

HAPPINESS



PLEASURIA



TAKE AS DIRECTED



JOHN J
JESSOP

*Pleasuria:
Take as Directed*

by John J Jessop

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VIRGINIA BEACH
CAPE CHARLES

DEDICATION

To my beautiful baby sister, one of the strongest women I have ever known, who grew into a loving mother, awesome human being, and best friend; and for those late-night talks where we were able to somehow turn tragic memories into laughter.

CHAPTER 1

CureStuff Pharmaceuticals was a biotech company located in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, that developed treatments for depression, restless leg syndrome and erectile dysfunction. Dr. Wendy Thompkins, senior vice president of clinical trials, sat in the boardroom, struggling to stay awake as Dr. Richard Littlething, the five-foot-six-inch troll who was president and CEO of CureStuff, droned on to senior management about the company's quarterly report. Wendy was a fifty-year-old physician who maintained the strict image of a successful executive, her posture permanently erect and her wardrobe a tailored, dark-blue pants suit. Tall and slender, with the long, athletic legs of a runner, she kept her red hair short and relaxed in natural waves. She had blue eyes, a smooth complexion, full lips and a small mouth that seldom held a smile, all of which remained free of makeup.

Wendy ran the clinical trial for their new blockbuster drug for depression and was waiting for her turn to report on the study progress. She perked up when she heard Dick Littlething say, "We at CureStuff

are sitting on a new drug for depression that has the potential to make millions. If the ongoing clinical trial shows that the drug works, we'll be rich beyond our wildest dreams. Failure could mean bankruptcy and massive layoffs. I don't know about the rest of you, but I just bought a forty-foot boat and a new Mercedes for my ex-wife, and I can't afford to be looking for a job right now."

Dick turned to Wendy and said, "Now, Dr. Thompkins will give us a progress report on our very important clinical trial."

Wendy looked startled and leaned forward in her chair, grabbed the table with both hands and whispered, "Oh my God! That feels so good. What's happening?"

Dr. Lance Harden, SVP for research and Wendy's current lover, glanced in her direction from his seat next to her. Her eyes were glossed over, accompanied by a bewildered smile. Realizing there was something wrong, he tried to cover for her by interrupting. "I don't think that we have anything to worry about, Dick. As you all know, I developed the drug in my laboratory, and it showed great promise in the studies in depressed rats. And those rats were really depressed. We forced them to watch CNN 24/7. With a steady dose of our drug, the rats were quite cheerful by the end of the study."

Dr. Tanya Grayson, VP of the toxicology group and Wendy's best friend from their time together at the University of North Carolina, spoke up. "That's just what we need, Lance, a bunch of happy rats. Studies have shown that drugs that work well in humans generally bring in a lot more money than drugs that work well in rats."

All eyes turned to Wendy again, expecting her to speak. Instead, she leaned forward further in her seat, her body stiffened; she wore a far-off stare. "Ooooh, that's nice; that feels really good. Don't stop."

Lance turned and whispered, "Wen, what's the matter? You look a little strange. Are you okay?"

Wendy's nipples were erect, and she felt a strange wave of heat flow down her belly and a tingling between her legs. She had an uncontrollable urge to squeeze her thighs together to enhance the delightful sensation.

She broke out into a hot sweat, began to moan softly, and whispered, “Ooooh, yes, don’t stop, please, please.”

The senior managers stared as she moaned louder. Lance was particularly attentive; he had heard these sounds from her before, but in the privacy of his bedroom. He turned and whispered to her again, more forcefully, “Wendy, are you okay? Is something the matter? You seem to be moaning, and not in a good way—at least not for here.”

Without realizing it, Wendy had grabbed the edge of the oak table with both hands to steady herself for the impending explosion of pleasure, too far gone to hear Lance. She thought, *What the hell is happening? I have to stop, focus, be professional. Give this stupid report. But oh God, that feels so good. I’m almost there.*

Lance was getting increasingly concerned as Wendy moaned again, louder this time, and said softly, “Ooooh my God! That’s incredible. That’s soooo good!”

Lance smiled, shrugged, placing both of his hands on the top of the conference table. He did his best to send the telepathic message, *It’s not me. Nothing going on here. See, my hands are in plain sight.*

Dick, preoccupied with trying to think of a catchy response to Lance and Tanya’s comments, noticed Wendy’s excited state. “Dr. Thompkins. It’s time for your report. Are you okay? You appear to be aroused, odd for a company meeting. Is it something I said? While it’s quite flattering, I’ve never seen my quarterly reports have this effect on anyone.”

Dick saw her hands clinging to the table, unavailable for self-stimulation. When she didn’t respond, he suspected she was mocking him; it wouldn’t have been the first time one of his female colleagues had done so. He said more sternly, “This is not appropriate behavior for a business meeting. But if it must continue, perhaps you could share your secret with the rest of us.”

When she still didn’t respond, he started to walk around the table towards her. He noticed that Lance, seated next to her, had placed his hands on top of the table in front of him. Dick wondered if this was some sort of magic trick. He was tempted to get down on one knee

and look under the table to see if there was anything else that might be interacting with Wendy to place her in such a state, but that wouldn't have been very professional. Stopping a few feet from her, he said in a much louder voice, "Earth to Wendy. Are you okay? Is there anything I can do?" His lips twitched into a smile at the thought.

Panting, Wendy was very near climax and said in a shaky, far-off voice, "It's okay Dick. I'll be fine, in another minute or two."

Lance had seen this before—as a participant. *Damn, she never gets that excited with me. What have I been doing wrong?* Without realizing it, he mumbled out loud, "Oh Lord, here it comes." He winced, purposefully sat on his hands and looked away.

Finally, Wendy let go; her entire body shook, her muscles contracted and she let out a muffled scream as the waves of sexual bliss flowed through her loins. "*Aaaaahh! Oh God, Oh God. That's sooooo good!*"

Lucy Chang, VP, Regulatory, said cheerfully, "Oh my! That looks amazing. I'd like some of that. Hopefully, it was something in the coffee; I had two cups this morning." She seemed to concentrate and looked expectantly down at her lap.

Lance said quietly in Wendy's direction, jealousy in his voice, "Damn, woman. You've never gone off like that when we're together. What'd you do?"

Wendy collapsed onto the table, resting her head on her arms as she tried to collect herself, regain her composure and her strength. The boardroom was silent as the other senior managers sat in awe at what they had just witnessed. After a couple of minutes, Wendy raised her head abruptly, red with embarrassment, an uncontrollable smile returning to her face, and thought, *Oh my God. Not again!* To the room she said, "Sorry everyone, I don't understand what's happening to me." With that, she jumped up from her chair and ran out of the room, headed for her office.

Perplexed, Dick Littlething and the other senior managers remained still for a few minutes, trying to process what they had just witnessed. None of them had ever seen anything like this in a company

meeting. Dick finally said, "Wasn't that something? I think I had better go after Dr. Thompkins and make sure that she's all right. I can't decide if I'm worried about her or just a little jealous. But first, onto more important matters."

For the next ten minutes, the chief executive finished his quarterly report, and no one seemed to care. Once finished, he walked out of the room, with Lance and Tanya close behind.

They found Wendy lying on the floor, her administrative assistant, Barbara Johnson, standing over her looking very concerned. Littlething asked, "What the hell happened? Wendy ran out of the boardroom after having some sort of fit, or seizure, or orgasm?" He looked at Lance and Tanya, and they just shrugged. "Is she all right?"

This seemed a strange question, considering she was on the floor of her office, barely conscious, her breathing labored and shallow.

Barbara, obviously dazed, confused, and terrified for her boss, said excitedly, "I don't know what happened. Dr. Thompkins came running by my desk and into her office, sat in her chair and started making strange moaning sounds. She was too distracted to close her door, so I could see and hear everything. I thought she was having some sort of fit, or maybe she'd been possessed. I asked her through the open door if she was okay. When she didn't answer, I got up the courage to go inside. I found her sitting at her desk, eyes glazed over, clutching the arms of her chair. And she was moaning as though she were about to . . . well . . . you know." She whispered this last part, obviously embarrassed.

Dick finished the sentence for her, "Have an orgasm? We're all adults here. I assume we know what an orgasm is. She already went off once, during the business meeting of all things. Very distracting and inconsiderate. Interrupted my quarterly report."

Barbara Johnson continued, tearful, "I tried to talk to her, to ask if there was anything I could do, but she just ignored me. Her moaning got louder and louder, and then it seemed that she did, in fact, have a . . . well . . . you know . . . a happy ending. A very happy one based on the way she screamed and her entire body shuddered." She looked around

again and sheepishly resumed. “After a minute or two, it started all over again. This time the moaning was more intense and the scream even louder. I couldn’t believe it. Then a third round, even stronger than the first two. It was like the Energizer bunny, she kept going and going. Then she just collapsed and fell off of her chair onto the floor.”

“My God. How many happy endings does that make? Three? Four?” Dick asked. “And in the span of ten minutes? Now I’m more than a little jealous. I have no idea what could have caused such a thing. It wasn’t anything in the air or water, because no one else in the room reacted like that. I certainly never felt anything.” He sounded disappointed. “I thought at first it might be Harden up to no good; he was sitting next to her, but his hands were on the table and his feet on the floor best I could tell.”

To Lance he said, “You and Wendy are together, right? Is it normal for her to go off multiple times like that?” Lance just nodded, smiled, and shrugged, not willing to admit that he had never gotten a response like this from her.

Barbara continued, her voice agitated and filled with concern for her boss. “I don’t know about that, but she doesn’t look good. I felt for a pulse, and I even placed a mirror under her nose and mouth like they do in the movies. She still appears to be breathing, but only barely. I’m no doctor, but my guess is that whatever it is, she needs help. I dialed 911 and the ambulance is on the way. Hopefully the paramedics will get here soon.”

Lance, worried about her and a little sensitive about the fact that he had never been able to give her an orgasm of this magnitude or repetition—in fact, no repetition at all—said, “She’s in bad shape alright. I don’t know what the hell happened to her, but I plan to get to the bottom of this. It just isn’t normal. It would be terrible if she died from too much pleasure. Is that even possible?”

Dick said, “I can’t imagine what caused her marathon of orgasms. But, whatever it was, I’d like to get a little for myself.”

Tanya, disregarding the fact that he was her boss, said, “Dick, you’re an idiot. Lance is right. She looks like she might not make it.”

The phone on Wendy's desk rang. Barbara answered. "The ambulance is here? Yes, we're on the third floor, Dr. Wendy Thompkins' office. Send them up, now. Please hurry!"

CHAPTER 2

Dr. Jason Longfellow worked as a drug reviewer for the US Food and Drug Administration. He was forty-five, tall, and slender from routine exercise. Second-generation Dutch, he had blue eyes, straight, sandy-brown hair with a smattering of gray, and a sculpted chin. His prominent nose was crooked from having been broken once as a child, but his sharp smile and glowing white teeth provided enough of a distraction that most people didn't notice. To his mind, he resembled Ichabod Crane of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, but women found his combination of intelligence, clumsy charm and innocence to be attractive.

Jason was a good man, but he had his issues—difficulties dealing with stress, indecisiveness, a lack of understanding of the female gender, and a whopping midlife crisis. He was neurotic, OCD, and an introvert, preferring his own company to the point where he often carried on long conversations with himself, sometimes in his head, but often mumbling aloud. He lived a very stressful life—a government job involving review of highly-technical documents, a long, daily, nerve-racking commute from Northern Virginia to Maryland on the Washington Beltway, the

difficulties of marriage to a strong-willed woman and raising a family with three young daughters, each of whom had arrived with her own set of trying circumstances.

Chelsea, Jason's wife of twenty years, was of Swedish descent, a natural blonde with clear blue eyes, a perfectly formed nose, and smooth, unblemished skin. Jason had first fallen in love with her full, beckoning lips and slight, dimpled chin. Or maybe it was her body; he was a man after all. A slender woman at five-nine, she had well-proportioned and balanced curves, peaking in a tiny waist clearly defined against her perfectly rounded hips and buttocks. Her long, slender, sinewy legs didn't hurt. Maintaining this level of fitness and allure had come naturally to Chelsea in her twenties, but by her mid-forties it required that she faithfully work out five days a week, usually early morning before work. She didn't get much sleep, but she wore her exhaustion extremely well.

Jason and Chelsea had met at Georgetown University Medical School when he was a graduate student in the pharmacology department and she was in the nursing program. He was amazed when this gorgeous woman with long blonde hair agreed to marry him. She was strong and independent, traits that Jason admired in her—most of the time. She had started out as an intensive care nurse, but after a couple of years she had developed night terrors as the horrible tragedies followed her into her dreams, and she had moved into hospital administration.

It was a typical Saturday morning not long after Jason's forty-fifth birthday. Chelsea had made breakfast and the children were fighting in the other room when Jason lost it over morning coffee.

He told Chelsea, exasperated, "I've been at the FDA doing the same job for twenty years and I'm bored to death. When you add in my twenty-four-mile, two-hour commute to work every day and the adorable little monsters that we call our children, I'm aging at a disturbing pace."

Jason told his wife how he loved spending time with her and the girls, and how concerned he was that they were growing up so fast.

“Lizzy’s already thirteen, Lilly’s eleven and Lucy is five. It’s impossible to communicate with the teenager, and Lilly isn’t much better. They’re great kids, but you have to admit they’re a handful, and I’m becoming way too friendly with gin martinis with olives.”

His midlife crisis was in full bloom as he spoke of how he missed being able to just jump into the car and drive wherever he wanted, whenever he wanted. He felt trapped in a deep rut, with no way out. He complained of being too tall, at six-seven, to fit into speedy sedans or sports cars. “Damned car manufacturers. I should sue them for size discrimination. Maybe I should get a motorcycle, a Harley, hop on it and head out West. I’d only be gone for a few weeks. What do you think, Chelsee?”

Chelsea just gave him her best disapproving stare, shook her head. “What do I think? I think you’ve lost your marbles. We have three daughters, and I didn’t do that all by myself. You don’t have time for a freakin’ midlife crisis. You can’t just hop on a motorcycle and ride off into the sunset, although you seldom shave on weekends and always look like you need a haircut with your hair hanging down over your ears, so I guess you do look kind of like a crazed member of a biker gang. And if you do ride off on a Harley, I’ll ride off in my much larger Ford Expedition, find you, run you over, and drag your ass back home. You are not leaving me here alone to raise our little angels.”

“Yikes. You wouldn’t destroy a perfectly good motorcycle just because I took off for a couple of months, would you?”

“It’s not the motorcycle you should be worried about, Jason. It’s needing to remove the front bumper of my Expedition from your spleen that should concern you.” With that, she smiled and headed upstairs for a bath, thinking, *Ah, a blissful soak in a tub filled with hot water and sweet-smelling bubbles, guaranteed to relieve the stress of living with a crazy person. I’ll have a glass of wine with that.*

Jason was eating toast with a bowl of his favorite cereal, Cheerios. When she left him alone in the kitchen, he started counting the Os swimming in the sweetened milk. He mumbled, “One, two, three, she won’t run over me. Four, five, six, my life I need to fix. Seven, eight,

nine . . . oh screw it. I need to do something exciting, change things up, maybe get the hell out of Dodge for a while. I long for the good old days, just me and Chelse, still in school, small apartment, no kids, wild and free. I'm going crazy. I need to have some fun, shake things up."

• • •

Nothing ever seemed to come easy for Jason, and building a family was no exception. While they were still in school, Chelsea had agreed to put off having children until Jason had finished his doctorate and established himself at the FDA. He actually hoped for a much longer reprieve from parenting, but when they were in their early thirties, Chelsea's biological alarm had sounded and they'd begun trying. Jason enjoyed the trying, a lot, but she just wasn't getting pregnant.

"We should see a doctor," she had told Jason one Saturday morning, after several months of negative pregnancy tests. "I want a baby, and this isn't working. We need to get checked out to see if our plumbing is okay."

"So when's our appointment?" he asked, knowing that when she said *should*, the appointment was already made. "I doubt there's anything wrong. I've heard people at work say it can take up to six months to get pregnant, sometimes longer depending on your age."

"We have an appointment with Dr. Gleason at the clinic near my office, Monday morning at nine. Dr. Gleason told me on the phone that they'll need a sperm sample. Can you handle that?"

"Sure. Happy to oblige. How many samples do they need? Maybe I should buy porno for the occasion. Or maybe you could do that striptease routine you did on our honeymoon."

Chelsea was not amused. "If you bring any porn into this house, you'd better be ready to have it surgically removed from where the sun don't shine. You are much man, and I'm sure you can use your imagination for some bizarre fantasy to get you going."

"It's not going to be easy now that you've placed that delightful surgical image in my head. But I'll manage somehow. We men are quite clever. I always hold back a fantasy or two for such occasions."

Monday morning rolled around, and Jason found himself at the clinic being poked and prodded by Dr. Gleason, who, to Jason's embarrassment, turned out to be a lovely young female fertility specialist. Jason thought, careful not to mumble out loud, *Here I am, with an attractive young woman handling my junk, and I'm not even enjoying it.*

After his examination, Dr. Gleason said, "Okay, Jason. Everything's where it should be."

He said, nervously, "Well, that's good to hear. I was worried that something might have fallen off."

She chuckled. She knew how embarrassing this was for most men, and she enjoyed watching them squirm. "Now that we know you're intact, go on up the hall and give us a sperm sample while I examine your wife. There are special magazines in the rooms if you need help getting started. In my experience, most men are well practiced."

"No problem, Doc. How much sperm do you need? A pint? A quart?"

She laughed. "Gee, like I've never heard that one before. No need for you to wear things out. You need to save as much as possible to get your wife pregnant. Just a small sample will do."

He found several magazines with fold-out pages. He settled on a Hawaiian model with long, flowing, straight black hair and bronze skin. *Might as well go exotic*, he thought. When he had finished, he said to the sperm sample, "I just know that there are plenty of you guys and you are Olympic swimmers. The problem can't be with us. We are manly men." The sperm didn't answer, which Jason thought was probably a good thing.

When he came out of the room to deliver the sample to Dr. Gleason, Chelsea was waiting. "The doctor had to move on to her next patient. She said that you set the record for longest time in the sample room. I think she plans to give you a trophy on our next visit. I'd ask what took you so long, but I'm not sure I want to know. Give the sample to the nurse at the desk, and let's get out of here. And I see that magazine

sticking out of your back pocket. Please leave it on the table. Jesus, I can't take you anywhere."

• • •

They met with Dr. Gleason again the following week, after all the test results were in. Sitting in the doctor's office with Chelsea, Jason said to Dr. Gleason, "So, I'm guessing it's not my guys. I'm confident my sperm count is high and my guys swam the race in record time. So what's the problem, Doc?"

Chelsea gave him the death stare out of the corner of her eye. "Forgive my husband. He can be an idiot sometimes . . . actually, frequently. So, what is the problem? Why can't we get pregnant?"

Dr. Gleason gave them a sad look, and said, "The good news is that Chelsea is fine."

Chelsea, smiling tentatively, said, "And there is bad news?"

Jason grimaced, and felt a little dizzy. *Not me. Not me. Please, not me.*

Dr. Gleason sighed, and said, "Jason, your sperm count is low, and the little guys are slow swimmers. In fact, I'm not sure they know how to swim at all."

He frowned, and said weakly, "Don't sugarcoat it, Doc. How bad is it? If my guys were sea creatures, would they be more like sea bass or dolphins?"

She answered, a note of sympathy in her voice, "Jason, if we're using a sea creature analogy, I'm sorry to say it would be more like coral."

"But coral don't swim. They just hang around on the bottom of the ocean."

The doctor gave a weak smile, shrugged. "Exactly. I'm sorry to say that it is unlikely the two of you will be able to have children of your own."

Jason, still in denial, said, "That's not possible. I work out every day. I'm healthy as a horse. I'm a manly man. I figured my sperm would be world champions. This can't be right. Do the test again. I'll go home, work out, get plenty of sleep tonight, and give you more sperm tomorrow. Maybe I just didn't get enough sleep, and the little guys were

tired. Is there anything I can do? What if I start eating raw meat, raw steak, would that help? What about oysters? Tabasco sauce? I could eat lots of tacos with tabasco sauce and hot chili peppers. Maybe that would get the guys going.” He put his face in his hands. “Oh God. It can’t be me.”

“Calm down, Jason. It’s okay,” the doctor said. “This is not uncommon. Normally, when a man has this problem, there are ways he can change his diet that might help. But, in your case, your guys are—how can I say this—dead on arrival. If anything, they appear to be swimming backwards, like they’re running away from something. No amount of raw meat, oysters, tabasco sauce, or chili peppers is going to help. Studies have shown that when a man’s sperm are DOA, it’s not likely that his wife will get pregnant. However, there are other alternatives to having children naturally, one of which is adoption. There is also surrogacy, or we could try *in vitro* fertilization, although that’s quite expensive and can take several tries, with no guarantees.”



Jason left the doctor’s office mortified and drove home in silence. Something felt dead inside. Something *was* dead inside. He knew Chelsea was hurting, her biological clock on constant alarm, and he did what he could to console her, signaling a willingness to explore options. They both went back to work, and he kept very busy to avoid thinking about the bad news. However, Chelsea was not someone to sit on her hands and brood.

After meeting with Dr. Gleason, Chelsea thought, *I REALLY want a family. It’s time. We talked about adoption, but I’m afraid Jason might not be ready yet. Maybe I should check it out first, and then bring him my research when I’m done. I don’t want to upset him.* So, she researched the adoption process on her own, using her annual leave to meet with an adoption lawyer in Vienna, Virginia, with connections to Central and South America.

On a Saturday morning, three weeks after their traumatic doctor visit, Chelsea got up bright and early and fixed Jason a nice big

breakfast with all his favorites—bacon, fried eggs over easy, biscuits, hash browns, pancakes, and black coffee. They usually slept in on the weekend and breakfast was limited to coffee and toast. This morning his wife actually made pancakes, from scratch.

As Jason sipped coffee and shrugged off the haze of a foggy brain, he poured syrup on his plate.

“Jason, I need to tell you something,” his wife blurted excitedly. “I met with an adoption lawyer, and there is a baby girl in El Salvador waiting for us to come pick her up. If you are okay with this, I have to leave Monday morning, because there are two other couples that are also interested in her. According to the lawyer, we’re next in line, but we need to act immediately. I’ve already bought the airline ticket and made the hotel reservations, and I can go alone since you don’t have time to take leave from work. According to our lawyer, I can do this by myself, and all you have to do is sign the papers when I get back with the baby, and the thirty-thousand-dollar check to cover the lawyer, airline tickets, hotel, and all the in-country legal and adoption fees. I hope you are good with this. I wanted to surprise you. So, *surprise!*”

Jason had just shoved a fork full of pancakes into his mouth and was washing it down with hot coffee when she hit him with her news flash. He started choking and hot coffee spewed from his nose. He took a drink of water, which helped with the choking but did nothing to bring down his blood pressure, which had just gone off the charts.

“Say what? Adopt a baby? El Salvador? Monday morning?” He was vigorously shaking his head back and forth in disbelief at what he had just heard, his mind having difficulty processing his wife’s words, trying desperately to make it go away. “When . . . what have you done? We haven’t discussed this lately . . . new baby? I have to be at work on Monday.”

“Jason, I really want this. I need it. It’s time for us to start our family, and this opportunity came up as soon as I reached out to someone about adoption. I didn’t tell you about it at first, because I was terrified that you weren’t ready, and I just couldn’t deal with that possibility. So

there it is. Are you with me? I checked, and my passport is valid. I'll go get our first child, a baby girl."

She asked, "What do you think?" But Jason knew there really wasn't anything to discuss. This was a done deal.

On Monday morning he drove his wife to the airport and watched her board an old passenger jet with the name *TACA AIRLINES* painted on the side along with a giant picture of a colorful parrot.

"What can go wrong?" he mumbled to himself, hearing the fear in his own voice as he watched the large parrot ascend into the sky. "She's flying to Central America on an obsolete passenger jet to adopt a baby from a war-torn country. Nothing to worry about. Nothing at all."

Much to his surprise, two days later, Jason got a call from Chelsea. "They already gave me the baby. She's beautiful and I've been caring for her in my room at the Hilton San Salvador. It's crazy. Be home in a couple days."



Upon baby Lizzy's arrival, Jason returned to his job at the FDA and Chelsea had taken a month off for maternity leave. They hired a nanny when Chelsea started working again, and life for Jason seemed to be leveling out. Caring for the baby at night was tough, but he liked seeing his wife happy. *I can handle one kid*, he thought. Not Chelsea. Her biological clock alarm was still blaring.

Two months after the trip to Central America, early on a Saturday morning after a long night of baby screaming, Jason was in the nursery trying to rock Lizzy to sleep. He was exhausted, and he thought he might be hallucinating when he smelled fresh coffee, frying bacon, eggs, potatoes, and toast. He was hungry, and at first he smiled. Then it hit him, and he thought, *Oh no. Not another big breakfast.*

"Good morning, dear. What have you done?"

Chelsea waited until he had his first cup of coffee before she said, "Honey, I've been thinking."

"That's never a good thing."

She let the sarcasm slide. “I heard on the news that studies have shown that single children often grow up unable to cope with life. So last week I placed our name on an adoption list at an agency in Washington, DC. I thought we’d do a US adoption this time. One of their adoption counselors told me that it would be five to seven years—at the earliest—before we would be able to adopt a child from the US. Lizzy will have to wait a while for a sibling to play with. Foreign adoptions are a lot quicker but also much more expensive.”

He sighed and thought, *Whew, that’s not so bad. Five to seven years is a long time. I guess I dodged a bullet. I’ll just enjoy this bountiful breakfast, and then catch a nap.*

“That’s fine, Chelse. I’m glad you did it. Five to seven years is just about right. By then we should be pretty good at this parenting thing, and that’ll give us plenty of time to get the house ready for another baby. Just for the record, I read somewhere that studies have shown that in families with more than two children, there’s a 75 percent chance that at least one of the parents will go skydiving without a parachute. So, I vote that we stop with two.”



Over the next year and a half they did begin to get the hang of the parenting thing. Chelsea was back at work, Lizzy was sleeping through the night and giggling through the days, and peace and happiness prevailed. So when Jason came home from work on a Friday and caught a whiff of steak and macaroni and cheese, his guard was down. His first thought was that this was a nice surprise, and he was hungry. Chelsea met him in the kitchen, gave him a big hug.

“Welcome home, dear. I hope you had a good day. I have a nice dinner waiting for my man after a hard day at the office.” When he heard this, along with the smell of that delicious food, all kinds of alarms sounded, followed by a huge anxiety attack.

Chelsea led him into the dining room, and there was a veritable feast laid out on the table; steak, loaded baked potato, blue cheese wedge

salad, homemade macaroni and cheese, biscuits, the works, and an ice-cold Molson Golden ale. He knew he was in trouble, because in their entire marriage she had never cooked on a Friday night. They both worked, and by Friday night they were barely able to answer the door when the pizza arrived. When he saw the table, he said, "Woman, what did you do now? You even made biscuits, from scratch. You never make biscuits. I hope you have a lot of that beer, 'cause I'm guessing I'm gonna need it."

Chelsea just laughed, gave him another big hug and kiss.

"Oh, Jason, I have some wonderful news! The adoption agency called today, and told me that they have a baby for us. We are to pick her up first thing Monday morning!"

Jason had just started chugging the remainder of his beer when she began talking. When he heard the words coming out of her mouth, the ice cold Molson's came out of his nose. He began to sputter, "Baby . . . Monday morning . . . two-day pregnancy? . . . What happened to five to seven years? Are you kidding me? Please tell me you're kidding." With that, his eyes rolled back into his head, and he slid slowly off of the chair and onto the floor, momentarily unconscious.

When he came to and got off the floor, he said, "Sorry, honey, I must be really tired. I seem to have taken a brief nap. I'm not sure that we're ready for another baby. Lizzy's only eighteen months old. We finally have a satisfactory daycare thing set up for her, and I don't know how a new baby will fit in. We don't have a nursery anymore, and you are working again. Is this really the right time?"

She responded, her words well-rehearsed. "Jason, I have things under control. I've already called all our friends, and four couples are showing up bright and early tomorrow morning to help out. They're bringing baby blankets, diapers, formula, bottles, and all the trimmings. We kept Lizzy's crib, and we just need to get it down from the attic. This is a four-bedroom house, and we can set up the room next to our master bedroom as the nursery. With our friends' help, we'll easily be ready for the new baby by Monday morning."

Monday morning, after a breakfast of toast and coffee, a totally exhausted Jason and Chelsea drove to downtown Washington, where they picked up Lilly Beth Longfellow. On the way home in the car, Jason said, “Chelsea, honey, we’re thirty-four, we agreed on two children, and Lilly makes two. The first involved a flight to Central America on a giant parrot, and this one came to us via a two-day pregnancy. If we survive this, can I please get you to agree that we have completed our family?”

Chelsea’s response surprised Jason. “Yes, dear. If you want, when we get home you can write it down and I’ll sign the agreement.”

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Once again, they settled into a nice, comfortable routine. Chelsea stayed home with baby Lilly for three months, at which time they managed to find a new daycare provider, Connie Harper, willing to commit to both Lizzy and Lilly. She was expensive, but worth it. Jason did his best to spend as much time with the children as possible, and it was his job to read to Lizzy and then to give Lilly her last bottle of the night before tucking her into her crib. As they grew older, the kids seemed well adjusted and Chelsea appeared to be happy.

When Lizzy was eight and Lilly was six, Jason and Chelsea took the family on a two-week vacation. They rented a house on a large lake in North Carolina that came with a twenty-two-foot ski boat. The girls had a great time swimming, tubing, and learning to water ski; they had special wooden beginner’s skis, call Snoopy skis, that were tied together and so buoyant that Lilly, the smaller of the two girls, could stand on top of the water. On their final weekend, they ran out of food, so Jason went to the grocery store. When he got back to the house, he found the girls crying hysterically, and Chelsea trying to calm them.

“What happened?” he asked when he walked through the front door. “Why is everyone so upset?”

Lizzy, sobbing, said, “While you were gone Mommy threw up a bunch and then went to sleep, and we couldn’t wake her up.”

Lilly cried, “Mommy fell down on the floor, and she wouldn’t get up. We thought she died!”

Chelsea said calmly, “Everything’s fine. I felt nauseous, and I threw up a couple of times. I guess I got so weak that I either passed out or fell asleep for a while. Maybe I’m coming down with the flu.”

Jason felt her head for a fever. “We’re going home tomorrow. If you aren’t feeling any better, you should go to the doctor and get checked out.”

The next Monday morning, Chelsea called Jason at work, “I still don’t feel quite right. I made an appointment to see the doctor this afternoon.” At four o’clock Jason pulled his Toyota 4Runner into the garage and went into the house to relieve Connie of her daycare duties.

When he got home, Lizzy said, “Please read to us, Daddy. We’ll sit on your lap.”

Lilly added, “Yeah, Daddy. Read us *Hop on Pop*. Please, please, please.”

He had read *Hop on Pop* so many times he could repeat it by heart. It made him a little crazy to read them their favorite books over and over, but he loved them and he figured a little more crazy wouldn’t kill him.

When Chelsea called at five o’clock, he answered on the first ring; he’d been worried that the doctor might find something seriously wrong with her.

“Hello, honey. What did the doctor say? Is everything all right? . . . Chelsea, talk to me. What did the doctor say?”

“Jason, you need to sit down, honey, before I tell you what I have to tell you. You know when I threw up and passed out during our vacation in North Carolina? I didn’t say anything to you, but it really didn’t feel like the flu. I didn’t want to worry you, but I was afraid that there was something else wrong, perhaps seriously wrong.”

“Oh my God, what is it? Brain tumor? Epilepsy? What?”

“I’m pregnant.”

His mind frantically searched for other things that she might have said that would sound like *I’m pregnant*. He thought, *Maybe she said*

“I’ve got a pimple,” or “I’m panicked,” or “I’m present,” or maybe even a weather report, “It’s precipitating.” Perhaps she said something else. ANYTHING else!

“Pregnant? I’m forty. Too old for more children—a new baby, no sleep. In my sixties when baby goes to college; no early retirement. Someone help me!”

Jason dropped the phone and fainted, his head falling forward onto his chest. He was out for less than a minute. He came to still sitting in the chair and took the phone from Lizzy, who had been talking to her mom.

“Sorry, hon, I took another brief nap, but I’m back. Did you happen to tell your doctor what we were told twenty years ago, about how we could never get pregnant? How my guys were DOA? What did he say to that?”

Chelsea chuckle. “Yes dear, you better believe I told him what his colleagues told us. And he told me that studies have shown that sometimes a man’s sperm get livelier as he ages, resulting in pregnancy later in life. The doc asked me if you’ve changed your diet, eating more meat, chili peppers or tabasco sauce. Apparently, studies have now shown that eating these things also helps increase sperm motility.”

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Jason didn’t sleep for the first three nights after that call. On the fourth evening, he came home from work in a daze. Chelsea met him at the door, saw that the right front bumper of his car had been demolished.

“Jason, what the hell happened? Are you all right?”

“It wasn’t my fault,” he said. “One of those damned trees around the corner on Elm Street jumped out in front of my car. Or maybe I fell asleep and ran off the road. I don’t know. Anyhow, it was an empty lot, and no one was hurt. It sure as hell woke me up. My poor 4Runner—it was still drivable, so here I am. Help me.”

Eight months later, Lucy Lee Longfellow was born, the third and last of the Longfellow daughters. She was beautiful, and became one of Jason and Chelsea’s greatest blessings in spite of her surprising

and somewhat late arrival on the scene. When he found out that this third child was also a girl, his first thought was, *Three daughters, three beautiful daughters, what a lucky man I am.* Then visions of a world full of danger, puberty, teenage girls, teenage boys, teenage pregnancy, college parties, and tuition skimmed the surface of his mind, and his happy thoughts were immediately followed by a more ominous one.

Oh my God, three daughters. I'm a dead man.

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