doing this earlier. The guys would decide now – now that their entertainment is no longer in the kitchen, to start to get their stuff on to head back out to the barn.*



*Now that he knows where the bathroom is, take him to living room. Good – he sat down. Maybe he'll fall asleep. I'll quick get my parka and boots on and go to the barn with the guys. If I hang around here, mom will for sure begin asking me questions. The last thing that I want to do right now is to talk with her.*

*That was sneaky mom. It's too early to begin to get supper ready. She knows how much I'd like to be out in the barn. What's she up to anyway? It's not like mom couldn't have cut up this chicken herself. How many of us are there? Pops, mom, my three bros, myself, Chatterbox, the foster kid and the lost cause. That makes nine. A leg for Chatterbox and a leg for the foster kid. A thigh for each twin. Junior will be a happy camper with the wings. Half of the breast for pops. Mom is fine with the neck and chest. Everyone knows that the back is mine so . . . that leaves the other half of the breast for that tactless mucklebrain.*

*I can't believe that mom hasn't asked me one question yet about anything? That's not like mom. Mom always wants to do know something about everything. How do I tell mom that I really don't want to know right now what's taking place at church? And if she thinks that I'm going to church for the church's Christmas program tomorrow night, it's not going to happen. I don't want to show my face to anyone.*

*The nice thing about mom going on the way that she is means that I don't have to say anything. I probably sounded to her the other night just likes she sounds right now to me. I sure did some rambling on and on about everything and anything and especially about . . . it's criminal what they're putting me through now.*

*I'll just go ahead and brown the chicken now that I've got the thing cut up into pieces. That should be enough flour in this bag. Add some salt. Now to find the old frying pan. That should be enough butter.*

*I wish that mom would stop looking at me with that goofy, cheery look. She looks like the cat that just swallowed the canary. Something has to be going on around here that I don't know about. Maybe mom is just really happy that her family is together again for the first time in about four months. This acting though like a teenager since I've gotten home isn't like that positive, upbeat mom who I've always known. Come on Daddy G – why won't you let me in on what's going on around here?*

*Now that I've gotten all the chicken pieces fried up golden brown, I'll put all the pieces in the roaster so that . . . wow – look at this brand new roasting pan that mom must've just gotten. About time. Pops probably got tired of patching up the old one.*

LGJ

*Add a little water to the bottom of the roaster and the chicken is ready to go in the oven. I can count on mom to put the chicken in the oven in thirty minutes or so to bake for an hour. Mom must've gotten these potatoes and carrots out of the food cellar this afternoon. They're still cold. Where's the peeler?*

*What's he doing in the kitchen? He needs to be sleeping in that stuffed chair in the living room. What's he going to do with his computer? He can't think that he can get on internet here at the house – can he? Why is he also taking his camera? He just rolled his eyes at me. That dweeb – he's so asking for it.*

*I saw that look mom. What were you doing smiling at him like that? You were trying to tell him something weren't you mom? Get him out of the kitchen before mom . . . I really can't blame mom for being intrigued in that fancy pants city boy. But . . . mom has got to know that that dude doesn't live in my world.*

*I hope that that disingenuous rat who has ruined my life has the worst Christmas ever. It'd serve him right for what he did to me. How could he in clear conscience do what he did after I showed him the ropes when he arrived at the school a couple of years ago? That spineless wimp wouldn't have been able to hang around there for two weeks if hadn't been for me. Not everyone walks into a college campus group that has already been meeting regularly. If my roommate and I hadn't joined that group when we showed up on campus a year earlier, the group would still be floundering. But then to have roomie do what she did – she better not dare send me an invitation. Who are you going to have Daddy G stab me next in the back?*

*This should be enough potatoes. Now the carrots. Mom's candied carrots – they always taste so good. Then I'll get some drop biscuit dough ready. Why don't you tell mom right now what your heartthrob has done to you? Do you really want to spoil the evening for her? Look how happy gal how mom is right now.*

*Be honest with yourself gal – did you really like that scrawny wimp? Just because you thought that you could love him if . . . do you really think that you would've if everything had come together like you were thinking it was? How should I've felt about him? He always seemed to like being with me. We had the same interests. We were always comparing what Daddy G was telling us. We talked about how many children we hoped to have. How many times did he call me his best friend? Going to his house this past Thanksgiving – what was I to think? Everything the guy did with me communicated that he cared for me.*

*Daddy G – why did you lead me to think that you were giving me the chance to have a husband and then to have kids when that's not going to happen? Why have you done this horrible thing to me Daddy G? I know Daddy G – my dream growing up was to have a man's man in my life – not some pathetic, gutless worm.*

*Gal – you've got to deal with reality. No guy wants to marry a gal who has the kind of scar that you have.*

*I've had it anyway with wanting to be a nurse. Why does being sick mean that people think that they've the right to whine and to complain and to think that everyone needs to listen to them. I'm going to miss that job though that I had. Those old people who're in that assisted living place have fascinating life stories.*

*Where's that recipe for those drop biscuits? Here it is. I'll just mix up the dough for now.*

*Why did that inconsiderate dupe dump me? It'd be so right if he was here with me right now instead of with her. I can't believe that after all those plans that he and I made that he'd do what he did. How was I supposed to know? Sure – I knew that he and roomie had been spending time together but . . .*

*Even if you were to find a job around her gal, you're not going to find someone to mentor you and to pray with you. You don't have any friends around here. What am I going to do?*

*What're you trying to teach me Daddy G? Okay Daddy G – I know – there isn't a nanosecond in time that you don't already know about. So Daddy G – why were you leading me on the last couple of months – leading me to think that he was going to on Christmas Day . . . getting my hopes up like that Daddy G and then smashing them the day before he was to come home with me – that's not Daddy G showing very much compassion towards me. Did you hear me? Then to have him use that excuse that he was too scared of me to tell me what he was going to do – why Daddy G do you have everyone so scared of me?*

*I do try Daddy G to produce good fruit in my life. You know that. I know Daddy G – I hear you. I'm not supposed to try to produce good fruit; I'm to be intentional about living a life that demonstrates a fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

*And how have you been doing gal? I'm such a fake Daddy G. I deserve having you make me Daddy G the laughing stock of my family.*

*Just finish mixing the dough gal and . . . I'll put this dish towel for now over this bowl of biscuit mix.*

*Looks like Chatterbox has lost her shadow. What happened to the foster kid? Did Chatterbox just tell mom that Frog Face doesn't want to play with her – that all she wants to do is to look at pictures on Missy's man's computer? He's my what? You need to tell Chatterbox that he's not your man. Didn't mom say that the foster kid was scared of guys? If she's so scared of guys, then why . . .*

*Where's mom going? This will give me the chance to do something with Chatterbox. Like mom has given me a chance to do something with Chatterbox? Mom couldn't have been gone ten seconds.*

*What's mom going to do with that Christmas present? Why is she giving it to me? Why doesn't she wait until Christmas to give it to me? I don't want a Christmas gift now. Just because you don't like to be given gifts gal, humor mom and open the thing.*

*What? Where did mom find this outfit? It had to have cost her a mint. Where did mom get the money to buy it? I can't take it. Mom needs to take the blouse and pants back to the store where she bought them.*

At the speed that she's going, the little miss here won't have enough time to see all the photos that I've put on my hard drive. Faces – especially those of little kids, are intriguing her the most. You need to tell her though that putting her finger on the screen will . . . guy – come on – how hard will it be to wipe her fingerprints off the screen later? Let her soak in those photos.

That was a fun experiential learning trip to Central America. Why can't people here in the U.S. be as accommodating? That month doing language study was really a great time. Everyone should live as a guest for month in a host country home. I should've taken home a lot more bags of coffee from there. Those ten pounds that I did take home disappeared in a hurry.

There were so many places to visit. I need to get back there. I could spend days just going through the different ruins. Those places offer so many options for taking really interesting photos. And then there's that deep crater lake and all those indigenous people who live on the shores of that lake. When I get back there, I'm going to walk around that lake even if it takes me a week or longer to do it.

How could I've thought that the people there live in poverty? Just because their homes don't begin to compare with homes here in the U.S., I'd trade everything to have the kinds of relationships that they have with each other. I learned so much from my host family.

Looks like I'm going to have to wait to see the photos that I just downloaded of Dotty and of Mama T. My little friend here probably wouldn't be interested in seeing some photos of a cantankerous older lady and photos of a very sweet loving lady who . . . where's Chatterbox going? I hope that she comes back.

It wouldn't surprise me at all if Mama T and that scheming vixen who lives here aren't somehow related. Mama T must've made life really interesting for grandfather. After seeing Mama T's wedding photos, it's not hard to see why the editor of the local rag thought that he was seeing a ghost.

How many times did I think about turning around? The trip got longer and longer. Talk about boring, flat country to travel through. If it hadn't been for that magnet pulling me towards that postmark . . . at least the GPS in my new car knew where to take me. If I'd known though how big the town was, there's no way that I would've started out on a two day drive to find someone with only a faded postmark to help me.

And what do you really hope to accomplish guy when you see Capt again? Do you really think that confronting him in front of whoever that pathological liar invited to his big party will make everything right? Jail would be too good for him for what he did.

If the gal at the post office hadn't told me that the guy who prints the local paper would know – if anyone would know, whose handwriting that could be on that envelope . . . going to see a newspaper editor sure wasn't on my radar. Since the guy had lived all of his life in the town and because he knew everyone . . . what was I thinking when I left school thinking that I could drive to a strange town and that all I had to do was show the envelope to someone at the post office and that he or she would know who mailed the thing?

I hope that it's okay that I'm letting this little lady look at the photos that I've downloaded on my computer. It'd be interesting to know what's she's thinking? She sure isn't talkative that's for sure. Maybe she'd like to know something about the kids who're in the photos – like the photo that she's staring at right now. Do you think guy that she has a context of knowing that kids her age in other countries have to work to make money to help buy food for themselves and for their families? I really doubt it.

Those three were really cute little imps. They sure worked me over to get me to buy some of the beaded bracelets that they'd made and which they were trying to sell. That running away though every time I wanted to take their photo was frustrating. It was when I finally got it that if I gave them some money, that they'd let me take photos of them. Then when I did finally buy a couple of their bracelets . . . hey guy – those bracelets still have to be in one of those inner pockets in your suitcase. I'll go get them.

Why does she look so disappointed? She must think that because I stood up that she has to stop looking at the photos. How do I get her to understand that she keep looking at the photos while I'm gone?

Why doesn't she say anything? She must've gone through some kind of serious trauma. Who is she? She sure doesn't seem like she belongs with this family? That other little girl though – if she grows up to be like her big sis . . . poor thing – especially as to how cute she is and how ladylike she acts right now.

She has to believe me that it's okay that she can keep on looking at the photos. It's like she doesn't believe me that I trust her with my computer. Tell her that you'll be right back – that you're just going to go get something out of your suitcase. Why is she putting my computer down where I was sitting? At least she's not getting up to look for Chatterbox.

It sure smells good here in the kitchen. I wonder where my nemesis has gone. It's just like her not to be around when I want to ask her something. Why don't you ask her mother where you can take your suitcase? Why am I getting the feeling that she'd really like to talk with me?

This place has a guest bedroom? At least I know now where I'm going to sleep. Great. This means that I won't be sleeping on the couch. Apologizing though that the guest room doesn't have heat and that snow is probably getting through the crack in the side window, she doesn't need to do that. Since there's plenty of blankets on the bed, I should sleep just fine in this room. After this past week guy, you should by now be used to sleeping in an unheated upstairs.

If I don't wake up soon, I'm going to start to believe that I actually did wreck my new beamer, that I was saved from freezing to death by a daffy wacko, that I'm now in a drafty old farmhouse with a mother who knows something that . . . you're awake guy. Just put your suitcase where she told you to put it and look for the bracelets. Why didn't I stay and spend the holidays with Dotty and Mama T. You would've made them really happy. This thinking that you had to be at Capt's annual Christmas party so that . . .

Think about it guy – you don't have one single reason for ever going home again. There's nothing in that room that you sleep in at Capt's house that you need. Everything that you have guy is at that house where you're rooming while you're at school. Just go back there and finish out your last school year.

Here they are. You should probably ask the mother first if you can give one of these bracelets to each one of her girls.

Why did her eyes suddenly get misty? If she doesn't think that it's a good idea for me to give her kids each a bracelet . . .

They're not both her daughters? The older kid is a foster child? Why did she just give me that surprised look? So the foster kid has been sitting on the couch next to me while looking at the photos that're on my computer – was that something that she shouldn't have been doing? She's scared of guys? Wonder why?

Ask if she talks. No one other than Chatterbox has ever heard her say anything the couple of weeks that she has been here? Chatterbox really can't be her given name – can it? That was a really idiotic question guy. Okay – she's called Chatterbox because she's always talking – even when there's no one is around.

The foster kid is okay being called what? That's not right. You've been called worse guy. It didn't feel good did it guy when . . .

Do I've a moment? Guess I'm going to hear the skinny on the kid whether I want to hear it or not.

She was taken away from her parents because the home environment was really bad? There're other kids. They're in different foster homes? If I'd had a brother or a sister . . . she'd been living in an old rundown house on the other side of town? There's a town near here? I wonder how many people live around here?

If she's so scared of guys that she doesn't want to have anything to do with them, her father had to have abused her somehow. Not being four years old yet when Capt . . . being placed in different foster homes probably isn't much different than constantly having to put up with a different nanny. Some of those nannies should be in jail right now the way that they treated me.

I know that Dotty did what she thought that she had to do regarding me but . . . growing up without a mother isn't going to be easy for that young lady. She needs to be with the rest of her siblings – not here in a strange home – especially over the holidays.

That's good that there're plans to bring all the kids together at one of the foster homes on Christmas Day so that they can spend some time together but . . . and they see each other at church, too? That doesn't begin to do it. Doesn't she know how painful it must be for each one of the kids when they've to say good-bye to each other again? And if she's the oldest, she has to be feeling responsible for the rest of the kids. No wonder there's such a haunted, hopeless look in her eyes.

This is more information than I need to know right now. All I want to do is to be on the road heading east. I don't want to be caught in the middle of someone else's problems. I've enough problems of my own.

Just keep listening guy. Don't let your feelings show. She means well. You're going to have a place to sleep tonight. The guys here seem to be good guys. If Chatterbox wants to spend all evening talking with me, I'd be totally game for that. Just because you have to be almost twenty years older than her . . . I'm sure going to keep my distance from her big sister though. That flaky screwball has too many screws loose.

Why didn't I stay with Dotty instead of trying to get back to Capt's place in time for his Christmas shindig? It's going to be so much fun celebrating Christmas someday with Dotty and Mama T. Just being around all those cousins that I didn't know that I had . . . it felt good being treated like royalty. Me being the favorite cousin and not having a clue that I was . . . when I see that egotistical moron again, I'm going to make him pay for robbing me like he did of knowing a family who really cares for me.

Why is she staring at me like she's waiting for an answer? Did she just ask me a question? I should know better than to let my thoughts wander.

She still has that twinkle in her eyes. No one can keep on looking and acting as happy as she has been. Ask her what's going on around here. Guy – what if she's thinking that you're Missy's . . . she very easily might believe that Missy will never catch a guy. She'd be right on target if she was thinking that. You've got to tell her guy like right now that you and Missy are not an item.

Do you want to be the one to bring a pall to her life and to this place? Just let Missy do it. How can someone with such gloom and doom hanging over her ever grow up in a place that seems so full of light and happiness. This place has the same ambience that's in Mama T's house. I sure wish that I knew what it was. I'd find a way to bottle it to take it with me.

Just tell her guy that you appreciate what she told you about the foster girl. But to call her Frog Face – there's no way that I'm ever going to call her Frog Face. It was bad enough for me always being called an accident. If I was married – which isn't going to happen as doing courtship just isn't me, I'd sure want to have kids. All a kid wants is to be befriended and . . . that was for sure a wink. She knows. Everyone knows around here. They're letting Missy hang herself. I think that I know why. This is going to be fun.

While your suitcase is still open, look for that bottle of ibuprofen that you always have with you. Here it is. I sure hope that these pills will knock out the headache that's more irritating than anything else. The way though that my chest still feels . . . guy – there's no way that you could've done what you did out in the barn if you really do have a couple of broken ribs.

That was really nice of her – bringing me this glass of water. She must've heard me opening up the bottle. I sure do hope that her husband knows how lucky he is. What Mama T said about what I need to do when I decide to start to look for a wife probably is right on target – that I'm never to settle on marrying a gal who's outwardly beautiful – that I should focus instead on finding a gal to marry who's filled with inner beauty. Missy's mother has definitely set the bar high for having inner beauty.

Good – she's still sitting where she was sitting on the couch when I left. I hope that she knows that these are bracelets. Why did she take off like that? What made me think that she'd like one of these bracelets?

*So the outfit is my color and it's classy – Mom still needs to take it back to the store where she bought it. Gal – you know that you need a new outfit so . . . but . . . I've got to get mom to stop mothering me.*

*Who does mom think she is telling me now that I should . . . okay – you know that she's right – I need to take a bath now before the guys get back in the house from milking. But telling me to put on this new outfit though . . . she knows better than to tell me what I need to do. Why won't everybody leave me alone?*

*Humor mom – tell her that you'll at least try it on. She's given you gal an excuse to . . . you really need to just get it out of the way and tell her what happened? You know that she knows that you're bugged about something. So do it. Tell her. What's the matter with you gal? Why am I heading for the bathroom?*

*What's that meddlesome goon doing now? Okay Daddy G – I know – I've no right to call him names. It's not his fault that he's stuck here with me. You could make it a whole lot easier for me Daddy G by giving me some sort of clue what it is that's going to take place before it takes place. Why can't you just let me have the kind of boring life like pops and mom have? I'm so tired of having theater always all around me – and then having her call me the drama queen. And I thought that she was my best friend.*

*What's he doing that has Chatterbox and the foster kid practically sitting on his lap? They're looking at something that's on his computer. Why don't you go over there to see for yourself what he's showing them? Chatterbox must be getting bored as . . . ask her what she was looking at on the dolt's computer.*

*Did she just say that Frog Face only wants to look at pictures of kids? Why does the obnoxious nerd have pictures of kids on his computer? I sure wouldn't want to be called Frog Face. I'm sure though that I've been called even worse names to my back.*

*For someone who's supposed to be scared of guys . . . is Frog Face changing the pictures? She can't know anything about a computer – can she? Did he teach her how to change from one picture to another? He's letting her touch his computer's screen. Why can't he be that patient with me?*

*He's so out of it he doesn't even know that I'm just feet away. Now might be a good time to talk to him. Why is he getting off the couch? You need to disappear before he sees you.*

*That was a real brain dead move gal. Why did you do that? You just blew a chance to talk with that chump. You really need to fill him in on what happened yesterday. Just maybe gal the poor dude has things going on in his life that he'd like to tell someone. You're acting gal like you're the only one who has ever had something really bad happen to totally mess up their life. There has to be a good reason why the guy is well over a thousand miles away from where the license plate on his car says that he's from.*

*What're you going to tell mom when she finally . . . you know that she just cannot help herself. There're times though mom when something is just not your business. And your plan gal is to tell mom that it's none of her business why your beau didn't come home with you? I sure jumped the gun – didn't I? What was I to think after two years? I'll keep in perfect peace Missy whose mind is steadfast because Missy trusts in Me? Daddy G – that's not cool. I know that's how I'm supposed to trust in you Daddy G. But – setting me up Daddy G to be duped by my friends was really brutal of you to do. Why did you do this to me Daddy G?*

*Why did that addlebrain head for the kitchen? If mom should start asking him questions . . . she wouldn't dare – would she? I sure wish that I could hear what mom is saying to him. Okay – telling him about the history of the foster kid is okay. He's probably not listening to a word that she's saying. You can at least give him credit gal for keeping his mouth closed. Who is he anyway? How many times gal did you have the chance to find out and . . . are you having fun yet gal doing pouting?*

*Just run a hot bath gal and . . . the guys won't be back in the house for another hour. A half an hour here in the bathroom and then . . . and then what? I can peel and cut up the apples for an apple crisp. I can mix up the topping for the apple crisp and . . .*

*Come on gal – get back to real life. You never duck from the truth. So – why don't you . . .*

*Now what? I just got in the bathroom. If Chatterbox thinks that she needs to take a bath now because I'm going to take a bath . . . what's mom up to now? That's my old makeup kit. Mom knows that I don't wear makeup anymore. This can't be happening. Mom can't believe that that big bruiser in the living room is the same guy that I've been yakking to her about for the last couple of years – can she? The scaredy-cat who I really thought was going to come home with me to . . . is scared of his own shadow.*

*The last time that I had a bath was the last time that I was home. That had to be last summer. It sure feels good to just sit here in this hot water and soak. I could fall asleep.*

*I can't believe that mom really expects me to come out of here wearing makeup – especially after my last year of high school when she was always accusing me of putting on too much makeup. What're the guys going to think when they see me with makeup? You know that they're going to think that . . . there's no way that I'm going to . . . why not? It'll serve them right to jump to an absurd conclusion that I'd have any kind of interest in a complete stranger.*

*The guys have to be wondering why I'm not out in the barn with them. I wouldn't put it past mom to have told them that my guy friend was coming home with me. If that wimp had gone out to the barn and if he'd been asked to help pull that calf, he would've keeled over the moment that . . . you know that you wouldn't have told him gal to go to the barn; you would've left him here in the house while you went out to the barn.*

*That really wasn't a bright move gal sending that city boy out to the barn with Junior instead of going out there yourself. You really need to apologize to him. I wouldn't blame him at all if he tells me to stay clear of him. Just because you could pretty much say whatever you wanted to to your bros and to your former wishy-washy acquaintance, that doesn't give you the right gal to treat the bloke sitting in your living room like dirt. He doesn't seem like that bad of a guy. The foster kid sure seems to like him. Mom sure acts like she's enamored with him. He has definitely passed whatever tests the guys had for him. He's already way ahead of where I know that that brainless blockhead would be if he had come home with me.*

*So Daddy G – after having me throw away a couple of years with one guy thinking that . . . what're you going to make me do next? I sure don't want to waste that kind of time on another guy – waiting for him to get up the nerve to ask me to marry him only to have him humiliate me. Okay Daddy G – I heard you. Love has to be part of the equation. But he was gentle. He listened. He knew that he was special to me. What more could a gal want in a husband? Why wouldn't I've been a good wife to him Daddy G? And what'll make her a better wife for him Daddy G? Having them not tell me until yesterday morning that . . . how could I've been so clueless that there was something serious going on between the two of them?*

*Why did you turn my life upside down Daddy G? Less than forty-eight hours ago I wasn't thinking of anything else but what it was going to be like getting back to school after . . . how many times have you told someone gal that the most important thing that he or she can do when hit with a crisis is to talk to someone? You need to start listening to yourself gal. Just because it's you this time, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't talk to at least mom. You know that mom will let you vent without going critical on you.*

*Thanks Daddy G for at least making it possible that I could make it home. I'm sure glad that you didn't leave me out there in that blizzard. You know how much I like a blizzard Daddy G. Your blizzards are so much more fun when I know that I can walk back into the folk's warm cozy house. And then to curl up in bed at night and hear the noise of the wind that you're sending to howl around and to shake the house . . . you know gal that you're not going to sleep well at all tonight if you don't tell mom what he did to you.*

*I don't want to hurt pops. Pops was so happy when I told him that I wanted to study to become a nurse.*

*You know gal that mom will expect you to wash your hair, too, so – what if I just stayed in this bathroom?*

*It'd be so awkward Daddy G to go to a campus ministry activity that he's leading. You know Daddy G that I'll want to rip the eyes out of both of them. Plus – I just don't do very well sitting back while others do what I know that I can do a whole lot better. Why did you Daddy G have me put in all that effort to have the campus ministry succeed and then to have that inconsiderate joker do what he did to me?*

*I can't believe it Daddy G that you'd just a couple of days ago have me talk to the gang who showed up for the last campus ministry function about you wanting to over the holidays make their feet beautiful by having them talk to family and to friends who you haven't led yet to know you – and then just two days later you made sure that all my dreams are destroyed. Everyone has to know by now about that hissy-fit that I had when that spineless invertebrate told me about how he'd fallen deeply in love with roomie and that . . . why was it so important to you Daddy G to make me look like such a hypocrite to everyone?*

*I really have a hard time understanding you sometimes Daddy G. Didn't I respond immediately to your call Daddy G on the very day that I first heard you clearly calling me to teach others about you so that they could teach others so that . . . and you've had me Daddy G do my very best ever since to teach others about you. I know that you know Daddy G that the number of guys and gals who're showing up to the campus ministry functions has been growing exponentially ever since I proactively got involved way back when.*

*And how often gal have you told someone that if there ever came a time when you felt that the campus ministry wouldn't happen if you weren't there that you needed to step away from it? You really were beginning to make yourself very visible in those campus ministry meetings and events – you know that.*

*You didn't give me a choice Daddy G but to clean out my dorm room. How can you be so callous?*

*I wish that there was a nursing home around here. Old people are always so affirming. I could check with the vet to see if he needs help. You can't stay here – you know that gal.*

*Good thing that the water in this tub is getting cool. It sure wouldn't be hard to hide out here in the bathroom until . . . until when? Just get out of the way washing your hair. It definitely needs to be washed. Why can't mom understand that I'm going to feel way overdressed in that new outfit that she bought me? Maybe it won't fit. That'd give me a nice out. Yah – since when has your mom gotten you something that hasn't fit? Talk about someone who can find the best bargain in a store. And where do you think that you got your penny pinching from gal?*

*You need to make a decision about what you're going to do about the persona non grata. Okay Daddy G – I'll let you take care of the city dude. I really should call the sheriff just as soon as I finish in here. Maybe if mom hears what I'm telling the sheriff over the phone about his car . . .*

*This hair is utterly ridiculous. Letting my hair grow long because he said that he likes long hair on gals sure helped didn't it gal? I'll get mom to cut it short tomorrow. The only way that I know how to fix my hair anymore is to pin it in a pile on the top of my head. Why don't you ask mom if she'll do something with it? When did mom get a curling iron? She must've gotten it to use on Chatterbox's hair. How does someone use this thing without burning their fingers?*

*I can't believe that I'm really doing this. I feel downright ridiculous getting all dressed up. You're going to make mom happy. So what if the guys think that I've gone bananas. Maybe it's about time that I tried being a lady instead of . . . this is a new tube of lipstick? Mom. You're going to get an earful when . . . and do you really think that getting on mom's case will make you feel better?*

*This outfit is a name brand. She couldn't have gotten it from anyplace around here. She must've ordered it from one of those catalogues that she's always getting. Well . . . the top looks like it's fitting me just fine. Now the pants. That can't be me in the mirror looking back at me. I can't leave the bathroom looking like this. I feel like a streetwalker.*

*It's time that you talk to me mom about what's going on around here. I know that there's something that you're not telling me. I know you mom. That I know something that you don't know look that you've had on your face ever since I've gotten home – you're ready to burst aren't you mom about something.*

*This is the pits. I can't leave my stuff forever in old jeep. I can't throw whoever he is back out in the blizzard. I can't go back to school. I can't even leave this bathroom. Daddy G – just please stop messing with my life. I know that this is the day that you've made for Missy but . . .*



Good – she’s coming back. By the way that she’s pulling Chatterbox’s arm, it looks like Chatterbox didn’t have a choice but to come with her. Just let them each pick out a bracelet that they like.

What does she want? Why is she pointing like that to my computer screen? Oh – I must’ve been gone so long the screen saver . . . I sure wish that you could tell me little lady what you want me to do. All those hand motions – how does Chatterbox know that she wants me to go back to the photo before this one? Is this the one that she wants?

How many times have you looked at that photo? That cute little terror in the photo is holding out towards me the bracelet that the foster kid is pointing to. How could she remember seeing it? I can barely see the bracelet in the photo. She’s definitely convinced that it’s the same bracelet. Talk about being animated. You need to tell her to be careful – she’s going to push her finger right through the screen.

Now you’re really in trouble guy. Other than that angry wind out there making whatever those sounds are and the constant sound of snow being slapped by the wind against this house and those spooky rattling sounds as the wind tries to blow down this house, this place has been really peacefully quiet until . . . how do I get these two little tigers to stop screaming and jumping up and down?

Oh – oh – here comes mother. Talk about someone looking like she’s seeing something that she can’t believe. I didn’t mean to get her foster kid all wound up like she is. Should I tell her that Chatterbox was who started the screaming and jumping up and down and then the foster kid . . .

She doesn’t look mad – she just looks really surprised about something. Maybe Chatterbox is supposed to stay quiet instead of being an out of control jumping jack. All this jumping up and down and screaming and hugging each other – it’s like they’ve never had anything given to them before.

What does she mean how did I do it? You need to ask her what you did. That’s the first sound that she’s heard her foster kid make since . . . that’s a Mama T look. She wants to hug me. Ask her if it’s still okay with her if I give each one of them a bracelet. That was an affirmative nod if I’ve ever seen one.

Just as soon as those two little terrors stop acting so silly, I’ll give the foster kid the bracelet that the little indigenous gal in the photo is holding and I’ll let Chatterbox choose one from the other bracelets.

Finally. They should sleep really well tonight after all that. I sure wish though little lady that you weren’t looking at me like that now with that haunted stare. Why doesn’t she believe me that this bracelet is now hers? I don’t want her to give it to Chatterbox. She needs to understand that there’re plenty other bracelets that Chatterbox can choose from but that I want her to have this bracelet because . . .

You’re a complete stranger to her guy. If her father abused her in any way . . . maybe she doesn’t know what it means to be given something? You always got whatever you wanted guy.

Maybe she doesn’t know that it’s a bracelet. Have Chatterbox pick out a bracelet. Not looking at her mother before she chose one – there’s something that she and her big sis have in common – decisiveness. The heart stealer had already decided which one she wanted even before I told her that she could have one.

You’re going to have to help Chatterbox with that bracelet. She doesn’t have a clue what it is. I’m going to have to put the bracelet on her – if it’s okay with her mother. You could let her choose a bracelet, too. That look that she just gave to me – it’s the same one that Dotty had after her initial shock of seeing me – like I’m someone who she’s really, really glad to see. Why? She doesn’t know me – I don’t know her.

Hopefully this bracelet won’t slip off her wrist as . . . I get a feeling though that she’s going to make sure that it stays on for awhile – at least through tonight. Now. . . good grief guy – don’t get maudlin now. Just because she just walked over, picked up the bracelet, stuck out her arm and . . . she trusts you guy. She trusts me. She really trusts me. I wish I could see the little hole to get the knot through. There. Finally.

Why do I feel so emotional all of a sudden? Just go to the big window guy and . . .

You sure made her day guy. Those were tears in her eyes. It's too bad that Missy didn't end up with her mother's DNA. Is Missy like her father? I kind of doubt it. He seems like a quiet, steady guy who has his head screwed on really well.

They sure are happy with their bracelets. I don't remember ever being that ecstatic about anything.

Why are they coming towards me? Don't let them hug your legs. This is really awkward. They want to tell me thanks for their bracelets? I should feel like a complete stranger in this home. But I've been made to feel a part of this family from the moment that I walked through the door. That loose cannon though – I wonder where she went. Maybe she decided after all to go out to the barn?

Where are those two little rascals going to now? Must be the door to the upstairs.

That didn't take them long to do whatever they were doing upstairs. Can Missy have one, too? Missy must've gone upstairs. Talk about a coward. It really isn't any of your business guy why she's running away from something. Just let those two zany little clowns pick one of the bracelets for her. There's no way that she's going to put it around her wrist.

Do I feel tired. At least my head has pretty much stopped throbbing. Why don't you just go over to that stuffed chair and crash?

Thanks a whole lot Missy. You could've entertained them instead of . . . guy – you've got to let it go with her. She is who she is. I bet Mama T was a Missy type when she was Missy's age. Mama T is still a Missy type. The only difference between the two is that Mama T thinks that everyone has to have a hug while Missy . . . hug probably can't be found in Missy vocabulary.

If Mama T and Missy ever ended up in the same room, that'd be scary. Talk about having ornery streaks. Terk had to have been quite a guy to be able to keep Mama T in line. Having to somehow raise six kids in that tiny house where Dotty lives with Mama T . . . where was my head that I didn't stay there through the end of the year instead of . . . it serves you right guy to end up in a place out in nowhere.

It looks like that was a good move guy giving those goofy kids each a bracelet. Take some photos of them with their bracelets.

That sure quieted them in a hurry. They've probably never seen a camera like this. You probably should take a photo first of something else and then show them on the camera what you took. That rocker over there should do. This is obviously something totally new to them. Take a photo of yourself. Make a face. That's better. You got a giggle out of them.

I wonder why the little lady is tilting her head like she is? She's keying in on something. That was a do it again? She talks. That sad looking little gal doesn't miss a thing. Ask her if she'd like to take a photo of me. If Chatterbox doesn't stop being so animated, her mother will come over here again. Talk about an excitement overkill on Chatterbox's part watching her foster friend take a photo of me. Tell her to take a photo of Chatterbox. Now download the photos so that they can see them. Good photos.

Let her take the camera so that she can take photos of whatever. She needs though to put the strap around her neck. She's getting it to see what a photo looks like that she has just taken and if she doesn't like the photo, how to delete it. Show her what happens if she turns the lens. Guy – that's one smart young lady.

Peace and quiet. Sounds like they've gone to the kitchen. Now to get some quick shuteye before . . .

That nap will have to wait again. Am I really okay with Frog Face and my camera and . . . ask her if I can call her Froggy instead. She really does give me the feel of a frog that's about ready to jump.

She needn't be concerned about the camera. Just tell her that it's under warranty. So she's young. That amazing aptitude that she has of grasping that quick how to . . . I don't know how to explain it to her.

She's looking at me like . . . she's dying to ask me or to tell me something. What's stopping you guy from asking her if you need to know something? You know that she'd tell you if it was something that she thought that you really needed to know. Why do I feel so totally accepted by her?

A question? Here goes. Chatterbox told her that Froggy said do it again to me? Is she's thinking that Chatterbox made it up that her foster kid said something to me? Why does she look so incredulous? No one has heard her say anything other than Chatterbox? How do I get her to get it that I've no clue why she said something to me? Thanks for spending time with her? Like I had a choice? She's serious guy about really being appreciative of you showing an interest in her. The truth is – you've been having a great time with those two fun-loving monkeys. Plus it's nice not having the ticking bomb around giving me glares.

It sure is tempting to tell her who you are. Why don't you? You know that she knows that you aren't who she called you when you got here. Just play her game guy.

It would've been nice to chat some. But I'll let starting whatever she called it trump spending time with me plus it's a good idea to check on what the girls are doing in the kitchen.

If I'd stayed at Dotty's place, I'd probably be right now at the teahouse having dinner with Mama T. Teahouse – yah – like that place is a teahouse. That so-called teahouse is the quintessential greasy spoon if there ever was a greasy spoon. Everyone knows the place as Terk's Place. Terk must've been a fabulous cook by how everyone raves about him. The place still has great food. It'd be nice if Dotty didn't have to work there. How has she done it – working two full time jobs just so . . .

How many times did I see her face in a crowd not knowing that she was my mother? Her family getting behind her like they have so that . . . a guy couldn't be any luckier than to be a part of such a great family. To have everyone treat me like I've always lived there – I should've lived there all my life instead of just finding out now what would've been if . . . when I'm through with you Capt, you're going to wish that . . .

It's going to seem like an eternity to finish up those final classes at school. Once you've gotten the bar behind you, you'll need to get out on your own guy so that you can help Dotty begin to have a life again. Capt making her pay support all these years – plus coercing her to pay for my schooling, for my cars, for my trips, for clothes, for . . . what a miserable, lowdown bottom feeder.

If it hadn't been for a birthday card that was mailed almost twenty years ago, I wouldn't have found out that I've a mother who has always tried to do the very best for me. That envelope should've disappeared long ago. And to think that not one other card from Dotty got through to me. If the old witch ever finds out that her sweet housecleaner has been calling Dotty every month for the past how many years to . . .

Spending each afternoon and evening waiting on tables at the tearoom and then doing the graveyard shift at the nursing home . . . Dotty because of me hasn't had a life of her own. I owe her big time.

Either someone must've gotten bored doing whatever it was that she was doing or she thinks that she has to keep me company because . . . if Chatterbox wants to spend time with me, I'm fine with that.

That question sure came out of nowhere. Do I have a friend? There's no way that she'd understand if I told her that up until a week ago . . . just tell Chatterbox that you have friends.

Will I be her friend? Why would she think that I wouldn't want to be her friend? Tell her that you'd like her to be your friend. She knows that she's my friend? How does she know that she knows that she's my friend? Jesus told her? What? Jesus told her that he's my friend? Is Jesus another name that the foster kid uses? And Jesus wants me to be his friend just like she's his friend? You need to ask her who this Jesus is.

Do I want to know how to become Jesus' friend? When Jesus died, he became her friend? I hope that she knows that she has lost me. Isn't Jesus in the kitchen right now taking photos of . . . what? Missy could've died saving her so that she can keep living with pops and mom is like Jesus dying on a cross so that he can save me? Missy saved Chatterbox's life? Does that angry looking scar that angles over Missy's eye . . .

*You can't keep hiding here gal in the bathroom. Just open the bathroom door and . . . maybe you can make it to the upstairs door without anyone seeing you. And what would you do upstairs? You know that once the guys are back in the house and supper is on the table . . . why have you let immaturity take over your life? Ever since they told you, you've been acting like a spoiled, rotten baby. It's your fault Daddy G.*

*How come Chatterbox can scream like a stuck pig? I'd be doing a time out by this time if I ever screamed that loud. Didn't mom tell me that Frog Face . . . that has to be her screeching. She's squealing just as loud as Chatterbox. What happened? What did he do? Those are a couple of really energized kids.*

*Mom didn't have to sneak up on me like that. She didn't sneak up on you gal – you know that. She was just heading for the living room to find out what all the noise was about. You just happened to have come out of the bathroom right before . . . I know Daddy G – I need to accept the hand that you're giving me as . . .*

*You could've Daddy G had mom give me a disapproving look instead of . . . that open mouth gawk like I don't believe what I see – what was she expecting to see? I feel so . . . just head upstairs.*

*It's cold up here. Turn up the room heater. My old bed. It's going to feel so good sleeping in it again – especially with all those sounds that the wind and the snow are making. Looks like mom has already put an extra quilt on the bed. Chatterbox must be going to sleep with the foster kid while I'm home.*

*You need to get your boxes from old jeep. If you don't get those boxes in before you go to bed, you're not going to have anything to sleep in tonight. Why did you decide Daddy G that the Christmas break would be the time for you to have my Job friends tell me that they've hooked up? Admit it gal – you're feeling relieved now that the cheating schmuck didn't come home with you. Do you really think that you'd be happy married to a weak-kneed bore? But those mirrors Daddy G – they're always telling me that no one will ever marry me because . . .*

*Just go over to the old glider and do what you know that you need to do to get moping out of your system.*

*Why are they coming upstairs? I want to be alone. This is my room. Just because mom has been letting Chatterbox use this room, it's still my room. Okay Daddy G – I know – get a grip.*

*Big deal – those are just some cheap things from who knows where. Can't they see – I'm looking at them. Here's hoping they'll leave now – like pronto. My man said that I could have one? What? Tell Chatterbox that she's not making any sense. He has a bunch of these? He didn't have those things with him – did he?*

*Mom must've gotten those things? Why is the foster kid pointing to the one that she has around her wrist? How does Chatterbox know why she's pointing to it? It's in what picture? There's no way that I'm going to go downstairs to . . . good – they're leaving – and they better not come back.*

*I've got to get away from here. Why in the world would Chatterbox say that he's my man? He's so not my man – let alone a friend. What did he tell them? He better not have been blabbing to mom. You should've left him to freeze to death. It would've served him right for drinking while driving.*

*If mom hadn't called that loser downstairs by my ex's name . . . and what would've you said to mom? You know that you should've walked in the house and blurted out what happened. And how does a gal tell her mom that she has just gotten dumped for her roommate who she thought was her best girlfriend? And how many times over the past couple of years did you tell mom what a gentleman that that imbecile is – was?*

*Mom had to have rocked me in this glider – just like she did with all her kids. If I could just climb up on her lap now and . . . no – please Daddy G – please don't have them come back up here. I know that you can stop them so please stop them. Why aren't you listening to me anymore Daddy G. Am I listening to you Daddy G? You don't have to remind me that I haven't been.*

*Not again. I didn't say that I wanted one of those things. If they think that I'm going to put that stupid thing around my wrist . . . she can talk. I know that I heard her say put it on please.*

*Talk about a manipulator – this talking only when she wants to talk. And isn't this what you've been doing ever since you've gotten home? That's not fair Daddy G. Okay Daddy G – I'll talk to mom.*

*Not a puppy dog look. Chatterbox had to have taught her that look as Chatterbox can do it really well.*

*Are you enjoying yourself disappointing her? You know gal – those two ragamuffins are not going to go away until you do what they want you to do. Why am I always doing what someone else wants me to do? Why won't someone do what I want done for a change?*

*How does this dumb thing work anyway? There's nothing to hook the ends together. Have I become that much of an invalid that . . . how was I supposed to know that that knot fits through the small loop on the other end. At least the thing's colors work with my new get-up. I'll take the thing off before supper. There's no way that I'm going to let that brazen numskull see me wearing this silly thingamajig.*

*Quiet. Thank goodness. I'll head downstairs in a few minutes to help mom start supper but for now . . .*

*Okay Daddy G – we need to talk. Please forgive me for my attitude Daddy G. What happened though Daddy G just won't stop hurting. I still feel like someone has just hit me in my stomach.*

*What did I do Daddy G that you'd do something like this to me? I know – you're my heavenly Father and that as my heavenly Father, you're going to take me through difficult situations so that I'll know what it means to endure and to have my faith strengthened in you. Your timing though Daddy G was really bad on this one. How am I ever going to survive my bros' ragging when they find out what kind of fool I've been?*

*And how have you treated your bros over the years? You know Daddy G that a gal – if she's the oldest in the family, has one strike against her from the get-go. I'm really glad that they're scared of me. They're not scared of you gal – and you know that. You just have them tolerating you.*

*I don't want to go downstairs. If mom needs me, she'll call me. I'll just wrap this blanket around me and if I fall asleep, I fall asleep. I need sleep after spending last night packing those boxes. She needs to be glad that she didn't hang around to say good-bye. Leaving with him for her home right after they told me . . . it would be worth it though to be back at school just long enough to see her face when she sees that all my stuff is gone. For her to really think that I'd be happy that she and namby-pamby are now a number . . .*

*There was no way that she could've been listening to me when . . . if she had been listening to me, she would've known my feelings about him. Thinking that we just had a platonic relationship – if that was what he thought our relationship was, he would've told me about his feelings about her. Then the pantywaist coward could only tell me through her that he was too scared to tell me that . . .*

*Here's hoping that he has tripped and fallen on his face when he walked into her folk's house. Well . . . okay Daddy G – I know – that constant buffering wind outside is like your Spirit regenerating and sanctifying me. You've got a long, long ways to go with me – you know that don't you Daddy G? You want me to thank you again? Okay – thanks again Daddy G for having your Son let His life become once and for all the ransom payment to cover my sin indebtedness to you. Will you help me now? You owe me.*

*Why are you so patient with me Daddy G? How do I forgive like you forgave me? Dressing myself with kindness, compassion, humbleness, gentleness, patience and then putting on love as a coat over everything that you've told me to dress myself with just isn't who I am. You hardwired me Daddy G. Why didn't you hardwire me like mom?*

*Why does it still seem like it was yesterday that I was sitting in this glider – thinking about what I could wear the first day of the new school year to impress the boys instead of keeping an eye on Chatterbox. If it hadn't been for Pooch really wanting to get someone's attention . . . I'm never ever going to be able to shake that sight of seeing from this bedroom window little red riding hood tottering towards Brutus. If it hadn't been for Pooch's nonstop barking and his nipping and nipping at Brutus' back hoofs . . . the way that Brutus was pawing the ground with his hoofs and half charging towards Chatterbox as she . . .*

*It had been fun dressing up Chatterbox in red while reading her Little Red Riding Hood. Then while you were sitting here daydreaming instead of still entertaining Chatterbox, she somehow manages to get out of the house without you hearing her leave and then through the barnyard fence so that she could pet Brutus. If you knew that I needed a scar on my forehead Daddy G to remind me that I'm to be always diligent and vigilant, you could've you know had it happen in another way instead of having me skid on a cow pie when I was reaching for Chatterbox just as Brutus was raising his head. And then to have the twins show up. Why? I know Daddy G – it's important that I always show integrity in everything that I do and in everything that I say. Okay – okay – I know – I'm getting a failing grade in keeping a right attitude.*

*Now who's coming up the steps? It sounds like one of those little troublemakers. That's his camera that she has in her hands. She's taking photos? He's letting her take pictures? That's an awfully expensive camera for that twerp to be playing with.*

*How can an inept foster kid know how to use a camera? That's not fair? What I wouldn't do to have a camera like that. What's this with just randomly snapping photos of whatever? What's he going to do with all those photos that she's taking? Do I want to see the pictures that she's taken? How's she going to . . . that's the kitchen. How many photos did she take in the kitchen? That's a goopy look mom. You weren't expecting someone to be pointing a camera at you – were you mom? That's a good one of you mom – you look like you just put a lemon slice in your mouth.*

*Why is Frog Face shaking her head back and forth like . . . she can erase photos on that camera? Don't let her erase that photo. The guys . . . it'll serve mom right for all the times that she's pulled something on us.*

*Tell Frog Face to leave. You didn't ask her to come up here. This studying every photo like she's a professional photographer – and then erasing each photo that she doesn't like, does she really think that she knows what she's doing? At the rate that she's going, it's going to take her all night to . . .*

*I couldn't have heard right. She couldn't have said that she wants to take a picture of me because I look really pretty? No – she can't take a photo of me. I'm not pretty. I can't look pretty.*

*You know gal that she's not going to go away until you let her take a photo of you. Just let her take one. It's not going to kill you to . . . how many photos is she taking of me? Okay smarty-pants – if you want to take photos of me, how about some of me making funny faces? That was a smile? She can smile.*

*Take that camera away from her before she breaks it taking photos of you. Now what does she want? What if I don't want to see those photos that she has just taken of me? I'll get her to erase all the photos. You sure do gal a great poor me look. If that's the look that's on my face when I have an I'm going to kill you look if you don't do what I tell you to do, no wonder I don't have any friends. No wonder everyone is always making a wide circle around me. No wonder everyone jumps when I say jump.*

*Why is Frog Face giggling? Oh great – she has to erase that photo – like right now before – there's no way that I'm going to let anyone see those photos. The first photos are bad enough but . . . there's no way that I'm going to let anyone see me trying to be an ugly sap when I know that I'm one already. This one with my thumb on my nose – that photo says it all doesn't it gal. You've been doing a great job gal snubbing your nose at everyone. You have to get that camera from Frog Face before . . .*

*When did she take that photo? I look like I'm happy – like I'm having a really good time. That's another one of me with a lot of teeth showing. She must've snapped those photos from her hip when I stopped making faces. They're dead center. Maybe you should've asked her first if it was okay with her that you give her a hug. You'd stiffen up, too, wouldn't you gal if . . . she's hugging me.*

*You heard her. She just told you that she likes you. She doesn't have any reason to like me. Once she gets to know me, she'll be like everyone else. Shouldn't she be asking me if she can be my friend instead of . . . what makes her think that she can tell me that she's making me her friend – what if I don't want to be her friend? Why does everyone think that they need to run my life for me? Please Daddy G – please – make me have a clean heart and start up again in me a faithful spirit.*

I sure wish that Chatterbox would stop looking at me like . . . is she expecting me to give her an answer now? Tell that little know-it-all that you're going to have to think about asking Jesus to be your friend.

Why don't you just play her invisible friend game and do what she's asked you to do. So – what would a guy say to someone he can't see to ask him to be his friend? Ask Chatterbox. She'll tell you.

I'm silly? Why am silly? I'm not silly. You need to tell Chatterbox that just because she can see Jesus that doesn't mean that you can see Jesus. And just because she said that Jesus wants to be my friend that doesn't mean that he wants to be my friend – does it? I couldn't have been like her when I was her age.

This having Jesus as a friend . . . that song or whatever that was that ended that church service the other morning – how did it go? It started out saying something about Jesus being a friend. Ask Chatterbox if she knows a song about Jesus being a friend. She'd have to go look for her mother.

I sure hope that her mother doesn't mind being interrupted fixing dinner. You really need to apologize to her for . . . lady – I don't know what you're thinking but if I have to hazard a guess by those eyes – me being here is sure making your day.

Just tell her that you weren't really listening to what the words were in the song. Tell her the truth – you were still trying to wrap your mind around being in a church when the song was sung. You were in church last Sunday because you didn't have any choice but to go there. If you aren't convinced by now that Capt is a compulsive liar – like always telling you that going to church is a waste of time, you need your head examined. Oh-oh – Missy told me that I wasn't . . . I probably just gave her mother too much information.

Okay – if the song started out with what a friend we have in Jesus – and then it goes all our sins and griefs to bear . . . tell her that's it. How long is that song? Does she know the whole song? She needs to get back to the kitchen. Who knows what that lunatic will do to me if she catches me talking to her mother again.

There was no way that Mama T was going to let me skip going to church. Having her cane waving in my face helped me to decide what to do. Being her show and tell to all those old ladies – who kept telling me that I'm Terk's spitting image . . . if I'd just gone a year ago to . . . did she just ask me something? Tell her that you're really sorry that . . . why did she just thank me for coming here with Missy – that I'm a real godsend? What did she mean by that? She'd have to go back to the kitchen. Did Missy fill her in on me?

Am I going to ask Jesus now to be my friend? That little shrimp isn't going to let up on you guy – is she? I've never asked anyone to be my friend. Talk about someone doing headstrong – telling me that the right way is to tell her invisible friend that I want to be his friend versus asking him to be my friend.

And I'm to tell Jesus that I know that I've been really bad but that when I ask him to be my friend that he'll take away all the bad that I've done because when he died he took away my bad and then when he came alive again . . . this is getting way too complicated for me. What's she trying to tell me anyway?

Who does she think she is telling me that I'm to ask Jesus to be my friend – like right now? Talk about an irascible imp. Someone needs to sit on her – like right now. You're going to have to do something. Just ignore her. Maybe she'll give up and find something else to do.

Can anyone escape Mama T? For someone who doesn't want to spend one second more in that assistant living place, she's having too much fun there. Most everyone there probably knew Mama T when she was a kid. Everyone there gets befriended by Mama T whether they want to be befriended or not. They're always glad to see her. They're really going to miss her when she's well enough to go home. Doc will figure out a way for Mama T to be able to get in and out of her house without any difficulty.

It was always Mama T first listening to someone telling her how he or she was doing and then out came that worn out Bible and that little monthly whatever. I sure felt embarrassed for her the first time that she prayed but then – now there's someone who really knows how to talk to someone who she can't see. I've no doubt that Mama T has been in her invisible god's face every day about what happened regarding me.

You're getting your way Dotty – I'm not going to make it to Capt's annual, raunchy wingding. You really have forgiven him haven't you Dotty for what he did to you. That self-centered fool has probably messed up more lives than . . . I've absolutely no doubt though that Mama T would use her pet bat on his knees if he should ever . . . that yellowbellied coward wouldn't dare come this direction. The guy has to know that there's a growing family loaded for bear for his hide. Why would Dotty want to pray for Capt every day?

Now what's she doing? Is she trying to tell that doll to . . . she is. I sure hope that I'm a dad someday. Kids are so unpredictably fun.

Talk about someone being capricious – that describes Mama T to a t. Seventeen seconds after showing up at the assistant living place – we just had to go to the teahouse. She could've at least acted surprised when she saw me – instead of telling me that it's about time that I showed up. And then ordering me to get over to where she was standing with her walker so that she could give me a hug.

You might think that Mama T was the administrator of that assistant living place by the way that she bosses everyone around. The place's wheelchair assessable van was outside the front door waiting for us before she had the words out of her mouth. Okay – so that's a bit of an overkill of a thought but . . . being so crotchety and still having literally everyone genuinely wanting to help her – that just doesn't compute.

Then seeing Dotty's reaction as I was rolling her mother in her wheelchair into Mama T's greasy spoon of a place . . . I won't ever need a photo to remember that incredulous look that she had on her face and then seeing that look of fear in her eyes. Her first words to me though – wanting to know if Capt knew that I was here, really makes sense to me now. You don't want to pull out those reams of copies now guy that you stuck in the side of your computer bag. There's absolutely nothing that you can do about Capt while you're stuck here in something that has to be akin to the little house on the prairie.

There has to be something that I can do sooner than later to help Dotty begin to live a normal life. I wish that I didn't have to finish school. But . . . get real with yourself about it guy – Dotty would want you to finish up with your classes – especially seeing that you're so close to finishing up everything.

To go though from one day to having no family – except for Capt and his overbearing ogre of a mother, and no friends, to the next day having a large extended family and a place where because of Mama T and Dotty and Terk and . . . and now to be everyone's friend, why couldn't that have happened years ago?

The discussion last Sunday night at church . . . you need to get a Bible guy and start reading it. If the Bible really is made up of incidents like those that the preacher used last Sunday night to . . .

Guy – you should've told the preacher that you thought that he was right on target with what he said – at least about how it feels to be unconditionally accepted, affirmed and approved after a lifetime of not being.

Let's see – if per what the preacher says is true that I'll always have at least four giants in my life, what would those giants be right now? Okay – there's Capt and Capt and . . . the preacher's claim though that I cannot kill my own giants – that I have to ask for help from others to kill my giants seems off the wall to me. Then dividing up into small groups after the discussion time to . . . did Dotty really have to go home at that time to get some sleep before she started her shift?

Once you get home guy, you need to find out who that David character was. That's a name in the Bible who you're never ever going to forget. It'd be interesting to find out what a king did when this David was alive. You seemed to me preacher to have gone a bit over the top wanting everyone to visualize David – as a king, sitting next to a campfire with his band of former thugs who he'd befriended probably singing songs that he himself wrote.

Using that white board and drawing stick figures really did make what the pastor wanted to get across come alive. One of those giants now is what am I going to do after I pass the bar? Another giant is how am I going to change things for Dotty. Guy – think about it – you just had this past week two of your biggest giants killed. You're no longer going to be haunted by the feelings of being alone and of being lost.



To ask a person in the circle to pray about my giant is one thing but to pray about a giant that someone else in the circle is telling me about while at the same time communicating to that person a total acceptance, affirmation and approval of him or of her . . . this praying thing is sure not me. Doing chants or getting a prayer rug out or . . . would be so much easier. Thanks Dotty for deciding to duck out of the praying time.

The preacher sure hit it on the head though when he said that when I'm tired that I probably will not make good decisions – which was apparently where David was when one of his buddies told him to act like a king and to stay home next time – but that this time, he'd kill the giant who had come prepared to kill David with the oversized spear that he had. Why can't life be that simple today?

This that it's up to me to initiate telling someone about my giant without first being asked – the preacher should know that having the mindset to do that doesn't fit into my egocentric generation. We know that we can take care of ourselves. We don't want to be told what to do. The idea though that vulnerability shows trust is precisely what I want others to have with me. By asking someone to pray for me, I'm telling that person that I trust him or her? How does one get past though always being told not to trust anyone? But to have someone hold my hand like Dotty did after we got home and as she was praying for me . . .

Wasn't she just playing with a doll? She'd just have to come over here right now. Tell her that you've got something in your eyes. Do you really believe guy that lying to her is going to work? There's no way that I'm going to tell her what I was thinking about. What kind of help is that – telling me that it's okay to cry as . . . the next thing you know guy, she's going to tell the whole world that you were crying.

Why won't she just leave this thing about Jesus alone? You need to get her to understand that you don't know anything about this Jesus who she wants you to ask to be your friend. Okay – the preacher did talk about Jesus in that sermon that he preached Sunday morning but . . . and didn't those places where you went to over the holidays last year all have a Jesus in their history?

Why did that cutie have to start acting like her big sis? She just had to make this Jesus become another giant in my life. I've got enough giants in my life. This I've got to ask Jesus to be a friend in my heart – and that I can't wait to do it – talk about being audacious; she has definitely taken ownership of being that.

That nervy little . . . she just told you because I said so that you've got to ask Jesus to be my friend. And what do you think that she'll do to you if you tell her . . . her mother sure wouldn't let her kick me out of this house because I don't want to ask Jesus to be my friend.

This come on, come on, come on please ask Jesus to be your friend is really, really getting old little lady. Why won't that impudent little monster get the hint to go away?

Just appease her guy. Go through the motions. Tell this Jesus that you're glad that he wanted to die for you because you're so bad and that you're glad that you can ask him to be your friend. Okay – I hope that you can read thoughts Jesus because . . . will you be my friend Jesus? She better be happy now. This Jesus is really happy now that I've asked him to be my friend – it sure must be nice to have an imagination.

Now I'm supposed to tell everyone that I've asked Jesus to be my friend? Oh no – not something else that I need to do. She's not going to tell her mother that I just . . . she can't. What's the big deal anyway about asking this invisible Jesus to be a friend? Why am I always trying to placate everyone?

This feeling though . . . it's like I've just done the most important thing that I've ever done. I feel like I'm alive for the first time in my life. You're just totally exhausted guy. Nothing is different. You don't need to let Chatterbox know that . . . just enjoy the moment – and those smells that're coming from the kitchen.

Here comes trouble. I can see it in her face. That inviting smile – I wish that she knew how much it lights up a room. Don't lose it gal. Letting her use my camera to . . . you asked to be her friend didn't you guy?

I get it – she's wants to download the photos. How many did she take? She definitely has an eye for taking a photo. Why is she flipping through them so fast? Did she just say that's Missy – and funny? What?

*You can at least gal ask the foster kid something – like why she talks to me but won't talk to mom? She doesn't talk to mom because what? Moms always yell at their kids when they talk? What kind of home life did she have?*

*She's right – I'm not a mom. So – because I'm not a mom, it's okay for her to talk with me? If she really believes this, she has to be really conflicted with how Chatterbox is constantly chattering away to mom. Mom and talking – they're made for each other. But mom doing yelling – that's not her. You do know gal that you've been blessed having a mom who even though she sure can do talking does listening just as well.*

*You need to do some listening yourself right now gal. Where did she get it that when a mom says something to her man that he doesn't like, that he'll hit her? Pops ever hitting mom for something that mom said . . . that's something that'd never ever happen between those two. Pops absolutely adores mom.*

*You need to tell this misguided young lady that if she thinks that it's okay for a guy to hit his wife, that . . . why is she saying that kids are to hide when the man is drinking because he'll beat them? Where did she get that? My man isn't mean like other men? My man? I don't have a man. Who's she talking about?*

*Did that brazen lummoX tell Frog Face that he's my guy? He's in so much trouble. I'm going to make him wish that he never . . . he's sad? Why did she just say that he's sad? How can she say that she just knows?*

*Why is she telling me that after her dad died that her ma's new man is like all the other men who ma has let live with her? How many guys has her mother lived with? In what world has Frog Face being living?*

*My man is different because he doesn't ever get mad? Why does that little snob think that he's my man? You need to tell Frog Face right now that he's not. How bizarre is this going to get? How does she know that that sap isn't mean – that he's only sad? That troublemaker should never have let her use his camera.*

*Eh? She's so getting on my nerves. Who is she to ask me why am I always mad at my man? Does that impertinent kid know how presumptuous that invasive question is? Who is she to question my character? It's totally none of her business if I want to be mad at someone. Why shouldn't I be mad at him? It's his fault that he crashed his car – not mine. I didn't ask him to be a part of my life. So help me – if she keeps pushing, she's going to have me . . . and what're you going to say to her or do to her if she doesn't shut up?*

*She's really glad that I came home because mom was worried about me? Mom worried about me? Just because there was some snow falling – mom knows that I can take care of myself. What's this about my ma really looking forward to meeting my man? You need to explain to this nosey eavesdropper that whoever that guy is who you dragged home with you isn't the guy who you were planning to take home. If you don't tell someone real quick gal that . . . now who's coming up the steps?*

*Mom must've thought that I'd fallen asleep. Please Daddy G – don't have mom ask me what Frog Face and I were talking about. You can though Daddy G have mom wipe that surprised look off her face that's still there when I told her that Frog Face and I were just visiting. You didn't have to have mom look so disappointed now Daddy G – having her hear that Frog Face will talk with me but not talk with her.*

*Mom must've left the stair's door open when she came up here. By the smells that're coming up the stairs, it smells like mom has already got the meal going. Do I want to help her with supper? You need to gal.*

*You didn't have to go right back downstairs again mom. I need to tell you something. You can go downstairs now and tell her what happened between you and the meathead before the guys get back to the house from doing the milking. You can put together at the same time the ingredients for the apple crisp.*

*You do know gal that Frog Face wanted to keep talking with you. I really don't want to talk with her anymore. She didn't have to come downstairs with me. She has so been pushing my buttons. Everyone is on your nerves gal – aren't they? And what've I learned so far about not getting my way? Daddy G – can you just take a break and go lean on someone else? You know that I don't want to have anything to do with failing. So why are you making me such a failure now?*

*This is the time of the year Daddy G when you always remind everyone that you . . . so why are you taking all the happiness out of it for me? What did I do Daddy G that has you covering my face with pie? Just start paring those apples gal. Pretend like everything is just the way that you want it to be. And when are you going to fess up gal to mom about what your two so-called best friends at school did – and that you don't know the name of that ignorant straggler who you hauled home with you? Why did I decide to stop?*

*Mom and your sappy smirks like – be glad that she doesn't know the half of it. This telling me though that I look really snazzy in my new outfit . . . you know that mom meant it gal. Just take it as a compliment.*

*You should've told Frog Face to stay upstairs. I don't like the way that she's laughing. I can hear that scrawny terror from all the way here in the kitchen. That has to be her laugh as it sure isn't Chatterbox's laugh. Something really funny must be happening in the living room to have her squealing like that.*

*Why did she come to the kitchen? Why is she pulling mom's arm to go with her? You're going with that uncivilized foster kid mom just like that? She could've asked you mom please come with me instead of . . . you probably should check out gal what Frog Face was thinking was so hilarious.*

*Something better not have been said about me. Does mom know that she's giggling so hard to herself that her whole body is shaking? Just ask her what's so funny. Mom has to know that for her to try to look straight faced makes her look really dopey. Like covering your face with your hands mom is going to help?*

*How could she say that after how I've been acting like a crybaby? Why did she have to tell me now how great it is to have me home again? What is it that she's trying to say to me? I know that you know mom that that dream dude who's sitting in the couch here in the living room right now isn't that sawed off beanpole who I told you was going to come home with me but . . . it serves roomie right to be stuck with that pathetic groveler.*

*I'm glad that mom thinks that whatever it is is funny. She's doing the best Jell-O imitation that you've ever seen her do – and she has had a lot of doing Jell-O practice at the table over the years as she has been a great target for us kids. If she'd just put on a different top each morning, she wouldn't give us kids the chance to point out to her the meal that missed her mouth and that ended up on what she calls her shelf.*

*Has mom ever gotten mad about anything? Even when us kids tease her unmercifully about whatever, she just keeps giggling while pops says nothing while smiling with us with his eyes. I wish that I don't like being the center of attention. Unless I'm the one in charge – it's got to be the back row for me.*

*You can at least ask mom what happened in the living room that was apparently really funny. I take a really good picture? And how does me taking a good picture have to do with all the laughing? Did she see the photos that Frog Face took of me? They're on his computer? How can they be on his computer? They were on his camera. Did that impossible good-for-nothing download to his computer all the pictures that Frog Face took? No – no – this can't keep happening to me. I can't let him see how childish I was acting. Face it gal – you know that he already has. Oh – no.*

*Mom is hugging me. Mom hasn't hugged me since I was in grade school. How does she know that everything is going to be okay? She can't know.*

*Why did she just say to me that we've all night ahead of us to talk? Why do you have to look so cheerful mom? You're going to be so disappointed mom when you find out about everything. Okay – just as soon as I get the apple crisp ready, I'll get the dining room table ready. Chatterbox can help me? I don't want Chatterbox's help. I don't want anyone's help – especially your help Daddy G. You've done a great job of messing up my plans. Okay – I know Daddy G – you made my life plans – I don't make them. But . . .*

*I'm going to need help to open up this dining room table in order to put the leaf in so that there's room for everyone. Thanks a lot mom – you could've helped me just as easily. I'm sure that's not his name mom. If I really wanted his help, I would've asked him. If you think that you're pulling my chain mom . . . just keep pretending mom that you didn't hear me.*

*You don't have to look at me guy like you going into shock. It's the same little repulsive me who forced you to come home with me. Tell him to stop goggling. Mom needs to turn the heat back as the stove's heat is making the whole house feel really warm.*

*Now that I've gotten the leaf from under the folk's bed, he can help me pull the table apart. He's looking at the leaf as if he doesn't know what it is. He really didn't know what it was. What a dummy. You didn't have to look at him gal with that disgusted look. Give the guy a break. He looks like you just broke his heart or something.*

*Just tell him to hold onto the edge of the table while you pull from the other side of the table. Why doesn't the stupid thing want to pull apart? What did Chatterbox just ask me? Who invited her? How could I've forgotten that there're a couple of hooks under the table keeping the two ends from pulling apart? This is so embarrassing. If he didn't think of me being a dingbat before, he sure has to know that I'm one now.*

*You can close your mouth now guy. He has got to have known that a leaf can be put in a table. In what cave has this guy been living?*

*Now what? Why that lopsided grin? You forgot to take off that cheap, crummy thing that's around your wrist. And it really helped putting your arm behind your back. You're showing a lot of maturity gal. Why did you bring that big bozo Daddy G into my world right now? I don't want him here.*

*He's being serious gal. He really wants to know if there's something else that he can do to help you. You can tell him that he can help you by getting lost.*

*Has it made you feel better gal hurting that poor dude's feeling? And why should I be nice to guys. All they know how to do is to rip the heart out of a gal. That condescending joker ever having an interest in your heart gal – that would never happen even if . . . you don't need to go there now gal – so don't.*

*He's standing there gal waiting for you to say something. Just tell him that the guys are going to be coming into the house in a few minutes so if he needs to use the bathroom that he needs to use it now. What's this with that loony grin again? He's got that same look on his face now that mom has had ever since I got home. Did mom talk to him when I was upstairs? He better not have said anything to mom because if he has . . . and what'll you do to the egghead if he has?*

*Looks like you don't have any choice but to let Chatterbox help you set the table. Dumb question – where's everyone going to sit? Chatterbox knows that pops will sit where he always sits – at the head of the table. Mom will sit where she can easily get to the kitchen – plus if she didn't sit on the edge next to pops . . . that little tyrant, she knows that I'm the one who always sits at the other end of the table – not Junior. What? I'm to sit next to my man? Frog Face – what has she told Chatterbox? And Frog Face is going to sit on the other side of my man because he really likes her? What makes Chatterbox think that . . . she doesn't have the right to decide to sit on the other side of me and next to pops. There's no way that I'm going to sit in the middle. You've got to tell Chatterbox that if you don't sit at an end of the table, that you have to sit at one end or the other end of the edge of the table. I'm being silly? It's good to sit in the middle because then everyone can talk to me? She's doing it all wrong. The twins don't sit on the same side of the table with mom. She's not listening to you gal. Did she just say that she's the boss? Who made her the boss? She's going to do it my way or . . . thanks mom – you're a real help. You didn't have to tell Chatterbox that you're glad that she helped me fix the table for supper. Chatterbox didn't help me. I'm going to be sick.*

*This nightmare that Daddy G has me in right now . . . I won't be able to eat anything. Everyone will be staring at me. I know my bros. They can't help themselves. They're going to be asking that egotistical geek all kinds of questions. I've got to do something. Tell mom that . . . that can't be the guys coming in from the barn already?*

*Quick – go upstairs. Why now mom – she doesn't need my help. I can't let the guys see me. Too late.*

*If those klutzes don't stop staring at me, I'm going to . . . Junior is going to pay for that whistle.*

That can't be Missy. No way that's Missy. That has to be Missy. No one else has a scar like that.

Where did Froggy get the hyena howl? She's laughing harder than I've ever seen or heard anyone laugh. What does Froggy see that's so funny in someone making faces?

How many photos did she take of Missy making faces? I can't believe that the Missy that I know would let someone take photos of her acting like a dippy goofball. Where has this Missy been? I do say Missy – you've got one of the better face making repertoires that I've seen. If she has any of her mother's blood in her at all, she has got to have a mischievous side someplace in her. I just can't see either her father or her mother having anger issues. So where has all that pent anger come from that she has against me?

I've a feeling that if Missy knew that I was looking at photos of her making faces that . . . whoa – whoa . . . who was that?

She's got to go back to the last photo. Missy smiling? She can smile? She's . . . why doesn't she want me to see that side of her?

That photo sure has gotten her attention. It sure has my attention, too. She can close her mouth now. She's acting like she doesn't recognize her own daughter. She's definitely proud of her. Tell her how thankful that you are for Missy – that Missy probably saved your life.

I know that she's fixing supper – dinner – whatever, but I really wish that there was a moment when we could spend a few minutes talking. Unless Missy has told her about what happened, she doesn't know that I'm not who she thinks I am. Maybe Missy had a guy coming home with her over the holidays? But wouldn't Missy have told her mother if . . . her mother sure has been acting like she knows something.

With the kind of temperament that Missy has though, I sure can't see a guy surviving spending a couple of weeks having to be in close proximity to her – unless the guy doesn't mind being pulled around by a rope that has tied to the ring that she has him wearing in his nose.

How in the world did Terk survive Mama T as long as he did? He must've really loved her. Everyone says that they were the perfect couple. What I wouldn't do to have been able to get to know Terk.

She scared me. I didn't hear her coming – but jumping off the couch . . . you're staring. You're making her blush. She can't be the same hotheaded shrew who . . . she's asking me to help her? Am I dreaming?

She's getting a leaf from her folk's bedroom? What's a leaf? That board is a leaf. She doesn't have to look at me like I'm an ignoramus or something. I can't help it that I've never seen a leaf before. What is it that she wants me to do with this table? I'm to pull on this end of the table while she pulls on the other end? Okay – but if I pull any harder, I'm going to pull her with the table on top of me. You need to thank Chatterbox. I don't know where she came from but . . . now look at who the dimwit is around here.

I can't believe that I didn't see it before that she actually has around her wrist one of those bracelets that I got in Central America. What a twit – putting her arm behind her back like that.

There must be something else that I can help her with around here. She definitely needs help.

I'm to use the bathroom before the guys get back to the house? Hey gal – I'm not Chatterbox. I'm not a little kid who needs to be told to go to the bathroom. Just do it guy and get out of her prickly world.

The difference guy between that bossy hellion and Mama T is that you never saw Mama T with that look that if you don't do right now what I'm telling you to do that I'll have your head on a platter. As bossy and pushy as Mama T is, she always maintained while I was with her a kind, calm demeanor.

How could that self-obsessed, narcissistic bum not know that he was the most fortunate guy in the world when Dotty married him? Finding a way to leave her like you did Capt – that was criminal – literally.

You're going to pay Capt for depriving me of growing up in a family. Just because your mother probably beat you when you were a kid, that doesn't mean that every mother beats their kids.

Whatever it is being fixed out there in the kitchen, it sure smells good. I'm so hungry. I wish though that I didn't feel like such a stranger. I know – I'm Froggy's friend. But she's an outsider here, too.

Sounds like the guys must be done with whatever they were doing out in the barn. I'm going to miss how quiet it has been around here. Why has it gotten quiet again all of a sudden? That was a wolf whistle. Oh boy – I bet one of her bros in getting the dagger look right now.

Guess I should be glad that Missy told me to use the bathroom as it seems to be the only one in this house. All old homes must have just one bathroom as Dotty's house only has one, too. Now what do I do?

Sure hope that there's a place at the table for me to sit. It sounds like the guys are going directly from the bathroom to the table by the sound of the chairs. Maybe Chatterbox will tell me what I'm supposed to do. Okay – I'm to go sit at the table now because it's time to eat. Good.

I'm to sit in that chair over there? That's not the chair that I'd choose to sit. That chair is like right in the middle of everything. And Missy is going to sit there? That's next to me. Who decided that? It couldn't have been Missy – could it? Why can't the guys just go to the other room to eat and the gals eat here instead of everyone having to fit around this table. This is going to be way too many bodies in too small of a space. Just tell Missy that you're not hungry – that you'll be okay sitting out the meal in the sitting room. Why did I sit down? Everyone is going to be looking at me. And what if someone asks me a question, what do I do? Missy will for sure stick her knife in me if I open my mouth about anything.

What were you thinking guy when you got off the Interstate? Why did I have to buy beer? Drinking that beer made you completely lose focus. You were so bent on getting to Capt's house in time for the big bash that he always has on Christmas Eve that . . . you're a total stranger here in a totally strange world. It's a good thing that I spent the last week or so with Dotty in Mama T's house. The warm, welcoming feeling in Mama T's house isn't much different than this place. And the way that everyone in this family acts with each other – except for that tactless crackpot, this family is like Mama T's family, too.

Is it ever going to stop snowing? I can't stay stuck in this place. I'm starting to feel claustrophobic.

Just as soon as I can tomorrow morning, I need to find a place that rents cars and get back on the road. You need to ask her what the sheriff said when she called him. If she can call the sheriff, there must a telephone around here someplace. And who'd you call guy if they said that you can use their telephone?

Just keep acting like you're really glad to be here in this house. After twenty or so years of practicing, you should be really good at faking looking happy.

Those things do look good. What are they? Are they some sort of biscuits? Are those thinly sliced things carrots on that plate that Missy just put down in front of her father? I should've told Missy not to put carrots on my plate. I can't be the only one here who doesn't like carrots. The rest of the food looks good. What if I don't drink milk with my meals? It looks like that's what everyone drinks here with their meals.

Those were really surprised looks that everyone had when you stood up to help Missy slide her chair to the table. And the way that they're still looking back and forth from me to Missy – it's like they all thought that they knew something but now they're not sure that what they thought that they knew is really what they thought they knew. You've got them all looking at each other now like . . . and the way that Missy is squirming right now – you really shouldn't be enjoying yourself so much right now guy.

Why doesn't someone start eating? The food is on the table. Why is everyone looking towards where her father is sitting? We're going to do what – pray? They hold hands in this house, too? Does everyone have to . . . okay Froggy, here's my hand. Why don't you take Missy's hand? That'll mess with her mind. Was that a grateful look? At least she didn't look mad.

This room wasn't this hot just a few seconds ago. You need to listen to Missy's father praying. Holding Dotty's hand or Mama T's hand when they prayed – you just wanted to respect what they do before they eat a meal. I hope that Missy didn't get the wrong idea when I took her hand? Why did I take her hand?

He's talking like Dotty or Mama T always talked when they prayed to their god or supreme being or whoever he is – like he's right here in the room with us. Him thanking his god for being so merciful to him to allow his family to be together again – to have Froggy . . . and how has his god shown any kind of mercy in Froggy's life? And that's not my name. You're squeezing Missy's hand. I hope that it's okay to open my eyes while he's praying. Why is she looking at me? Did she just mouth that she's so sorry?

Why did I have to open my eyes to see what everyone else was doing? That look that she had on her face when . . . why did you just squeeze her hand? What're you thinking guy? How long is her father going to pray? Does he care that the food is getting cold? Was I supposed to say amen, too?

What I wouldn't do for a big juicy steak right now instead of whatever this is. This is a piece of a chicken? I sure don't recognize it. How am I supposed to eat it? Why did she give me the largest piece? Going out someplace to eat buffalo wings or having chicken fritters at the fast food place down the street or getting a chicken sandwich for take-out . . . just take your knife and fork guy and . . . this isn't going to work at all.

You have to do something guy. Everyone else is stuffing their faces. It sure has gotten quiet around here again. Isn't anyone allowed to talk here when they're eating? You're looking at me gal like you're glad that I'm playing along with your charade. That smile – if she'd just use that always instead of . . .

Let's see what the mashed potatoes taste like. They're good. The gravy on these potatoes has to be the tastiest gravy that I've ever had – better than even at Terk's Place. Someone must be a really good cook around here. What has this salad in it? Those are raisins and something else – chopped up apples? The dressing is delicious. I should ask what kind of make it is. Ask why the carrots are in a sauce? Some brown sugar and butter were added to the carrots? They taste like candy. I almost forgot about those biscuit things. They're still warm. With butter on them like this, they'd really be a hit at Terk's Place.

What part of the chicken is she eating? Was that the chicken's tail that she just ate? Now she's breaking up that whatever it is like – she has had to have eaten that piece of chicken before by the way that she getting the meat off of it. Is can't be the chicken's neck that her mother is eating – is it? And she gave you the biggest piece – and you haven't even started eating it yet. Come on guy – get with it.

Here goes. Please knife – don't embarrass me. This meat is really tender – and juicy. If this piece is a chicken's breast, isn't it supposed to be tough and dry? No wonder no one is talking. This is really good eating. I hope that Missy knows that a thumbs up means that . . . that was another one of those smiles.

That sure didn't take very long for everyone – except me, to completely clean off their plates. Why don't you just pick up your piece guy and start pulling off the meat with your fingers like everyone else did? Why not? Here goes. This is a lot of meat. Maybe Froggy would like this piece. She sure has one of those smiles, too.

Now everyone is talking. No one is watching you guy. Who is this Miss Congeniality all of a sudden? Does she know that everyone is looking at her like they can't believe what they're seeing? If she does, she sure doesn't seem to care. Someone could clue me in on what's going on around here. That'd be nice. Let's see what happens if I put my arm behind her and on the back of her chair. Whatever game is being played around here – you just upped the ante. Talk about a befuddled look that her mother now has on her face. It'd be nice to know why her brothers are looking at her like they can't believe what they're seeing.

What did Chatterbox just say about me? Didn't she hear her sister just ask Junior how he's enjoying university life. Now everyone is staring at me.

I need to crawl under this table – like right now. Why would Chatterbox have to open up her mouth now to tell the world that . . . you should've known guy that she was serious that I was to tell other people that . . .

*Just ignore them gal. You know that you've got the best bros that anyone could ever have. Maybe they're seeing something that you didn't see when you looked in the mirror. Those last pictures that Frog Face took of me – I don't ever remember seeing that gal before. If it wasn't for that really hideous looking scar over her eye . . .*

*I heard you mom – I'll put the biscuits in the oven when I take the roaster out with the chicken – and then I'll put some butter and brown sugar in with the carrots. You might think gal that mom thinks that you've forgotten how to cook. I know that you know mom that I know where the cream and the butter are to use to mush the potatoes. You owe mom big time gal for being so patient with you – so why are you . . .*

*When did mom fix my favorite salad? Where did she get the cabbage? This just mixing some mayonnaise, some apple cider vinegar and some sugar together sure makes a whole lot better dressing than anything that comes out of a bottle.*

*You need to tell Chatterbox to tell whoever that gatecrasher is that it's time to eat – that he needs to get to the table. I'm going to be glad to have this meal behind me. Everyone is going to stare at us. What're you going to do gal if they start asking him questions? You know that no one is going to be asking anyone anything until everyone is done eating. Then when everyone has cleaned off their plates, you can start asking your bros how they're doing. Once you get the twins talking, you know that they won't shut up.*

*The biscuits are done. I'll put them in this piece of pottery and set them on the table along with this stick of butter. It's been awhile since I've had a homemade meat and potatoes meal. Everything will be delicious.*

*Poor guy – talk about someone looking really lost. You haven't done him a favor gal by not telling everyone that he's just a stray who you rescued. He probably feels like a vagrant right now. At least the guys are talking among themselves instead of trying to talk with him.*

*Do I want to put the plates on the table as mom puts food on them? Sure. What was that look for anyway that he just gave to me? He wanted to say something to you gal. You could've asked him what he wanted.*

*Why is he staring at his plate like he doesn't like what he sees? He wouldn't dare not eat what's on his plate – would he? Maybe he has never eaten a home cooked meal. By the kind of car that he wrecked, he's probably a steak and lobster kind of guy who eats his suppers in restaurants. Gal – you still haven't called the sheriff. Why didn't I leave a note on the front seat of his car that says that the driver is with me? If someone should just happen to find his car, they're going to think that the driver is probably out someplace in the blizzard trying to . . . just as soon as we finish eating supper, I'm going to have to call the sheriff.*

*Now that you've taken all the plates to the table, sit down. Why did he stand up? I can slide my own chair up to the table without . . . they can all put their eyes back in their heads. Haven't they ever seen a guy act like a gentleman before? That was really nice of him to do after the way that I've been so spikey with him.*

*Now what do I do? He had to see that everyone was holding hands when pops started praying. I'll just keep my hand under the table so that he knows that he doesn't have to hold my hand. He's probably not holding hands with Frog Face anyway so . . .*

*That brash lout just reached over and took my hand. My hand must not feel any larger to him than what Chatterbox's hand feels like to me as I hold her hand. What's this squeezing thing about? How does he not know that he's hurting my hand? Tell him to stop before . . . that's an angry looking grimace. What's he thinking about. Oh – pops called him . . . he's not supposed to open his eyes. No one is supposed to open their eyes while pops is praying. You've your eyes open gal. What in the world made you mouth to him that you're so sorry? What did the hand squeeze mean? Please stop playing games with me Daddy G.*

*You had me thinking pops that you were going to go on praying forever. I know that you have to be glad that you've your kids back home with you again but . . . we're hungry. This chicken looks so good. What's he waiting for anyway? He has to see that everyone is eating. Just dig in guy – the food won't bite you. And what made you think that smiling at him . . . you do know gal that he just looked right into your heart.*



*He must really like the mashed potatoes the way that he's devouring them. He has to like the salad. Everyone does. He's definitely not sure though about those carrots. At least he tried one. Pass him the biscuits. A couple of these should . . . it doesn't surprise me that someone as big as he is has an appetite.*

*This chicken back is so good. You know that he's staring at you gal. You can't be looking very ladylike breaking up this back the way that you are. How did you expect him to react when you ate the tail? He's probably never seen a chicken's tail eaten in his life. He needs to start eating his piece. Do I need to get him a steak knife? The knife that he has should cut the breast meat okay. Good grief guy – just put that piece in your mouth and . . . I could've told you that you'd like it. Thanks for the thumbs up though.*

*You're doing great guy. That's good – pick up that piece of meat and start pulling the meat off the bones. That was nice of him to give Frog Face some of that breast meat.*

*Now that all the plates are cleaned off, why isn't anyone talking? You need to say something gal before . . . good – a question for me. It's true – I really am glad to be home again. Now that you've got everyone looking at me . . . did he just put his arm on the back of my chair? He did. Talk about being impertinent. And what would you call not telling everyone who he is? If I had just asked him his name instead of . . .*

*This is actually turning into something rather comical. After all those practical jokes that mom and bros have pulled on me over the years – having them sitting there now looking totally buffaloed is really funny. They know that there's no way that a dude like the guy sitting next to me would ever look at someone like me twice. I've no idea why he would do now whatever it is that he's doing for me after how I've treated him but . . . this could be fun keeping this game going. Ask Junior how he's enjoying university life.*

*About time Chatterbox that you finally . . . what did she say? She couldn't have said that? Why did it have to get so quiet all of a sudden? Why is he taking his arm from off the back of my chair? He can't be trying to slide under the table – can he? Talk about a chagrined look.*

*Don't look at me guy. He has to see that I've no idea what Chatterbox is saying. This my man though asking Jesus to be his friend – you need to tell Chatterbox that he's not your man.*

*Please Daddy G – shut Chatterbox's mouth for me. She's opening up a Pandora's Box. What do you want me to do Daddy G? She told my man that he needs to tell everyone what he did? He's not to say anything.*

*And I thought my face gets red. There's no way that he could look any more unnerved than what he looks right now. Why doesn't mom or someone else say something? They need to stop looking down at their plates. See what happens gal when you put off laying out the truth? I hear you Daddy G but . . .*

*Somebody say something. He better not say anything. Don't you dare guy open . . . what? Chatterbox told you that Jesus had told her that Jesus wanted him to ask him to become his friend. What? You did what? You did what Chatterbox told you to do? Do you think that he has any idea at all what it means to ask Jesus to be a friend? What are you unfolding now Daddy G? I know Daddy G – I'm to rejoice with the angels that you've just welcomed someone into your kingdom. Did you really just adopt him Daddy G?*

*Thanks pops. You're amazing. For someone who rarely ever says anything, you sure have the knack of always knowing what to do at the right time. Okay – I know pops – you're giving me a chance to get my thoughts together. So please pops – don't ask me any questions about the devotional that mom always reads after supper. There's no way that I'm going to be able to concentrate on what's going to be read.*

*Why is he looking at the devotional book like he's seen it before? Why the grin? Who's Mama T? What has Mama T got to do with . . . every person at the assistant living place where she's had to stay has her visit them – and while she's visiting them, she makes them listen to her as she reads from that little booklet?*

*Does he care that everyone is looking at him. Why would he say that he really hopes that I'll get to meet Mama T someday? What if I don't want to meet her? Just because I remind him of her, what in don't you dare open your mouth didn't he understand? And do you really think gal that kicking his leg . . .*

*You're so in trouble guy – asking bros if I always kick them as hard as I just kicked him. Talk about gall. I need to get away from the table. I can't look at anyone. It has gotten way too hot in this room.*

*Don't start reading mom. Why did she start reading? She has to know that no one is listening to her.*

*What else would the devotional be about with Christmas Day being just two days away? Would I spend a night in a stable if . . . if I had to sleep out in the barn, I would. Animals accept me. I can act normal around animals – which I can't when I'm around . . . why does everyone always have crises in their lives?*

*What's the big deal about Jesus' father being a carpenter? Why didn't you have your only son Daddy G have a father that was a fisherman – or a farmer, instead of a carpenter? Setting up your son to begin his life in a humble setting . . .*

*He just took my hand again. Oh – mom is reading the prayer at the end of the devotional. Just as soon as mom stops reading that prayer . . . and hiding in the bathroom is going to make the inevitable go away?*

*Who does he think he is – asking pops if it's okay if he says something about what was just read? No one invited him to open his mouth. Why did you look at me pops with that mischievous grin instead of at him? He's the one who asked you if he could say something. Like he has really given you pops the option to say no? You do know that he's still holding your hand? And why gal are you letting him hold your hand?*

*He was where at this time last year? His roommate has family in Israel? And because his roommate didn't want to go alone to visit the family that he has in Israel – he asked him to go with him? That lucky bum has been in Israel? That's not fair Daddy G – you know how much I want to go to Israel.*

*His roommate's relatives live in a chalet near a lake called Tiberius in northern Israel? Doesn't he know that's the Sea of Galilee? After a couple of days of staying with his roommate's relatives, he just had to get away from them because . . . they've reason to know that they're God's specially chosen people. You really are a Gentile to them. So what's wrong with that? And I'm supposedly the thin-skinned one around here.*

*He went to Nazareth? He decided to go there by taxi because he'd been told that Nazareth had some really great views? It does? If we want to see some photos of Nazareth and . . . did he just say that he has well over a thousand pictures on his computer of his time in Israel?*

*So he went to an older section of Nazareth when he was there – so? He went there hoping to take some photos of whoever would let him take their picture? Then while he was walking down a back street and past some small buildings made just with rocks stacked on top of each other, an old lady came out of one of those places and stopped him. She had a tea kettle sitting over an open fire? She invited him to have tea with her? She let him take pictures of her and of her place? Those are pictures that I sure want to see.*

*Did she really tell him using her broken English that her stone walled house is just like the kind of place in which Jesus lived in when he lived in Nazareth? Her place was about the size of our sitting room and this room combined? Joseph and Mary lived with their kids in that small of a place? And her furniture was crudely made stuff? So if Jesus' father was a carpenter say two thousand years ago – is he saying that he doesn't think that Jesus' father was a carpenter like what was said in what mom just read – that it was more likely per what the lady said, that Jesus helped his father make the rock walls of the houses that were being built in Nazareth at that time? Jesus chipping and carrying stones for his father – I don't think so.*

*He went to Bethlehem, too? How did he get there? You're sure getting animated guy. Okay – the old lady couldn't have been more talkative when you visited her again the next day. So when she offhandedly told you how far that this Jesus' father had to walk with his very pregnant fifteen year old wife in order to pay per her some taxes in Bethlehem – you decided that since you didn't want to hang around your roommate anymore that . . . did he really follow more or less the route that that old lady said that the father and the mother of Jesus would've taken? Why would it have taken them days to walk to Bethlehem? And if they made that hike at this time of the year, the weather had to have been really miserable as . . . and it wasn't a stable that they purportedly were sent to – it was more like a grotto? What? Was Mary fifteen years old?*

Just pretend guy that you didn't hear what Chatterbox said. You know guy that everyone heard what Chatterbox said? What am I going to do? What do I say? Just tell them the truth – Chatterbox told you that you had to ask her friend Jesus to be your friend, too – so you did.

What was so hard about that? It actually felt like what you just said was something actually tangible that you did.

You really need to tell that smoldering firebrand sitting next to you that you like a whole lot better that pleasant smile that she seems to want to keep hidden to this fuming, frustrated glare that she thinks that she has to always keep pasted on her face. Can't she see how everyone is embarrassed for her? They all have their faces buried in their plates. She has everyone so intimidated that . . .

And how's getting upset with her going to change anything? You don't know her story. She's obviously carrying some serious baggage by the way that she's acting. And like you're not carrying any baggage?

This can't be how it's like always around here. As freezing cold and blustery as it is outside right now, the inside of this house seems to me to probably always exude warmth and peace. So why isn't it now?

That look that your father just gave to you Missy . . . just because your father up and left your mother, you don't have the right to . . . you don't know how lucky you are Missy to have grown up with a mother and a father who clearly care for you. If you were to just spend one hour Missy with Capt, you'd know how really, really fortunate that you are to have the kind of caring mother and father that you have.

That's the very same little booklet that Mama T always uses when she visits the other patients. Why is she going to read it now? This probably isn't the time that anyone talks at this table but . . . that was supposed to be a compliment. Missy and Mama T really are a lot alike. Why is everyone grinning?

What was that that just hit me on my shin? It felt like a kick. It has to have been Missy. Who does she think she is kicking me? So I've made her even madder at me asking her brothers if . . . I don't care. If those looks that they've giving me mean what I think that they mean . . .

If you think gal that I'm going to let you leave this table now because you don't like being laughed at, it's not happening. Good – she has to stay now – now that her mother has started reading from that booklet.

This Jesus character – whoever he is – you need to find out more about him. He sure seems important to Dotty and to Mama T. He has to be important to Mama T's whole family seeing that they all showed up at those meetings at that church the other day. Those movies though that I've seen about Jesus . . . when I get back to school, I really need to head to the bookstore to see if the place has the same kind of Bible book there that Dotty has that I can peruse. How can someone though who lived so long ago . . .

Whoever wrote what she's reading needs to go to Nazareth. The father of that Jesus couldn't have been a carpenter. If the kind of furniture that I saw in that old lady's house is like the furniture that would've been in the house that that Jesus lived in in Nazareth – the stuff was barely functional. If that old lady was right, that Jesus when he was a kid helped his dad by chipping rocks to get them to fit together to make walls.

Did she just read that this Jesus was born in a stable? The author has to know that a stable and a manger are nothing more than a perpetrated tradition – that there weren't outdoor stables in Bethlehem at the time that that Jesus supposedly was born. Okay – it's possible that after he was born that – they need to see the photos that I took when I was in Nazareth and in Bethlehem – and the ones that I took of the route that . . .

Did she just say let's pray? She must've as everyone is bowing their heads. Where's her hand? That was a quick prayer. You can let go of her hand now. You're being callous now guy – not letting go of her hand. This farce of pretending though that she's okay with me holding her hand . . .

They need to know that the author of whatever those things are called in that little booklet doesn't know what he's writing about. That old lady knew what she was talking about.

Didn't they hear that Jesus' humble, unremarkable beginning was the point in that whatever? What kind of profession would be more low class or demeaning than using boulders to make house walls? Someone sure didn't know what he was doing when he promoted the idea that that Jesus' father was a carpenter.

Do you really think that anyone is really that interested in what you're saying? This going to Israel with your roommate over last year's holiday break because he didn't want to go there alone . . . maybe you should shut your mouth guy. What kind of base line would they have anyway to what you're saying?

Guy – why was it so important to you to tell them about the old woman and her ancient home in Nazareth? No one in this house gave you the stage to say anything about anything. You're as a complete stranger to everyone in this house as you were to that old lady in Nazareth. But . . . it was really important to her though to tell me what she knew about that Jesus. Keep talking guy. They all seem to be listening to you.

Maybe you shouldn't have said anything about a stable and a manger being just a wives' tale. But I really did see the grotto where that Jesus supposedly was born. Per what the flyer said, grottos and caves were being used as places to stay or to keep animals out of the cold or to . . . I don't know. Why did I have to open my mouth? Maybe that Jesus' mother had him sleep in a manger after he was born.

You're going to make a really great attorney guy. This putting stuff on the table like you're doing now as if the stuff were actual facts instead of first checking everything out before saying something – maybe the guy who wrote the thing is right. Everyone is looking at me now like I've completely lost my mind.

You're a real help Chatterbox – telling me that I'm silly – that everyone knows where Jesus was born. Doesn't anyone else talk around here? This emotional rollercoaster that you've gotten yourself on guy . . . you have to be having a bad dream. I'm going to wake up in a few minutes and . . . please don't start feeling sorry for me now gal. I can do a really good job of that myself without your help.

If you had just thanked Missy's mother for that really tasty meal, you know that you wouldn't be sitting here right now wishing that you'd kept your mouth shut. I feel so tired. I wish that everyone would stop looking at me like they're expecting me to say something else. I don't belong here. This stubborn streak that you have guy of having to do whatever it is that you think that you need to do has done it again. What I wouldn't do right now to be sitting at the table with Dotty and Mama T. I belong with them. They never made me feel like this – like I've put my foot so deep in my mouth that I'm never going be able to . . .

She wants me to go with her to where? The barn? Now? Why? I don't want to go outside. I don't want to put on that red monkey suit again. Can't she tell that . . . that was an awfully pathetic sounding please.

Is she trying to get me out of the house before . . . if her family doesn't know by now that . . . they can't be that gullible – can they? If they're really thinking though that . . . they can't believe that I'd be attracted to her – could they? That flake is as bizarre as they come. You've got blame, too, guy. You've acerbated whatever it is that's going on around here as well as putting yourself right in the middle of everything.

Ask if you can help with washing the dishes or something. And do you really think that anyone here believes that you know how to wash dishes? Until last week when Mama T told you that you were to wash and dry the dishes . . . what? The twins shouldn't have to do the dishes after every meal. I'll help them.

You're not needed around here guy. They want you out of the house just as much as Missy wants you to go with her. Our ears are going to be burning if . . . we need to stay in the house. Why won't Missy just tell everyone that I'm not whoever he is who they're saying I am?

Why am I putting on this stupid looking thing again? Oh – that's a good idea – photos of that new calf. Doc is never going to believe that I helped pull the thing out of his or her mother.

I need to get a photo of Missy before we head for the barn. It's the only way that anyone will ever believe me that that very quirky, appealing looking gal looked like a young punk to me when . . . that stocking cap does absolutely nothing for her. Laughing at how she looks probably wasn't a good idea but . . .

Get Froggy to take a photo of you and then of Missy. You're going to have to let her take a photo of you and Missy together otherwise we'll be here all night.

What's the problem with Chatterbox and Froggy going with us? It'd probably be good if they were able to get out of the house for a few minutes. Whatever it was that Missy just promised Chatterbox that she would help her and Froggy do once we get back, it must be really fun the way that Chatterbox is . . .

The guys must've thought that Froggy couldn't do anything by how fast they stopped what they were doing and are now staring at her. I don't know why she just talks to me and to Chatterbox – and to Missy. It sure would be nice to have some kind of conversation with Missy. Maybe when we're in the barn together . . .

This is so really dumb. Why did I listen to her again? Can the wind blow any harder? Snow is getting inside the hood of this ill-fitting whatever it is that I've over my clothes. It was bad enough out here when it was still light outside but to be outside right now in the dark in this snow that's coming at us sideways is suicide. Did she just yell at me isn't this fun. She's got to be warped. This isn't fun. This is downright scary. What if my hand slips off this rope? You do know that you're hanging on to her arm for dear life?

Making it to the barn was one thing guy – making it back to the house . . . does every single one of these cows have a name. What's this greeting each cow like an old friend? Those cows don't actually recognize her voice – do they? They sure seem to as . . . where did all those cats come from? I didn't see any cats earlier. You'd have to show up again dog. The thing's name is Pooch? And you're going to let her hug on you like that? Stop looking at me like that dog. You don't have to like me. Just don't bite me.

I sure hope that she's not planning on spending the whole night here in the barn. Just head for the room where the cow and the calf are. There they are. You don't have to get up for me little guy – or gal. At least my fingers are still working. Take a bunch of photos. The little thing sure is cute.

Glad that Missy has finally decided to join us. She didn't come here earlier – did she? The calf sure is acting like . . . the thing is just letting her rub his – or her head like . . . she has to be thinking of the scar over her eye by the way that she's running her finger up and down that black slash on the calf's forehead.

Where did that come from? Okay – the way that she has been treating me has been really disrespectful and irresponsible but . . . and now thanking me for being so kind to her in spite of her very wrong actions? She's up to something. You know that you haven't been exactly considerate of her either.

Why is she looking at me like it's the first time that she has seen me? Just maybe gal I don't want to hear your sad story – if that's where you're going to go now. Guess I don't have a choice. So you thought up until last night that you had a good friend coming home with you to spend the holidays here with you and your family? But . . . you had that one figured out didn't you guy – that the good friend would be a guy.

That guy did what? He went with your roommate to her home instead of coming here? And he's going to give her a ring if her father is okay with him marrying her? What am I missing? Why wouldn't she be happy that her good friends are . . . you shouldn't have asked her that. At least she's not trying to take off your head for a change. Just tell her that . . . and what makes you think that she wants to hear you yakking?

So that's why the back of her vehicle is full of boxes. She spent all last evening packing up all her stuff in those boxes. I'm with you gal – there's no way that I'd go back to a place where someone did that to me. I'd feel really humiliated, too, if . . .

Then when we got to the house and your mother called me by his name . . . and then Junior . . . I kind of see why she couldn't get herself to tell her mother what happened. And because her mother looked so happy to see her come through the door with me that . . . you've got to tell her that you know that her mother is having fun pulling her chain as . . . how do I know that she's messing with her? She just has to believe me that I can tell that her mother is. Once we get back to the house and she tells everyone what happened . . .

Why am I suddenly wishing now that we didn't have to go back to the house?

*He can't know what he's talking about – can he? Instead of feeling so sorry for yourself, you should've tried talking with him. Yah – like you really think that you actually could've had a serious conversation with him? He's so far out of your league gal.*

*There's no way that Mary could've been that young when Jesus was born. And everyone knows that Jesus was the son of a carpenter and that he was born in a stable and that there were cows and sheep and donkeys in the stable. And are you going to be the one who's going to tell the expert that he doesn't know what he's talking about? Why doesn't someone say something? What doesn't someone say something other than Chatterbox? You need to tell Chatterbox that he's not being silly – that he . . . you need to get him out of the house before he makes himself an even bigger fool than he has already made himself.*

*He's got to go to the barn with me. Who does he think that he is telling me that . . . that's begging gal.*

*Helping to do the dishes – that's something I'd like to see him do. You and your happy looks mom – and you didn't have to sound that happy either mom to be able to tell him that the twins always do the dishes.*

*You do know gal that he really doesn't want to go to the barn with you so why are you insisting that he go with you? You always have to have your way don't you gal? Maybe if you ask him if he'd like to take some pictures of that calf, maybe then he might want to go with you to the barn. I really do want to see that calf.*

*You're just going to have to let Frog Face take some picture of you and him together. I like my stocking cap. I really don't care how I look with it on my head. It's obvious that he thinks that it makes me look like a dunce. That's his problem. Just let him laugh at you if that makes him happy.*

*We probably really do look like a couple of goofy looking geeks. No one who knows him knows me so . . . and he for sure isn't going to let anyone he knows see how grandpa's red coveralls barely fit him. And what do you know about him gal – other than that he seems actually to be a really decent kind of guy?*

*I don't want Chatterbox and Frog Face to go with us. They need to stay here in the house. Now you're stuck gal with getting the Christmas decorations out when you get back here. At least you'll have something to do when you get back here to the house.*

*I'm so glad to be out of the house and away from everyone. Why did mom look so pleased when she saw him? There's no way that mom knows him – does she? She sure acted like she was expecting him. If you would've told mom when you walked through the door into the house that he wasn't . . . why didn't you?*

*Why do I love so much being out in this kind of weather? Thanks Daddy G for showing off to me again your awesome power. Why can I trust you Daddy G to take care of me out here in this blizzard while at the same time, I just can't seem to spit out those words Daddy G that you've been trying to get me to say to mom and to . . . take no thought for tomorrow Missy for tomorrow will take care of itself? Why did you Daddy G just make me think of that? I know that you don't want me to worry about tomorrow but what do you want me to do? I'm not going back to that school. I don't want to ever see them again – especially after what they did behind my back. Okay Daddy G – I know – as my heavenly Father who unconditionally loves me you have to take me through life lessons that teach me to trust in you – and that some of those life lessons are going to make me cry. I don't want to cry Daddy G – I want to scream. I'm really mad at you.*

*We're at the barn already? That was too quick. Probably a good thing though. If he had held unto my arm any tighter, he would've broken it. You didn't have to make him come here with you – you know that don't you gal? Please Daddy G – I really don't want you trying to get my attention right now – okay.*

*It sure is good to be with real friends again. So they all have names – what's his problem with that? More friends. Looks like mice don't have a chance around here. I've sure missed you Pooch.*

*Where's he going? What's wrong with waiting for me? Just let him go gal. He'll stay here in the barn. I really don't want him to be around me anymore anyway. Then why are you feeling so alone right now? Why Daddy G? Why are you doing this to me? Why did it have to be him who you had me . . .*

*Gal – you’re going to have to go to the west barn whether you want to or not. If the calf really does have a black slash on its’ forehead, I really don’t want to see it. You can’t though go back to the house without seeing the new calf otherwise . . . you’re going to have to at least pretend like you care about the calf.*

*The calf really does have a scar like marking on its forehead. Why did you think it was so important to you Daddy G to have my forehead marred with an ugly scar? And how many scars does my son have from having been whipped, from having been nailed to a couple of crossed wooden beams, from having had a spear stuck in his side, from having . . . okay Daddy G – I hear you. Jesus has scars because of me.*

*This calf is going to have so much character. She already has. It’s going to feel kind of dopy calling her by my name. But . . . she’s going to make me proud. She’s sure does like me rubbing her forehead.*

*This being so patient and so merciful and so gracious with me again Daddy G – especially after I’ve been such an impatient and critical and ungracious heel . . . I know Daddy G – I need to tell him that I know that how I’ve been treating him has been totally not right. What if he doesn’t forgive me Daddy G? I know Daddy G – I’m not to worry about whether or not he’ll forgive me – that you’ve already taken care of that, but that for now, I’m just to tell him that it’s inexcusable how I’ve acted towards him. Come on – do it.*

*You’re telling him a lot more than what he probably wants to hear. You just needed to tell him that you’re sorry – that’s all. He’s genuinely listening to me. He isn’t trying to think of what he should say that he thinks that I want to hear him say like . . . if she hasn’t already realized it, she’s going to find out real quick that that cheater who she has claimed for herself really likes to hear himself speak. And she likes to talk.*

*How long have I been talking? We need to get back to the house.*

*My mother knows? What does mom know? She’s been messing with me? That’d be like mom to do but . . . how does he know that mom hasn’t told me something? What did mom tell him?*

*Why is he coming towards me? He’s giving me a side hug. Don’t you dare cry gal – don’t – you can’t. That look . . . he’s concerned about me. He’s for real.*

*This can’t be happening. I can’t stay out here with him any longer.*

*He has to understand that we really do need to get back to the house. It’s kind of surprising that someone hasn’t already shown up here in the barn just to make sure that we made it here okay. Like they’d dare to question my ability to make it out here? You’re going to have to stop thinking that way gal. Just because you know that you can singlehandedly change the world . . .*

*Don’t go there gal. Don’t let yourself believe that he’d like to stay out here in the barn with you. Just get back to the house for now gal and do the explaining that you need to do. You’ll make their evening. It’s just going to be something else that they’re going to be able to hang over my head for the rest of my life.*

*What was that that he just said to me? Why did he just ask me if I’ve thought about what I’d do if I don’t go back to school? What’s it to him what I was studying? So I was studying nursing – so? Don’t look so surprised. Why did I just tell him that I actually wanted to be a veterinarian but . . . why did he have to ask me that? I don’t know how I’m going to finish up my last semester of studies if I don’t go back there.*

*What? Why is he telling me about a doc who’s going to need help when his gal Friday begins maternity leave starting the first of the year? And there’s a nursing school there in town? That’s the name of the town that he’s talked about? It’s no more than about a half a day’s drive away. Who are Doc and Dotty? And then there’s that Mama T who lives there who is supposedly like me. Why is he telling me that Dotty and Mama T would enjoy having someone like me staying with them? And what does he mean – someone like me? Don’t ask him gal what he means by that as it’s maybe something that you don’t want to know.*

*It sounds like he has already decided that I’m going to live there. He can’t do that. He needs to know that no one ever decides what I’m to do.*

*Don't burst his bubble gal. Just let him stay enthused about the possibility of you going there. And you're going to just wait again gal to say something to someone what you know that you need to say now. When are you going to learn that you'd save yourself a whole lot of angst if . . . this waiting for the perfect moment to say something – you know that there's never a perfect moment. But . . . there's no way that he can be from that town. Look at his clothes – and his car. That town is as much of a Hicksville as my town.*

*The first thing that you need to do when you get back to the house is to fess up to everything. He just took my hand. What made him think that he can do that? He was holding on to the rope and on to your arm for dear life on the way to the barn. Believe it gal – the dude is trusting you completely to get him back to the house. You know if you don't keep your focus on holding onto this rope . . . it sure is getting colder out here. With the wind blowing the way that it is, I wouldn't want to be caught out in this kind of weather.*

*There's nothing like getting back to a toasty warm house after . . . you're smirking again mom. She's going to be so disappointed when she finds out that mister everything isn't who she thinks he is. You still don't know his name. It'd be absolutely mortifying if mom asks me what his name is. I need to find a way to . . .*

*Looks like the twins beat me to him. Did he really not know that was an ice cream maker and it's that easy to make homemade ice cream? All it takes is some milk, lots of cream, some sugar, a couple of eggs and some vanilla and then some packed snow, some rock salt, more packed snow and more rock salt. And then it's just keep turning that crank until it's obvious that the mix has thickened. It's sure going to taste good on that apple crisp. Mom must've put the apple crisp in the oven while we were in the barn. I can smell it baking. When did he start turning the crank? Talk about someone looking like a happy little kid.*

*Chatterbox is just going to have to wait. She'd just have to go and tell Frog Face that they're going to have to wait ten minutes before we start. I should've known that Frog Face knows how to tell time. They'll probably stay sitting there in front of that clock until . . . I need to get everyone to the living room now.*

*Other than having to compete with ice cream still being made, you've gotten the whole floor gal. Why did it get so quiet all of a sudden? You need to say something – like now.*

*Who invited mom to . . . roomie called? She called a couple of hours before I got home? The nerve of her to call. What did she tell mom? She was worried about me? Why? She knew that I was really upset when she and . . . if she knew the half of it. When she got back to the room and saw that . . . why did she go back to the room? She and that duplicitous two-timer were planned to head directly to her house right after their last classes. They decided to go back to the school – hoping to catch me before I left for home? When she saw that I'd cleaned out my side of our room . . . I hope her conscience is eating her alive. I can't believe that when I walked through the door that mom didn't tell me right away that roomie had called.*

*You just had to sneak a look at him didn't you gal? How did he know? I can't believe that mom really didn't say something to him about roomie calling. Okay – other than Chatterbox and Frog Face, everyone knew that a guy was coming home with me. Don't you dare try to be funny now mom. Please Daddy G – please shut mom's mouth before she says anything else. Oh no – you can't say things like that mom. How could mom dare say that she just knew that if I said that I was going to take a guy home with me for everyone to meet that . . . it's not funny. Then why am I laughing, too?*

*Would I like to introduce my friend? My friend? Oh no – how many chances gal did you have to ask him what his name is? You're going to have to tell everyone that you never. . .*

*Did he just tell everyone his name? That's his name? He's a man after your heart Daddy G? His home is where? Didn't he tell me that whoever Doc and Dotty and . . . that they live in . . . okay – so his father lives back east. His mother is who's living in . . . his mother and father must be separated or divorced.*

*He has a semester left at . . . he really is an Ivy Leaguer. I wish that the twins and Junior could see their faces right now. Their mouths couldn't be any more open. Even you mom look like you can't believe what you're hearing. His father had it all planned out that once he finishes school and has passed the bar that he would join his firm? But he just found out what his father did to his mother and he's going to do what?*



If Mama T was here, she'd . . . she'll probably try to kill me if I try to give her a hug. She needs to know though that all guys aren't like that guy who strung her along and then . . . and when did you become guy an authority on gals? Like how many gals have you hugged? None. Well . . . Mama T and Dotty and . . . it must be a family thing by how those cousins who you just met always expected you to give them a hug.

You shouldn't be thinking of doing this guy. Has anyone ever dared to give her a hug? I'm sure that being hugged or hugging someone is something that hasn't happened to her or something that she's done but . . . that's a surprised look. She sure didn't expect that. She isn't pulling away. That's long enough. She looks like she wants to cry? Good move guy. What're you going to do if she has gotten the wrong idea?

And what's this telling her that everything is going to be okay? Do you really expect her to believe you? She deserves a break. It's not cool at all what happened to her. It's not cool leading her along either.

It probably would be good to go back to the house. But . . . what do you know about her? Nothing. You can at least ask her if she's thought about what she'd do if she doesn't go back to school. She's been studying to be a nurse? I wouldn't have guessed that. She wanted to be a veterinarian? Why? Why did she say that animals don't talk back? She has to finish her studies. She'll probably make a really good nurse. It's easy to tell that she'd get patients to listen to whatever it is that she wants them to do.

If she doesn't go someplace to do something, I sure wouldn't want her moping around my world as it's obvious that she does moping really well. Plus it's really clear to me that she brings a whole lot to the table. And how do you know that guy? You always had a feeling that Capt was manipulating everything around you so . . . you don't need to go there now guy.

She doesn't have to stay here. Doc is going to need help soon. And there's that nursing school less than ten blocks from Mama T's house. And she could stay with Mama T and Dotty. Tell her that.

Why is she looking at me like that? And how'd you look if someone just told you that you should move in with their grandmother and mother who you've never met? Maybe she really doesn't want to be a nurse.

You do know how off the wall that was guy – telling her what she should do? You should consider yourself really fortunate guy that she isn't leaving you out here in this barn. You should know by now how obvious that it is that no one ever tells Missy what to do.

Missy and Mama T . . . if only I'd met my grandfather before he died, just maybe I'd be able to get my arms around what his old newspaper buddy meant when he said that Mama T marrying Terk was the luckiest thing that could've ever happened to him. Just the short time though that I was with Mama T, I have to believe that Terk had to have really cared for Mama T a lot in order to . . . did he ever dare try to tell her what to do and if he did . . . or was that a battle that Terk never picked? Dotty has to be like her father. This mindset of leaving battles to others to fight instead of . . . is that why when someone looks at Dotty and sees that radiant smile that they know that she believes in them and that she trusts them?

Mama T is right – I'm my mother's son. I'm to be a lawyer because Capt told me that he expected me to be one. You always capitulated to Capt ordering you to do this or to do that in order to escape any kind of confrontation with him. Not this time Capt. What you did was wrong. Making me lose over twenty years of being around my mother and her extended family – I'm going to make sure that you end up in jail.

Is this what the inside of a barn is always like in the winter? All the different smells in here – and those sounds of cows . . . is this what it was kind of like in that place where that Jesus was allegedly born? There's a real sense of surreality and serenity here. I'm not sure that it wouldn't be better to be born in a place like this versus being born in a sterilized room that's filled with anxiety, all kinds of machines and . . .

You've stalled enough guy. Just follow her behind these cows to the door and . . . why did you just grab her hand instead of . . . I don't think that I could get her to let go of my hand right now if I tried.

We just left the barn. I didn't even get cold. Now to get out of this . . . what're the twins doing?

That's a what – an ice cream maker? They're making ice cream – with that? You're gawking like a little kid. Do I want to turn the crank? Do you think that you maybe overkilled a bit letting them know that . . .

How does this thing make ice cream anyway? What's he going to do with that snow? Isn't that some kind of salt? If that was snow before between that tub thing and the sides of this wooden bucket, it must've melted as . . . I can start cranking again? Okay – when this cranks starts to get hard to turn, it means that the ice cream mix has thickened. I'll be able to say now that I've helped to make homemade ice cream.

We're all to go the living room now? Why? What am I supposed to do with this ice cream making thing? Good – hope that he knows that I'm okay with him turning the crank until . . . I want to hear what Missy has to say when she . . . I hope that she's going to tell her family now about that crumb who dumped her.

Why doesn't Missy say something? Everyone is staring at you gal. Missy has to know that she can't keep running from what happened. It happened. Missy has to move on with her life. So it was a real bummer what the bum did to her. She probably knows deep down that she has as much fault as he does as to what happened but . . . what would you say to someone if that had happened to you?

What's this that roomie called before she got home? What's a roomie? I knew it. I knew that she had something on Missy that she wasn't telling her. Why didn't she tell Missy when she walked through the door that her roommate had called? I knew that she had to be winking at me about something.

You probably shouldn't have given Missy that I told you look but . . . I hope though that Missy knows that I don't feel intimidated by her anymore.

That was a rather cruel thing though of her mother to do – not letting Missy know that her roommate called here because she was worried about Missy after going back to their room and finding that she had cleaned her stuff out. Can't you tell lady – Missy has been and is still really hurting. Give her a hug or something instead of . . . that wasn't funny at all. I'm not that kind of guy who'll go home with just anyone. How can she laugh, too, about . . . don't make it something personal guy. They're not laughing at you.

This always laughing about something . . . this family laughs as much as Mama T's family. Laughing is probably something that'd be good for you to learn to do.

Now – there's something really funny. You just gave yourself away Missy. Help her guy. Don't make her hot seat anymore hotter than what it is. Just tell them your name. That's a relieved look that she has on her face. She smiled. Why? Did my name have something to do with that smile?

Just tell them where you've been living and where you've been. Why is everyone looking at me like they've just found out that I've gone to the moon and back or something? So it's a well-known, prestigious school where I'm studying. I can't be the only wannabe lawyer or attorney that they've ever met? Why are they looking at Missy with those incredulous looks? Are they thinking that we've known each other? You need to get the air cleared on that one before they jump to a conclusion that . . .

Why aren't you telling everyone that you rolled your beamer and that Missy . . . what makes you think that they want to know your life history? What's it to them that your father lives out east and that you've spent the past week with your mother in . . . by those looks, that was way too much information to tell them without first giving them some sort of a timeline of . . .

Thanks Chatterbox – I owe you. If Missy really told you Chatterbox that she'd help you and Froggy do whatever it is that you want to do, Missy needs to keep her promise to you and help you.

What's that buzzing noise all about? The apple crisp is done? Is that what I've been smelling? I'm not to say anything else until . . . I wasn't planning on saying anything else.

Why doesn't Missy go with Chatterbox and Froggy to do what she promised to help them do? I'll go with them when they go.

It's out of the oven and cooling? Now what's everyone going to do? They're waiting guy for you to talk. But – but . . . Missy has to . . . Chatterbox – you could've told your big sis that you don't want to wait another ten minutes – that you want to do right now what Missy promised that she'd help you do.

What do I tell them? Just start at the beginning guy – like at about two weeks ago when you were going through that old shoebox in which you've kept some stuff since who know when. Tell them that you had kept an old envelope – that you had gotten a birthday card in that envelope.

You need to tell them about Capt. And what're you going to say about him – other than the guy doesn't have a decent bone in his body. You probably should tone down that intensity that you're feeling right now guy as . . . how could Dotty have let herself fall for that worm? So the guy was the town's new lawyer. And then being young and single and . . . Capt still thinks that he's a ladies man. What a joke.

Telling a gal who still had a year left in high school that if she'd marry him that . . . and if Dotty had just listened to her mother . . . but then you wouldn't have been born guy – let alone be here right now in this house. Mama T still should've used that shotgun on Capt instead of letting him marry Dotty.

Just focus on the facts guy instead of going on rabbit trails. Let them make their own decision how they feel about Capt instead of you thinking that you need to always insert your feelings and your opinions.

Are they thinking that I flew this direction instead of driving? Tell them about your accident so that . . . I'll wait. This when you've gotten a jury's attention . . . tell them about your trip to the town whose name you could barely make out that had been posted on the envelope and then showing up at the post office and being told by the gal there that you should go to the town's newspaper office to talk with the editor as . . .

I really do wish that I could describe to them the editor's face when I walked into his office. I really have to believe that the guy probably was napping when I walked through the door – as why else when he saw me would he have called me Terk? That senior photo of Terk in that old yearbook . . .

This amplifying or augmenting everything is going to . . . just tell them that Mama T wasn't surprised at all when you walked into that assistant living place where she has been stuck staying – that Dotty was shocked when she saw you walk into the restaurant – and that you found out that you've a wonderful family that you didn't even know existed.

The housekeeper though – calling Dotty every month to let Dotty know how I was and where I was. And then going to the airport to pick up Dotty when she came to my graduations and . . . and then to have Dotty stay at her house with her when . . . would I like to see Capt's deranged mother's reaction when she finds that out. I never want to see that demanding recluse again.

If Mama T hadn't kept hidden all those newspaper clippings and all that other anecdotal stuff associated with what Dotty supposedly did to me . . . Dotty really didn't have an inkling that her mother had filled a portfolio with everything that she could find regarding what purportedly happened to me. You need to count yourself really lucky right now Capt because if I hadn't . . . I'd be at this time tomorrow night getting ready to put you in front of a judge and a jury – which would be me and me and you'd be found guilty.

Why did you go there guy? You didn't have to tell them about what happened over twenty years ago after Dotty took you to the emergency room.

You've probably said enough guy. That whatever it is has to be getting cold. Plus you know how much you like ice cream so . . .

Do I let Missy answer that unspoken question? I better. Tell them exactly what happened instead of . . . they don't need to know that you started to follow Missy in your car. She really did save your life. You had to have blacked out when . . . what did I just say that has everyone about ready to bust? Think guy – you just said that when you came to that a skinny punk was . . . now you've done it guy. They've got to know that I didn't mean to call her a . . . even her father is laughing so hard that . . . Missy is going to . . .

*That timer would have to go off for that apple crisp just when . . . and now here comes Chatterbox and Frog Face. Ten minutes can't be up yet – can it? Just ask Chatterbox if she'd be willing to wait another ten minutes before we start.*

*This is like old times sitting in the living room like this – sitting on the couch with the twins, pops in his chair and mom in her rocker. It was nice of Junior to . . . he doesn't mind sitting on the floor anyway. The way that Junior is working at turning that crank the ice cream should be getting hard at any moment. You didn't waste any time getting back here did you mom?*

*Where did that look come from? I hope that I haven't rubbed off on him. What could've happened that has him so angry at whoever this Capt is? I sure wouldn't want to be that Capt when he sees him again.*

*If we don't mind, he'd like to start kind of in the beginning? Start wherever you want to guy – I just want to know why this Capt has really gotten under your skin. Nice to know that there's someone else around here right now that can see a bit of red. He's not as dull as I was starting to think that he might be.*

*It must be nice to just go wherever you want to go over Christmas break. The way that he has talked about this Capt – hanging out at his home the ten days from when classes ended and Christmas Day wouldn't have been an option for me either. If someone were to ever give me new wheels, I'd have a lot of fun taking the car out on the open road. He needs to tell everyone what kind of car it is – and that it's sitting right now in what's his name's field with a mushed roof.*

*He doesn't remember when he started to put stuff in one of Capt's old shoeboxes? Probably everyone has some kind of an old box someplace that he or she has been keeping odds and ends of stuff. He kept an envelope in the shoebox? Why would he keep an envelope? Why didn't he keep the card? Capt tore up the card? Why would Capt tell him as he was tearing up the card that the card was sent to him by mistake? It was a birthday card? He knows that he wasn't in school yet when he got that card? That was years ago.*

*Hope that no one falls asleep. The aroma of that tobacco that pop is smoking in his pipe – the wind rattling the windows – the smell of that apple crisp . . . there has to be some way to capture these kinds of moments.*

*How could he not know how flat the Midwest is? I don't think that it's boring driving around here. Going to the post office to . . . dah – like there's going to be somebody there who has lived in that town for the past twenty or so years who is an expert on everyone's handwriting? The guy really can't be that smarts challenged – can he? He has got to have some common sense otherwise he's going to make a terrible lawyer. And where would you've gone gal?*

*The gal at the post office sent him to see the old editor at the newspaper office? Why? Wouldn't the police station have been a better place to go to seeing that that town is more like a small city? The moment that the editor saw him . . . it must've been really funny. Don't just stand there like that. If you're going to laugh guy – laugh. You're looking like mom right now when we're all teasing her. Doing giggling isn't manly at all.*

*When the old editor saw him, he thought that he was who? Who is Terk? Terk is his grandfather? Terk and the newspaper editor had been high school classmates? He thinks that the guy was taking a catnap when . . . waking up and seeing an old buddy from way back when standing there . . . so that's what happens when people get old – they forget where they are or what they're doing or what they've said. Those memories though that those old people at the nursing home have are sometimes really fascinating.*

*Okay – so when the old editor got his wits back, he dug out his high school yearbook. It was like looking in a mirror. The old guy knew everything about him? Everyone in town knew him? How could that be if he had never been anywhere in that direction in his life? Your story guy . . . it really isn't plausible.*

*The old dude couldn't get him fast enough to the assistant living center? Why? The old geezer couldn't wait to see Mama T's face when . . . Mama T is his grandmother? She's staying at the assistant living center because her house doesn't have a wheelchair ramp?*

*Okay – she has to stay at the assistant living center while she recoups from hip replacement surgery. What does Mama T have to do with that Capt? The first words that Mama T told him when she saw him was about time that . . . and he thinks that I'm like Mama T? And ordering him to give her a hug when you saw him coming towards her doesn't sound like me. So she doesn't mince words – what's wrong with that?*

*So your grandmother guy had just started getting around using a walker. She hadn't been out of that assistant living center since . . . but when you showed up, she had everyone jumping – from helping her to put on what she called something more presentable to bringing the handicapped assessable van around for her to . . . then off you went to her tearoom. Tearoom? Everyone calls it out of her hearing Terk's Place?*

*When Terk and Mama T opened their tearoom, Terk was the cook? The place still has terrific meals – even though . . . that's too bad that Terk died last year before . . . along with working at the area nursing home, Dotty works at Terk's Place? Dotty is his mother? Now it's all coming together. Now – who is Doc?*

*When Dotty saw him, she got this really panicky look on her face? Why? Why did she keep telling him that he's not to be here – that he can't be here – that he has to leave – that he can't tell his father – that . . . why didn't Dotty want anything to do with her son? Didn't he tell me that I'd really like her? She sounds like a real crock to me.*

*After Dotty had finished cleaning up the broken pieces of the plate that she dropped when she saw him walk into the restaurant, Mama T got her to sit down to eat with them? It would've been really disconcerting for me, too – to have everyone it seemed in that place to know me and for me not to know anyone in that place. He has found out that he has lots of uncles, aunts and cousins who he didn't know that he had?*

*The only person that he knows on Capt's side of the family is Capt's mother – and she's a . . . guy – there's a couple of very impressionable little girls in this room. That's a harsh thing to call a grandmother.*

*The cleaning lady that his grandmother back east has had forever would call Dotty at least once a month to keep Dotty updated on him? Why? Then she would pick Dotty up from the airport when she . . . and she let Dotty stay in her house, too? What am I missing here?*

*That was a big breath. What was that all about? Mama T had the assistant living center's van stop at her house before going back to the center? After giving you the key to get into her house, she told you to get the folder that you'd find under the bottom of her what drawer? Terk had built a false bottom so that Dotty wouldn't find the folder? Why?*

*So when you got back to the center, Mama T began going through the folder with you? You need to move your story along guy – the apple crisp isn't going to stay warm forever.*

*So after you saw a couple of pictures of you with Dotty and Capt, Mama T took several pictures out of an envelope that has you looking like you had been run over by a truck? What happened?*

*He has photocopied every single newspaper article, every court document, everything that Mama T had in that folder? The copies are in the side pocket of his computer bag? Why?*

*If you don't tell us what happened . . . can't you tell gal – he doesn't want to go there. Something really awful must've happened to him.*

*When the emergency room doctor saw all the bruises on his body – and because his arm was broken, the doctor called child welfare? Why? Maybe a truck did hit him?*

*Per what ended up in the newspaper, Dotty pleaded guilty to child abuse? Dotty beat him?*

*It'd probably really help if he filled us in a little more on Dotty – and on Capt. Okay – so when Capt finished his law studies, Capt decided to disappear. He had really had it with his step-father per what that old cleaning lady told Dotty. I'd try to disappear, too, if I'd had a verbally abusive step-father.*

*And what do you know Daddy G about Capt choosing . . . okay – I know – everything. You were looking forward to unfolding this evening for me – weren't you Daddy G. There's never a coincidence in your perfect plan that you've designed especially for me.*

*Keep listening gal. Dotty still had a year to go in high school when . . . so that's why he calls him Capt. The guy wanted the office staff – like his secretary, to call him the captain. He got stuck with Capt.*

*Just because the guy said that he wanted to marry her, why did Dotty marry him? Dotty knew that she was doing something wrong when she let the guy sweet talk her into marrying him but . . . don't forget guy that there's little people in this room here, too. So she agreed to marry him? Did she want to marry him? Why would she still marry him?*

*And then when no one would go to Capt's hole-in-the-wall joint because of how he treated Dotty, Dotty had to find work? Capt wouldn't even let her finish her last year of high school? If Dotty beat him up so badly that he ended up at the ER, why does he like her so much?*

*You're starting to stress a bit guy. You might open up your fists instead of having them balled up like that. We all know that you really have a case against Capt. Why? He's not the one who beat you.*

*When the person from child welfare showed up at the emergency room, she called the police? They're supposed to do that. When Capt told the cop that Dotty had beat his kid – and that it wasn't the first time, Dotty didn't deny anything?*

*If she really didn't beat her kid, why didn't Dotty just say what really happened instead of . . . why would she think that if she took the blame that . . . instead – and even though everyone in town knew that Capt was who'd beaten his kid, Capt divorced Dotty, got the judge to have Dotty give him child support and got the judge to deny Dotty visitation rights? And then Capt headed back to his mother – who told her then husband to get lost as she didn't want her perfect son to disappear again? And now he knows why he always felt like a piece of baggage that Capt didn't want anything to do with? And you thought your life gal had gotten complicated. Even if it shocks everyone – including him, why don't you just get up and give him a hug. He sure looks like he needs one right now.*

*What? Capt has done more? Capt told Dotty that if she didn't pay for your tuition costs at whatever school that he sent you along with buying you whatever you wanted – like cars or cameras or clothes – or paying for whatever you decided you wanted to do – like going on trips, that he'd . . . for over twenty years now, Dotty has been working two jobs so that . . . no wonder he wants to get back to Capt's house out east.*

*Did he just say that he owes everyone back there big time for the way that they've helped Dotty over the years? Her family and the townspeople would pay for her trips to fly to see him? Really? And the moment that you saw Dotty, you knew that you'd seen her before – like at your graduations and even at some events like those when you were given awards? She'd always catch your eye – and smile that beautiful smile at you? Mama T though must be some kind of character. I don't blame her at all for making sure that everyone knows everything about the grandson who looks and acts just like her husband.*

*You need to get mom a Kleenex before . . . maybe you should get one for yourself.*

*Great idea – that apple crisp and ice cream is going to taste so good. I'll go dish it up for everyone.*

*What's this one more thing? I didn't save his life. He was just dazed. He would've been fine. He didn't just say that. What a yuk – calling me a . . . he couldn't have thought that I was a guy until . . . I'm glad that everyone thinks it's so hilarious. I don't think that it's amusing at all.*

*I'll teach him. You've got their attention. Tell them. There. He isn't supposed to be looking that happy. He's supposed to look flustered that I'm taking him up to move in with Dotty starting the first of next year and that I'm going to . . . why is mom jumping up and down like a little first grader? And you don't have to look so glad, too, pops.*

I've seen that look. She's up to no good. Whatever it is that's going to come out of her mouth, it isn't going to be good. It doesn't take long to know what kind of a manipulative person that she is.

Did Missy just say what I think that she said? She did. She wants to live with Dotty? She's serious. Why is she looking so befuddled though if . . . you're going to have to follow through on what you just said gal as you've just made your mother's day. Why is she so happy that . . . and your father . . . I sure hope that she really does want to go there. She'll really like it there.

They really are okay with me following her there. You need to call Doc when you can get someplace where you can get a signal to make sure that . . . there's a telephone? Where? That's a telephone over there hanging on the wall? You're doing a really good job guy of showing your ignorance around here. Tomorrow will be soon enough to call Doc.

Who is Doc? You didn't tell her in the barn did you guy that Doc is a veterinarian. You can't fool me gal with that pokerfaced look – I know your insides are jumping up and down. You said that you wanted to be a veterinarian so . . . that was a quick exit gal to the kitchen.

So this is an apple crisp. It's really, really good. And this ice cream has to be the best ice cream that I've ever tasted. Do I want more ice cream? That was a rhetoric question.

If I hadn't rolled my car, I'd be alone right now in my car mulling over and over again what I'd say to Capt in front of all his guests. Suddenly wanting to get off the Interstate to buy some beer, then following Missy, then having Missy . . ., plus happening on that old envelope again and then impulsively getting in my new car and . . . how could so many foolish and bad decisions lead me to such a good thing?

You need to thank everyone for the kind of hospitality that they've been giving to you – especially for someone who they've never met before in their lives. I wouldn't want to be any other place right now than in this house with this family.

How can someone feel so emotional and so alive at the same time?

It's true that I'm really grateful how this family has been making me feel like I'm a member of their family. In just a few short days I've gone from thinking that no one cared about me to . . .

How does someone explain what it's like growing up without a mother or a father or without siblings? The only people who I've had around me have been whoever the nanny was when I was little who Capt hired to supposedly take care of me. Just be glad guy that before you started going to school that Capt didn't send you over to his mother for her to watch you. Yah – like do you really believe that would've been something that he could've gotten her to do?

It's just wrong to force a kid as he's growing up to leave home. Okay – boarding at the different schools wasn't so bad and some of those summer long camps were a lot of fun but this being such a klutz – always stumbling over my own two feet . . . I guess there always has to be someone who's the laughingstock of every group.

Books have always been really good friends. Spending time alone in different cultural and societal settings really did make for great experiential learning times. But those family get-togethers with Mama T's family last week and now these few hours with Missy's family . . . the best thing that you can do right now guy is to just let go of Capt and relish the moment.

Just soak in everything that's happening around you – all the laughing – all the teasing – all the happiness. I feel like they made me a friend without me having to . . . which now has me feeling that they're all my friends. Even though I was an uninvited guest when I showed up here, when I walked through the door into this house it was like everyone already had their arms wide open to unconditionally accept me no matter who I was. And if I had turned my back on their friendship, I'd probably be doing right now the poor me thing along with feeling really mad and miserable instead of feeling like I do right now.

This Jesus friend that Chatterbox was wanting to be my friend because he wanted to be my friend – and I couldn't be okay with him just wanting to be my friend – I had to ask him to be my friend because that was what I supposed to do – why did it feel so right when I appeased her?

What's Missy going to do with that box? It must have to do with whatever it was that Chatterbox wanted her to do. Those are Christmas balls. Do they put up a Christmas tree in this house? They must be the way that Chatterbox is insisting that they do.

Guess you're to go over to the dining room table. I'm to pick out a Christmas ball to do what? That was a rather apologetic look Missy. Hey – if Chatterbox has decided that I need to put my name on a Christmas ball, I'm not about to get into another debate with her. If I can't even win an argument with a kindergartener, how am I ever going to win an argument in a courtroom?

Why is it only just me and Froggy who're going to do whatever it is that needs to be done? This always being silly – like I should've known that pops and mom and . . . okay – everyone but Froggy and me have their names already on Christmas balls. That's whose Christmas ball? Chatterbox's? That's her name?

Okay – we're to each choose a Christmas ball. Then we're to use that white glue to print the letters of our names on the Christmas ball. After that, we're to do what? We're to sprinkle this sparkling stuff over the white glue? That shouldn't be too hard. I saw that look Missy. It's clear that doing things with my hands isn't something that I do very well. You didn't have to give me though that I feel sorry for you look.

It would be like Froggy to want me to look at her Christmas ball now when I really need to focus on writing my name on this thing. She's finished? How could she have finished so quickly? Why did she write April on her Christmas ball instead of . . . April is her name? Her mother told her that she named her April because she was born in April and because April is when everything starts to grow again.

Talk about opening up a spigot – just keep right on talking April. I'll keep right on listening. She knows that her mother was really happy when she was born but . . . her real father died after getting really sick?

Does April know how quiet it has gotten around here? Everyone is looking at her like they can't believe what they're hearing. Didn't they get a family history on her when they got her? Her mother got really sad when her father died? Why would April's mother tell April that it was April's fault that her father died?

April intuitively read you guy. She had to have seen something in your eyes or sensed something by the way that you acted that told her that you'd be a safe place for her to be herself.

What do I say to her? You could ask her if she'd put that sparkling stuff on the glue while you hold your Christmas ball. Where did all that bubblyness come from all of sudden – and where did all that glumness go that was like a black cloud over her?

Did she just ask me if I'd make her one of my friends? How could she not know that she's already my friend? I've to say okay to making her one of my friends just like Jesus said okay when she asked him to be her friend? And she's really glad that I asked Jesus to be my friend, too?

Why is everyone looking at me? They should be looking at April. I didn't do anything. April is the one who said that . . . plus I said when we were having dinner that I had asked Jesus to be my friend so . . .

Now what did Chatterbox just say? I've never seen anyone get so red? She's really embarrassed. Why? Did Missy really save Chatterbox's life? Why is everyone laughing? What did I miss? When or why would have Missy told me about that vivid scar that she has on her forehead? Why would've I asked her?

Do I want to hear Missy's version or the twin's version of how she got that scar? Of course – it's has to be Chatterbox's version because she knows that it really wasn't silly Brutus' fault. What? Just listen to her guy. She and Missy were playing dress up one day. Pops and mom weren't home because they weren't home? Makes sense to her so . . . she had on red clothes while Missy was reading Little Red Riding Hood?



As much as you'd like to guy, you can't say what you're thinking – that Missy was the big bad wolf and that she didn't even have to get herself dressed up to play the role.

Missy didn't know that Chatterbox had decided to go look for the big bad wolf? What was Missy doing that she didn't know that her little sister had left the house?

When she saw Brutus, she decided that she wanted to make him her pet? That helps – knowing that it has been over four years ago now when this happened. Brutus – didn't they call that big thing Brutus that was staring down at me when . . .

Brutus didn't know that she wanted to pet him? Why would she want to . . . and that it wasn't his fault that he got mad because now she knows that Brutus doesn't like red? What? And what color was that thing that you were wearing when you fell through that open door and Brutus was looking straight down on you?

It couldn't have been that funny? So why are they all . . . okay – when Missy tried to pick you up, her foot stepped in some cow gook and . . . that's funny? That's doesn't sound funny to me.

If he can stop laughing long enough, I'm going to hear the version of what really happened from one of the twins. They were digging up potatoes when . . . digging up potatoes? What? Okay – when they heard Pooch making a racket, you guys decided to find out what was ticking off Pooch? Just as you got around the corner of the barn, you guys saw Missy come running out of the house – jump over the fence and . . . what possibly could've happened next that has these clowns laughing so hard that they can't even talk?

Finally. Missy slipped on a what when she tried to pick up Chatterbox? A cowpie. What's that? And whatever that was caused her to slide forward? Her forehead slamming down on one of Brutus horn stubs just as he lifted his head? That had to have hurt. I bet blood was spurting everywhere.

That wry grin that she has on her face and the way that she's shaking her head tells me that this isn't the first time that Missy has had to put up with the twin's version of what happened. She did what? Even though blood was spurting all over the place, she stood there right in front of Brutus pointing her finger at him and lecturing him for being such a bad bull? You can't laugh guy. Don't laugh. I can't help it.

I'm glad that Missy doesn't seem to mind that I'm laughing at her. I get the feeling now that she gets laughed at a lot around here.

What's that that Junior just hauled in from outside? Why did Missy just mutter something about mom having gone to the lumberyard again? That's a Christmas tree? Does her mother really always wait until the last minute to pick out a Christmas tree and that it's always the most scraggly looking tree that's still left on the lot? That's definitely a sick looking tree. They can't be. They are. They're using string to tie the tree to those nails. They're right – the tree would probably fall over if it wasn't tied to the wall.

Now what? We're all to go into the living room – and I'm to sit in the middle of the couch? There's plenty of room for April to sit next to me on my left. I hope that Missy is okay with Chatterbox telling her that she has to sit next to me on the other side. You're just going to have to get used to being called that as they really think that you are. I hope that Missy is okay with having to practically sit on my lap. There isn't a lot of room on this couch. Chatterbox would have to sit on Missy's lap.

I sure hope that everyone is okay with Chatterbox running the show. Pops has to go first because he's the oldest? First to do what? Oh – he's to hang the Christmas ball with Pops on it on the tree. Now it's mom's turn. I've a feeling that she uses this time every year to affirm her kids.

I'm next because I'm the next oldest. Okay. That was really nice of them to include me in doing this. Why not – I don't mind putting Missy's Christmas ball on the tree. Wait a minute – this Christmas ball doesn't say Missy. It has someone else's name on it. That's her name? I've got to tell her. I've got to tell everyone. I don't care if they're thinking that I've gone off the deep end. I've found what has been missing in my life.

*You've done it now haven't you gal? I don't want to go to someplace that I've never been to before. You said that you'd made your decision to go there gal. You've just made yourself another grave.*

*What if his mother won't let me stay with her? And if Mama T is really like me . . . she sounds like a scary person to me. But he really thinks the world of her.*

*What's this about calling Doc once he gets to someplace where his cellphone can pick up a signal? Why doesn't he call Doc from here? He didn't know there was a phone here? The guy has to be blind. It's in plain sight – right there hanging on the kitchen wall. What did he think that was?*

*Yah guy – knowing whoever Doc is would be nice. He's a what? Don't look at him. Act like everything is totally normal in your world. Go to the kitchen and start spooning the apple crisp into some bowls. It sure has gotten hot again in this house.*

*I know that the apple crisp with that ice cream is really good but . . . why do guys always have to inhale their food instead of enjoying each bite.*

*That's it. If the guys want more ice cream, they'll need to make another batch.*

*You better get that box of Christmas balls down from the upstairs' closet before it gets any later. It shouldn't take Frog Face and for him very long to put their names on the glass balls.*

*Did I really say that I want to stay with his mother? And was he really serious about following me there so that he could introduce me to his family – and to a veterinarian? And why are you really hoping that he's really serious?*

*Here's that box of Christmas balls. I had to have been a little older than Chatterbox is now when mom found this box. That was fun putting our names on the Christmas balls that each one of us kids picked out from this box that someone was tossing and which mom rescued. How does mom do it – like always stumbling across the craziest stuff – like this box of mismatched Christmas balls?*

*Who knows where mom came up writing our names on these balls. And mom getting pops to also . . . are there any other pops out there? I'd be awfully happy to find just one guy who'd do whatever his wife asks him to do.*

*And how many times did he do anything for you? You gal was the one who was always doing the waiting on instead of him waiting on you. Good riddance. I'm his loss; he's not my loss.*

*The dining room table will work just fine for Frog Face and for . . . why did you choose him Daddy G to put through that kind awful gunk that he's had to gone through ever since . . . for me? Did you just say Daddy G that you did it for me? I know Daddy G that nothing ever happens by chance but . . . I need to thank you Daddy G. You're making me feel so in your perfect will.*

*Why is mom letting Chatterbox get her way again? Mom knows that we always put up the Christmas tree on Christmas Eve – like right after we get home from the church service. Tonight isn't Christmas Eve. How does she do it? I would've never thought to challenge mom.*

*You don't have a choice guy. Just take Chatterbox's hand and come to this table.*

*Did he think that we were all going to put our names on Christmas balls? He can look at Chatterbox's ball to see how she did hers. Probably isn't the best ball to show him. No one helps Chatterbox to do anything. And do you let anyone help you?*

*His name isn't going to look any better on that ball that he chose than Chatterbox's name does on her ball. He looks like he has two thumbs the way that he's holding that ball. That ball does look awfully small in his hands – especially compared to the same size ball that Frog Face has chosen.*

*Frog Face is done with her ball already? How did she do that? That's really nice writing. But why did she write April on her ball? That's her real name? How come no one knew that April was her name?*

*She's talking to him like she's always known him? Talk about a place suddenly getting really quiet – why has she decided to start talking now? He has to have something to do with it. He's looking at her like . . . what I wouldn't do to have someone looking at me like that.*

*Her dad died? Did mom know that? Her dad was lots of fun? He taught her to write? Her ma says that it was her fault that he died. Why?*

*You've had life so hard haven't you gal? Pops and mom are probably living off nothing just so that you can study nursing and so that Junior can go to college. This house is more than just a home. Who explained to you how accepted and how perfect and how just right that you are like right now in Daddy G's eyes? Okay Daddy G – mom – pops – Sunday School teachers – the pastor – okay – okay.*

*That's a surprised look. Is there something wrong with her asking you if you'd make her one of your friends? Why don't you ask him if he'd make you one of his friends? Yah – sure.*

*He sure is looking awfully confused. He probably never has had someone ask him before if he'd make him or her his friend.*

*And she's glad that he asked Jesus to be his friend, too? You've really made him look uncomfortable now little lady. You're in the spotlight now guy. I've a feeling guy that you didn't really know what Chatterbox was asking you to do when she insisted that you ask Jesus to be your friend. Then Chatterbox making you say during supper that you'd asked Jesus to be your friend – you probably should talk with him tomorrow about what it's like to have Jesus as a friend. And what makes you think that he's going to want to spend time talking with you tomorrow?*

*Why is everyone looking at me? Why did Chatterbox just have to now . . . she needs to stop telling everyone that I saved her life. I didn't save her life. Chatterbox ended out there in the cow yard because I was thinking about myself instead of watching her.*

*Why would I tell him about that repulsive scar on my forehead? It's not a funny story. None of them have to live with a gruesome looking slash across their forehead. I do. And you can stop staring at it right now guy. I need to get out of here.*

*The nerve – grabbing my hand like that. If you've been planning Chatterbox on me playing some games with you while I'm home, you can forget it.*

*Please guys – don't – don't. I'd sure like to see you jump over a barbwire fence. Just keep laughing like that you guys and . . . if he'll just let go of my hand long enough, I'll throw my shoes at them. I take back what I said to you earlier Daddy G about you having blessed me so much. You didn't have to stick me with mirror twins as baby brothers. You've had them make my life miserable ever since they were born?*

*So – I slipped. Big deal. Don't deny it gal – you were giving Brutus a piece of your mind when the twins finally decided to help me get Chatterbox out of the cow yard. Your irrational rant probably has scarred that poor bull for life. Why else does he start heading away from you when he sees you coming or hears your voice?*

*You know gal that you'd be laughing hysterically right now, too, if . . . it's okay – you can laugh guy if you want to laugh with them. I'm used to it.*

*I didn't see Junior go outside. You should be glad gal that he wasn't here when . . .*

*What in the world is that that he's pulling behind him? No mom – you didn't. You did. You and your compassion gift. A tree mom doesn't care if no one buys it to take home.*

*Why are you feeling so embarrassed this time gal? You always thought that mom was doing something special when she'd come home from the local lumberyard with the scraggiest tree still left there. You did yourself really proud this year mom.*

*You need to tell him that the unsightly thing that he's staring at is our Christmas tree for this year. Once there's tinsel hanging from the branches and there're strings of popcorn wrapped around it and there're balls hanging on it and . . .*

*He probably can't believe his eyes that the guys have to tie the tree by some string to those nails. Those nails next to the picture window never come out of the wall?*

*This sure has been one of those days. You were really dreading coming home. Now you don't want this day to end. There'll be tomorrow. But what if tomorrow . . .*

*Thanks Daddy G. I believe with all my heart that you know what tomorrow holds for me. Thanks also again Daddy G for your Spirit doing what your Spirit has to do to continually create in me a worthy heart for the constant presence of your Son. And also thanks Daddy G for always reminding me to ask you to help me to do what you'll tell me is right to do. I sure need your help doing that.*

*Bedtime can't come soon enough for me. It's going to feel so good curled up under a pile of quilts while listening to the wind trying to shake this house down. I'm going to sleep really well tonight.*

*Mom needs to tell the girls it's bedtime for them. Chatterbox can wait until tomorrow to put those Christmas balls with our names on them on the tree.*

*I can't believe you mom caving in again to Chatterbox. Just put a smile on your face, find a place on the floor here in the living room and . . . I'm to do what? She has got to stop calling him my man.*

*Don't look at anyone. Those sloppy grins on their faces . . . besides – there's no room next to him on the couch with Chatterbox sitting on one side of him and Frog Face – okay April, on the other side of him.*

*Chatterbox – Chatterbox – what am I going to do with her? She's really not making my life any easier. This getting up, telling me to sit where she's been sitting and then sitting down on my lap – can we just get this over with once and for all hanging our Christmas balls on that sad looking tree.*

*If you'd stop gal trying to act invisible to everyone, just maybe everyone will stop looking at you with that I can't believe it look. Besides – can't they tell, he doesn't even notice that you're snuggled up right up against him? Okay – you've got to admit it – you couldn't be feeling more like everything is so right with the world than what you're feeling right now sitting on this couch this close to him.*

*About time Chatterbox that you followed a family tradition around here. The oldest does go first.*

*You're looking awfully self-conscious pops hanging your Christmas ball on that tree. Good thing the tree isn't any taller otherwise . . . let the guys rib him. You're going to feel just as chagrined and you're going to get just as much teasing when it's your turn.*

*Okay mom – that's enough. This annual speech about us kids being the best gifts that God could ever possibly have given you . . . this going emotional though mom really gets embarrassing. You're just tired gal – that's probably why you're feeling so melancholy right now.*

*That didn't seem to bother him at all to hang his ball. Let him hang your ball, too. That way Chatterbox doesn't need to . . . why is he looking at my Christmas ball like that? Did he think that my given name was Missy? Why is he getting so excited? It's your name gal. It's you. It can't be. But he just said that he has found what he has been missing in his life. By the way that he's acting . . . thanks Daddy G for my name.*

*Joy.*