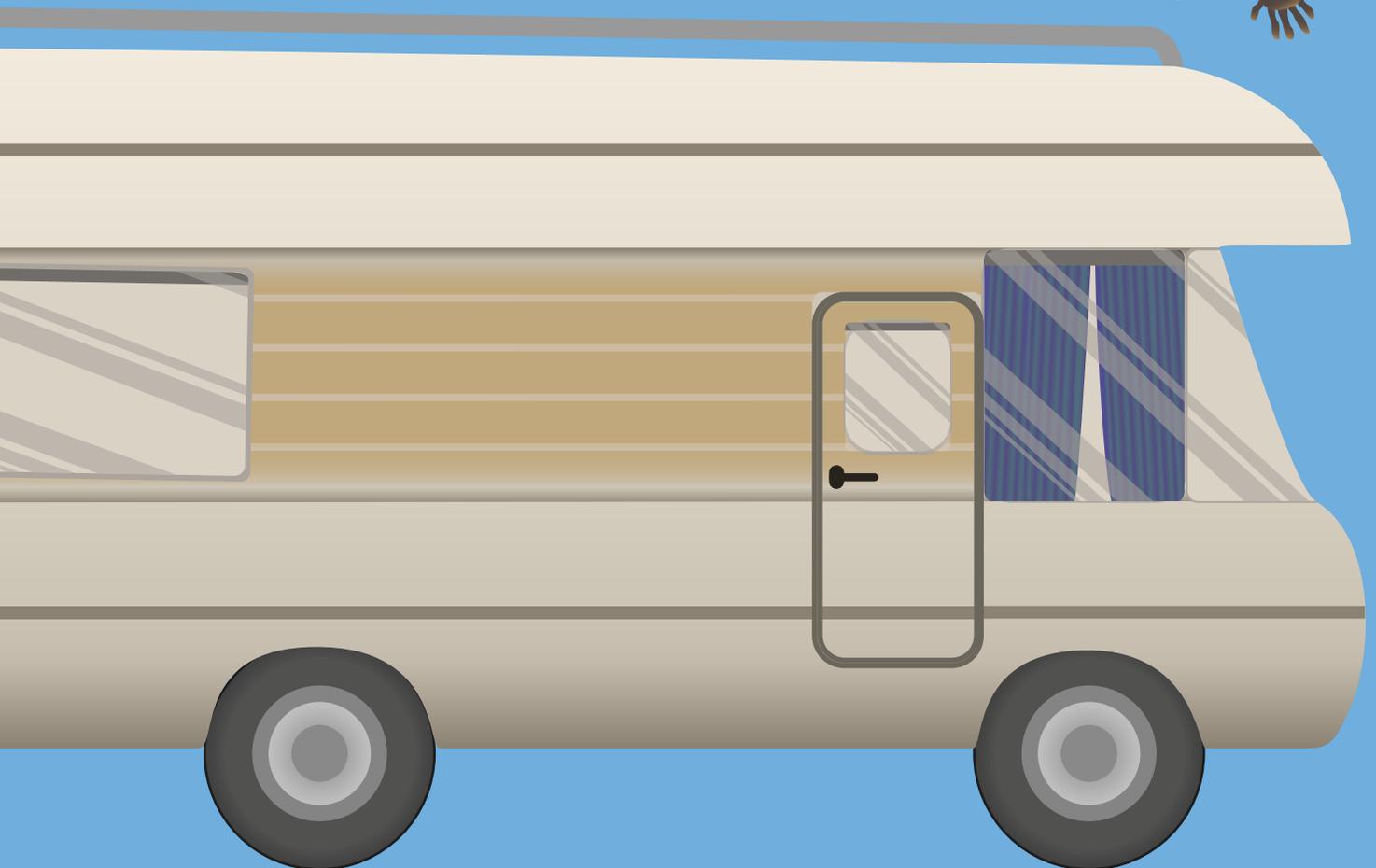


MURDER BY ROAD TRIP

JOHN J JESSOP



& JACQUELINE J JESSOP

Also by John J. Jessop

Comedy Murder Mystery Series

PLEASURIA: TAKE AS DIRECTED

Dark Murder Mystery Series

GUARDIAN ANGEL: UNFORGIVEN

GUARDIAN ANGEL: INDOCTRINATION

MURDER BY ROAD TRIP

by John J Jessop and Jacqueline J Jessop

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MURDER BY ROAD TRIP

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Jacqueline J Jessop

DEDICATION

To my daughter, Jackie, who traveled across the USA and back with her crotchety old man in July 2016. We did 7600 miles in 30 days, and my bad back thanks you for your tireless efforts at unloading and loading the car as we hopped from Marriott to Marriott. Thank you for your trip to CVS in Shreveport to get me Tylenol for the pain of my surprise root canal, and for your patience and not leaving me or running over me during those trying times. We truly experienced this wonderful country that is the United States of America, from the root canal in Shreveport, to the 118-degree weather in Tucson to the Badlands and hunting for the elusive buffalo in Custer State Park. We got to know each other better, laughed and ate way too much cheese. And, who'd a thought we'd end up using the experience to stage a comedy murder mystery. Life is truly a blessing, and I thank God that I got to experience this wonderful adventure with you.

Chapter 1. Break-In at the Lab

The lab monkeys chattering made it difficult for Jenny Hardwick to hear her co-worker, Harold Dumbrowsky, from across the room.

“Jenny, it’s getting late. We’ve run the tests, cleaned the cages, and fed the furry beasts. It’s time to get out of here. Besides, I’m getting sick of the smell of monkey shit. Enough with the pursuit of science. How’s about I take you to dinner, and then we can go back to my place?”

Having blossomed at a young age and kept her girlish figure well into her twenties, Jenny was used to the attention of eager young men. But she was serious about her graduate education and had little time for play. Harold, handsome in his own right with the toned body of an athlete, was accustomed to women saying yes. He got into the LSU graduate program thanks to a generous donation from his father, but play ranked well above studying on his list of priorities.

“As much as I’d like to take you up on that tantalizing offer – made in the same breath as complaints about primate waste – I have to study tonight. I have a pharmacology exam in two days. Besides, I still need to clean a couple of cages, and I want to spend more time with Roscoe before I head out. His response to the therapy has been astonishing.”

“Come on, Jen. We’ve been working together for over a year. It’s time I get to know you better. The monkey will be here in the morning if you still care about his health after a long night with me. My bet is you won’t.”

“I’m trying to be polite but this is getting ridiculous. You’ve been hitting on me for over a year, and I’m still not interested, not going to be. And, the idea that you could impress me more than any of these monkeys is frankly embarrassing. Roscoe started as a thirty-three-year-old *Cynomolgus* monkey – the max average lifespan of which is thirty-seven years – and based on the current physical exam, behavioral tests and blood work, the results are more consistent with a

fifteen-year-old Cyno. Your entire claim to fame is that you have a penis and honestly as much as you brag about it, I can only assume the size is not worth mentioning – though, again, to be very clear, I have no interest in verifying that hypothesis.”

As Jenny spoke, she opened Roscoe’s cage. “Now if you’ll excuse me, Roscoe and I have work to do.” To Roscoe, “Come on little fella. How about some play time?”

Hearing movement behind her, she turned and saw Harold reaching for her arm, just as a squishy brown wad hit him square in the forehead, stopping him in his tracks.

“Son-of-a-bitch! You fucking monkey! I’ll kill you!” he bellowed as the feces slid into his eyes. He tried to wipe it away, instead spreading it further down his face.

“Thank you, Roscoe. That might teach him to be a little more respectful.” To Harold, “It seems Roscoe likes me better than you. I’d recommend you go before you seriously piss either of us off.”

Ignoring her even though his ears were the only openings in his head completely devoid of excrement, Harold started toward Roscoe, his hands balled into tight fists. “You stupid monkey. You’re gonna regret that!”

Roscoe grabbed the bars of the cage and rattled them violently, while shaking his head rapidly side to side and screaming high pitched monkey sounds. “Ooh, ooh, eeh, eeh!” Stepping through the still open door, he tossed another handful of feces in Harold’s direction, where it landed on the floor.

“Oh shiiiiit!” Harold screeched as he slipped in the gooey brown ooze and fell hard on his ass. He sat there for a few moments, stunned, all the fight knocked out of him.

“Come here, you good boy,” Jenny said as Roscoe reached his arms out to her. She picked him up and held him on her hip, in spite of the unpleasant odor.

Having been defeated by monkey crap, Harold slowly picked himself up and turned to exit, his face red with embarrassment and rage and brown with monkey dung.

“You’ll be sorry you missed your chance with me. I would’ve rocked your world. And I’m going to get that monkey back.”

Jenny laughed. “I think I made the right call.” To the monkey. “Come on, Roscoe. Let’s get you cleaned up. We can’t have you smelling like Harold, now can we?”

Dr. Lars Vanderwinkel, Senior Professor in the LSU School of Medicine, arrived at the lab at seven AM. The door to the lab was ajar, which was concerning because the doors to the lab and animal room were to remain locked at all times. He cautiously stuck his head into the dark room.

“Hello. Jenny? Is anyone in the lab?” He flipped on the light switch, rushed into his small office, and dialed security.

“This is Dr. Lars Vanderwinkel, third floor, Pharmacology Building, room 354. There has been a break-in. My lab’s in shambles.”

Surveying the room further, “The door to my animal room is open too. I’ll check, but it looks like we may have a few test monkeys running free in the building. I’ll bet those insufferable PETA people got in somehow. Please send someone. Hurry!”

He hung up the phone and slowly walked to the animal room at the back of the lab, entering cautiously in case of mischievous escaped monkeys. Instead, to his left, he saw Jenny lying face down on the floor.

“Jenny, are you all right?” As he approached her still body and saw blood crusted on the back of her head, he crouched down to check for a pulse. “Thank God, you’re alive. Wake up. Please wake up.” He gave her shoulder a gentle shake.

She groaned softly and slowly lifted her head off the floor.

She struggled to sit upright. “What happened? The last thing I remember, I was putting Roscoe back into his cage.”

“Are you okay? Do you remember phoning me last night? You told me that the results of Roscoe’s tests were—how’d you put it—astonishing, so I came in early this morning to check him out myself and found you unconscious on the floor. The lab’s a disaster – broken glass and upended furniture everywhere. Someone aimed to do maximum damage, and they did a bang up job.”

Jenny managed to sit, leaning against the leg of one of the examination tables.

“I remember running the tests on Roscoe, calling you, and . . .” She paused, still trying to clear her head.

“Harold asked me to go to dinner with him and got angry when I said no, but he left. I gave Roscoe a bath, took a quick shower myself downstairs, and then came back to the lab to spend some time playing with him. About ten-thirty I put him in his cage, and that’s the last thing I remember.” She touched the back of her head, and winced.

“It looks like someone clocked you a good one. We’d better take you to the hospital to get checked out. I’ll have security call for an ambulance.”

When she tried to stand, she had to grab the table to stabilize herself.

“I am feeling a little woozy.”

Suddenly alert, she looked around frantically. “Roscoe! Where’s Roscoe! Is he still in his cage? I don’t think I closed it.” She pointed to a cage in the next row.

Vanderwinkel took a few steps in the direction she had pointed.

“I was so worried about you I forgot the animals. It looks like over half of the monkeys are missing, including Roscoe. As soon as security and EMS get here, I’m going to search everywhere. Do you have any idea who did this? Did you see anyone?”

“I don’t know, Professor. I didn’t see who hit me.”

“Based on the extent of the damage, I’d guess it was PETA. Those activists have stolen or released lab animals all over the country. But you would think they’d have released all of the animals. Is there any chance that it was Harold? You said he was angry with you.”

“Harold’s been hitting on me for a long time, and he was upset when he left, but he has no reason to damage the lab. Honestly, he’s too lazy to go to all that trouble. Knowing him, he probably ended up at a bar too drunk to do much of anything.”

“Then I’m sure it was PETA. I’m just surprised they could’ve got past our security without help.”

“I’m sorry, Dr. Vanderwinkel. I should have stopped them. Let’s search this floor. I want to help. I feel responsible for losing Roscoe. We’ve got to find him.”

Vanderwinkel took her by the arm as she started to walk out the door.

“No, Jenny. This was not your fault, and you need to go to the hospital. I’ll call some of the other staff, and we’ll conduct a thorough search of the building. I have a tremendous amount of time and money invested in those animals, and from what you told me, we were about to make a once in a century breakthrough.”

He knew there was little hope. In cases like this, the animals were rarely ever found. He should have demanded the university provide more security, and he should have also placed microchips in the animals. But, his worst mistake was focusing solely on the monkeys and PETA. He missed the true reason for the break-in.

Chapter 2. Dr. Detective Longfellow Plans a Trip

Dr. Jason Longfellow, or Detective Longfellow as he prefers, was bored with his job as an FDA drug reviewer. On a drawn-out whim, he obtained a private detective's license online and began dedicating his weekends to PI adventures. If that wasn't a clear enough indicator of his full-blown midlife crisis, he drove a little red roadster convertible far too small for his 6'7" frame.

It was a comical sight; his crooked nose – having been broken as a child – hooked over the visor, eyes constantly blinking away bugs. Outside of his clown car, Jason was typically handsome as a slender, blue-eyed blonde. He had some success throughout his 46 years with women who found his combination of intelligence, clumsy charm, and innocence appealing. More recently, his wife did not.

It didn't help that he was neurotic, OCD, and an introvert who often carried on long conversations with himself – sometimes aloud. His government job reviewing highly-technical documents, nerve-wracking commute, and a marriage to a strong-willed woman with whom he shared three young daughters may have contributed to his nervous tics.

Chelsea, Jason's wife of twenty-one years, was of Swedish descent, a natural blonde with clear blue eyes, a perfectly formed nose, and smooth, unblemished skin. A slender woman at five-nine, she had well-proportioned and balanced curves and long, attractive legs. Thanks to diligent morning workouts she looked the same in her mid-forties as she had in her twenties, despite raising three young daughters and a husband. In spite of her good looks, she had a jealous streak. While she loved Jason, Chelsea had no interest in raising their girls on her own while her husband gallivanted around as a self-appointed Sherlock. And she was even less keen on losing a steady stream of income from his day job on the premise that "it'll be fun."

Jason and Chelsea had met at Georgetown University Medical School when he was a graduate student in pharmacology and she was in the nursing program. He was amazed when she agreed to marry him. After three years as an intensive care nurse, she had developed night terrors and moved into hospital administration.

It has been six months since Jason had solved his first case as a private eye and the family's lives had finally returned to a sense of normalcy. Chelsea feared it was too good to last. Early one sunny Saturday morning in April, Jason and Chelsea were talking during breakfast.

“Honey, it's good that the girls are at your parents' house for the weekend. We need to talk. I love being Detective Longfellow. My first case clearly demonstrated my detecting skills, nailed it, a real pro, an amazing adrenaline rush. I want more of that.”

“Jason, if you refer to that case one more time, I'm going to smother you in your sleep and I haven't decided yet if I'm going to bother resuscitating you.”

Jason winced. “Sorry Hon. It was just so exciting to investigate murder. So much more fun than reviewing drug applications. Anyhow, after my first case...well, you know, I had pretty much decided to quit my job with the federal government and become a full-time detective. If I can catch a serial killer investigating on the weekends, just think what I could accomplish if I did the job full-time. And, did I say it's a lot of fun?”

“Yes, Jason, you mentioned that. And if you mention it again, I might not wait until you're asleep.” She paused, then said, “Wait a minute, you say you had 'pretty much decided'? What does that mean? I am not going to take a second job so you can play Dr. Detective.”

Jason paused a moment, not entirely sure if she was kidding about the whole killing him in his sleep thing, and then cautiously continued.

“I realize that I can’t make as much money as a private eye, but I love the work and I was ready to submit my resignation and put up a full-time PI shingle. Then I got this phone call yesterday.”

“You were about to submit your resignation? Without talking to me about it first? Do you have a death wish?”

She paused again, took a deep breath, tried to calm herself.

“What phone call?”

“Chelse, I got this call from a drug company in California, *Well-Healed Pharmaceuticals*. Their recruiter found me on LinkedIn. They’re interested in interviewing me for a job as a senior director in their regulatory affairs department. My first thought was obviously to reject them outright and hang up my PI shingle. But, the woman from Human Resources told me the salary and it’s three times what I’m making now in addition to stock options, a company car, a large yearly bonus, and some overseas travel.”

Chelsea interrupted, anger turned to excitement. “That’s awesome! Did you tell them you would interview for the position? Please tell me you did. I’m happy to pay for your flight to California. For that salary I’d drive you there . . . maybe even carry you there on my back.”

“I have to admit, it’s tempting. I know you want me to make enough money to support the family, and this salary would support several families. It’s similar to the job I have now, but instead of reviewing the never-ending regulatory documents, I’d be writing them. I really enjoy the private eye thing, but the money would be awesome. Then again, the hours would be ridiculously long, meaning I’d have to put my private eye career on hold for a while. I want to take care of my family, but I also want to be a detective. I don’t know what to do!”

He shook his head violently and his eyes crossed as he tried to work through the pros and cons of this decision.

Chelsea smiled. “Jason, Darling, calm down. That’s a lot of money. You could take the job, do it for a few years, retire and play private eye to your heart’s content once we get the kids through college. Heck, you could play private eye on a tropical island somewhere while I sit on the beach and sip tall, cool, fruity drinks.”

She stared off into space, a dreamy look in her eyes before abruptly coming back to reality.

“So, what did you tell them?”

“I told the woman from Human Resources that I’d have to think about it. I’m supposed to call her back tomorrow. What do you think I should do?”

“Jason, that’s got to be the mother of all rhetorical questions. I want you to schedule an interview and get the job. I’m not thrilled about moving to California, but for that kind of money there aren’t a lot of places I wouldn’t live. Please call them back, do the interview, get the job, and make your wife happy. Studies have shown that making your wife happy is very good for your health, and your love life.”

She gave him a wink, reached under the table and squeezed his knee gently, thinking to herself, *With Jason’s high stress level, our girls, and the over-forty blues, our love life has faded significantly in the past couple of years. Maybe I should be extra friendly with him this weekend. After all, the kids are with Grandma and Grandpa.*

Monday morning, Jason phoned Helen Harken, the woman from the Human Resources Department at Well-Healed Pharmaceuticals.

“Good morning, Ms. Harken. This is Dr. Jason Longfellow.”

“Hello, Dr. Longfellow. I’m so glad you called us back. I’m hoping that you have decided to come visit us for an interview.”

“Yes, my wife has informed me that I would like to schedule the interview that we discussed last week. Thank you for considering me for this position. I look forward to meeting you.”

“Excellent. In anticipation of your accepting our offer, I spoke with the five executives that will interview you, and it appears that end of July would work for everyone. Our CEO and one of the interviewers will be traveling until then. Would Tuesday, July thirty-first work for you?”

Jason thought about it, and began mumbling to himself.

“Let’s see, the kids will be out of school and Chelsea’ll be working. Our daycare lady watches the kids during the week, but if I travel on the weekend Chelsea’ll have to watch them. She’ll be pissed. But, maybe not, since she wants me to get this job.”

Harken said, “Dr. Longfellow, are you okay. I can hardly hear you.”

Jason realized that he had been rambling into the phone. “Sorry Ms. Harken. I tend to think out loud. It helps me to process things. I’m figuring out my calendar for July.”

“From what I could hear, it sounds like you’re having difficulty deciding what to do with your family while you come visit us. If I may be so bold, perhaps you might consider making a vacation of it. Last summer my husband and I took a whole month to drive across country, and we had a great time. Perhaps your wife would enjoy doing something similar. It seems that you’re very concerned with her happiness.”

Jason thought, *More concerned for my health, but that too. It could be fun to drive across the country with Chelsea and the girls. Maybe we could do some camping along the way. Chelsea loves camping.* “That’s a really great idea, Ms. Harken. I’ll talk it over with my wife.”

“Excellent, Jason. How about we go ahead and schedule your interview for nine o’clock the morning of Tuesday July thirty-first? If you decide to fly, Well-Healed will pay for your flight and accommodations. If you decide on the road trip, our President and CEO told me to do my best to get you here for an interview, so I’m guessing our company will pay a substantial amount of your travel costs. Give me a call as soon as you’ve figured out what you want to do.”

Jason thought, *Wow. What a great deal. These people really know how to live.* Out loud, he said, “Excellent. I’ll speak with my wife and get back to you as soon as possible.”

Chapter 3. Chelsea's On Board

That night after the kids went to bed, Jason and Chelsea sat in the kitchen drinking coffee.

“So, when's your interview with that company in California? I'm assuming you called today – you know, happy wife, happy life, unhappy wife, stiff back from a night on the couch.”

“Yes, I called them. I spoke with a Ms. Harken, in the Human Resources Department, and I must say, she was very nice. We scheduled the interview for Tuesday, July thirty-first. She said Well-Healed Pharmaceuticals would pay for me to fly out to California for the interview, but she also made an interesting suggestion for an alternative.”

He told her about Ms. Harden's offer. “I've been thinking about it all day, and I'm guessing we could do the trip in about a month. It would be awesome – we could make lots of family memories, and my midlife crisis tells me that a month off work would be just about right. The only negative is that PI Longfellow and his detective hat would have to remain locked in the closet for a while if I get the job. But it would probably be worth it to make you happy.”

“Probably?”

“Definitely. You are definitely more important than my detective hat.”

He tried to sound upbeat and convincing, even though he was thinking, *Detective Longfellow isn't going to be very happy locked in the closet. What to do? What to do? WWJD; what would Jessica (Fletcher) do?* Fortunately, he remembered not to say that part out loud.

Chelsea gave him one of her looks. “Good to hear. Now can you tell me how we went from a job interview in California to a month-long road trip around the country? I can't just take a month off work and go gallivanting around the US. What would we do with the girls? On a positive note, I really do like the idea of locking Detective Longfellow in the closet. If it were up to me, I'd lock the door and throw away the key.”

Jason smiled. “Come on, Honey. I’m willing to give up my plans for Detective Longfellow for a while. The least you can do is take some time off work. We could rent an RV and take the southern route out to the West Coast, camping along the way. I know how much you love camping. I’ll do the interview, and then we could drive up the California coast and cross some northern states off our bucket list on the way home.”

Chelsea’s face reddened, and Jason realized that he’d stepped in something bad.

“Camping?! You want us to go camping across the good old USA? You think I love camping? I guess you’ve forgotten our one and only camping trip; that wonderful state park with the two mud puddles and a lake, the filthy facilities, and the monsoon?”

Jason cringed. “Sorry, I forgot about the Tri-Lake Park camping debacle. But, I don’t want to fly out to California by myself just for an interview and then fly right back home. That’s boring. And they offered to pay for a vacation for us. How often do you get an offer like that?”

“Why would they be willing to pay for us to drive across the country and back, just to get you to an interview?”

Jason’s chest swelled with pride. “Well, I have worked for the FDA for a long time, I’m brilliant at my job, and Ms. Harken hinted that the interview is only a formality. They really want to hire me and her superiors told her to do whatever it takes to get me there for the interview. The road trip was her idea.”

“Jason. First of all, if they met ‘Detective’ Longfellow, they might reconsider. He’s a little wackado...actually a lot of a wackado. More to the point, you know I want you to get this job, but do we really have to spend an entire month driving?”

“Well, Chelsea. You did say that you’d carry me across the country if necessary. A month-long trip to California and back would be easier than that, wouldn’t it?”

“Yeah. Sure. I guess. The kids are out of school in July and August, and I could speak to my boss at work and see if I can arrange a month off. We’re on good terms, and I may be able to swing it. But I AM NOT CAMPING!”

Jason pulled out his iPhone and showed it to Chelsea.

“Look at this. You can rent a forty-five-foot RV with features as nice as our home.”

He scrolled through the photos of the interior of a very large diesel-powered RV.

“Look at this baby. Two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen and dining area, a living room, an area with a desk, wi-fi, and it even has a dish for mobile TV reception. Hell, I’ll bet there’s a pool on the roof. And this bad boy has a 500 horsepower Cummins diesel engine, strong enough to tow another house behind it. This isn’t camping; it’s driving around in your own house.”

Chelsea rolled her eyes again, but she took the phone and scrolled through the photos.

“I have to admit this is nice. But wouldn’t it cost a fortune to rent for a month? And, who’s going to drive this monster? Not me, that’s for sure. Do you really want to be cooped up with our children, a teenager, an almost-teenager and a six-year-old on the road for that long?” Lizzy, 14, Lilly, 12, and Lucy, 6, did not historically get along well in tight quarters longer than a few short minutes – seconds on a bad day.

“Chelse, I’ve always considered myself a manly man. I love to drive; you’ll note how well I handle the red rocket, and it has a manual transmission. This RV has an automatic transmission, making it a piece of cake.”

“Well, manly man, your red rocket, even with the top up, which I’ve never seen it, would fit in one of the bathrooms of this rolling monstrosity. Forgive me for being skeptical, but it doesn’t look to me like this thing would even fit on a highway, at least not in one lane. And how do you

plan to back it up? What about buying gas? Will it fit into a gas station? Oh God! Why do I listen to you?”

Jason took a deep breath, smiled, and pushed on. “That sounds like a yes to me. Besides, do you want me to take this job, or not?”

“If you say you can do it, I’ll believe you. I just hope we don’t all die in the desert in a terrible RV crash. How are we going to get around at each stop once you’ve parked the RV? Are you going to tow your little red rocket? Or, carry it in the luggage rack?”

“Oh, God no, Honey. You know how I am with my car. It might get a scratch on it, and I couldn’t stand that. That’d be chaos. We’ll be fine with just the RV. I can drive it around whenever we need to go somewhere. Not a problem.”

Chelsea just shook her head, fully resigned. “Sad as it is, I know you’d drive me crazy worrying about your little red car if we took it. I’ll trust you. Besides, there’s always Uber.”

“That’s my girl. I’ll look into renting a forty-five-foot RV for the trip, and damn the cost. Well-Healed Pharmaceuticals is going to pay. Since we’ll be traveling in our own rolling house, we don’t need to worry about where we’re going to stay. No need to waste a lot of time making plans. Some real freedom for a change!”

“Okay Jason. I’ll tell the girls tomorrow night. But we do need to make some plans. Don’t you need to park an RV in a site that has electrical and water hookups and dump the waste tank periodically? My uncle had a smaller version of one these RVs, and he always made reservations at RV parks along the travel route. Since this is your trip, I’ll leave those details to you.”

“Okay, Dear. Don’t worry. I’ll take care of it.” *What’s to take care of? Freedom. The open road. The wind in my hair, if I stick my head out the window.*

Tuesday night, after dinner, Chelsea called their three daughters into the living room and sat them down for a talk.

Lizzy, the teenager, said, “What do you want? I need to finish my homework. What’d I do wrong now?”

“Try to be a little ruder, why don’t you? I need to tell you about some plans that your father and I are making for this summer. He has a wonderful opportunity to interview for a job with a company in California end of July, and we’re talking about turning it into a road trip across country. He wants to rent a big RV, drive to California, do the interview, and then drive back. It would take about a month, and we could make some great memories. What do you think?”

Lizzy said, “Mother, I can’t possibly be gone for a month this summer. The neighborhood pool party is in July, and Johnny Goodman’s going to be there. I have to go! We’ll strangle each other if we have to be squished together in an RV for an entire month. Is Dad trying to kill us?”

Lucy said, “Yeah, is Daddy trying to kill us? I don’t want to be squished.”

Lilly chimed in. “It sounds like fun to me. My friend Lisa’s family took a trip to Florida in an RV. She slept in a bunk bed, and there were swimming pools at all the places they stayed. She said sometimes they would sit around a fire, roast marshmallows and make s’mores. I love those. I think we should go.”

Lucy said, “Yeah! I love s’mores! We should go! What’s a s’more?”

Lizzy asked, “How big is this RV? Will we each have our own room? Our own bathroom? Is there a TV? I can’t miss my shows. And what about internet? Will I be able to keep up with my friends on Facebook and Twitter? I’ll just die if I’m out of the social media loop for a whole month!”

Lucy said, “Yeah, we need social media.”

Chelsea, exasperated as usual said, “The RV is gigantic – forty-five-feet long. It apparently has TV, internet, and all the comforts of home. You’ll have to share a bedroom and a bathroom, but there’ll be plenty of room for you to sleep. We’ll be fine, and think of all the great places that we’ll get to see: mountains, desert, the Grand Canyon.”

Lizzy had to get in the last word. “Can I stay home and go to the pool party? Maybe I can stay with Stacy’s family. Please, Mom! Don’t ruin my life!”

“This is not negotiable. Your father needs to be in California for this interview on July thirty-first, he wants to turn the trip into a cross country vacation, the company is willing to pay for it and we are going to support him on this. Besides, what could go wrong? We’ll be traveling in our own house.” *God help me. This is another one of my husband’s idiotic ideas, like playing private eye. What could go wrong, indeed. Driving across the country, across the desert with three young daughters. Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona...in July. I hope this rolling behemoth has a really good air conditioner.*

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