

THE  
Skeleton  
House

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“... beware lest there shall arise contentions among you.”

Mosiah 2:32, The Book of Mormon

## The Helicopter

By the time we cleared the mountains, the vast glimmer of the city sprawled below, I was accustomed to the vibration and noise.

As when driving, it was a glow on the horizon. We somewhat followed the freeway from the air – I tracked the headlights with my forehead smudging the cold window. The hills seem so big from the car, and that part of the desert is the deepest indigo; there are no streetlights outside the city. As a child, I'd lie in the back and cushion my head on a sweatshirt. The window curved enough that I could see the night sky if I tipped my head back, and I'd get dizzy finding the Big Dipper.

On the ground, the engine would pull you up the hill. You'd reach Apex, summit 2,492 feet, twiddle the steering wheel on the bend, and Las Vegas would swing into view and dazzle your eyes.

From the air, blue-white pinpricks from energy-efficient bulbs glare against the sea of yellow-orange – embroidery fabric, the squares of the grid system.

It's the worst day of my life and I'm riveted.

Maybe, when this was all over, when everything was better, we could all go together in a helicopter. Maybe to the Grand Canyon.

Not a Life Flight.

## Chapter One

Sand crept into my sneakers. Half a mile away, it looked like it was made of toothpicks – a little closer, chopsticks, then lumber, the framing of our new house erected by the polygamists who call themselves Mormons. Our Mormons call them a cult.

“Starting to look like the real thing, isn’t it?” Kyle tipped his baseball cap back to wipe his forehead. “You should’ve seen it, babe. A semi came down the street with a heap of timber, then the vans, out popped men and boys of all ages – wham bam thank you ma’am, we have a roof.”

“Is that the technical term?”

He smirked.

Sweat rolled down my spine and I shivered. The desert sun bore down on us, though it was cooler today than it had been all week – ninety-seven with a light breeze. Out in the hills beyond, the lizards would scamper from creosote bush to creosote bush, their tails leaving winding trails through the orange sand with the tick-tick of footprints on either side.

I was annoyed I’d missed the polygs. A couple of times a year, I see the women and girls at Walmart in Mesquite. They wear *Little House on the Prairie* dresses and have eighties bangs which emerge as an atomic puff over their foreheads. They peer at me in wonder – the heathen in denim – their little heads stacked one over the other at the corner of the aisle.

I leaned back to keep my balance as Hallie reached for Kyle. He scooped her up, kissed her, and turned to Finn.

“What’s our rule, little man?”

“A construction site is not a playground,” Finn recited, squatting for a piece of copper wire.

“Thank you. And how’s little miss?” Kyle blew raspberries on her neck. She giggled. He asked what Mommy made for lunch. I went to Finn before he could ask what she meant by the single syllable “cheese.” As if toddlers were reliable reporters.

Finn was chatting away to Neeley, his imaginary friend, and when I approached, he dropped to a whisper and turned his back. I reminded him of the talk we had about honesty. He showed me the squiggle of copper in his hands.

“Neeley and me was making a heart, but I can’t get it right.”

“Neeley and I were,” I corrected.

And the good mother helped him bend it the rest of the way. When she sliced under her thumbnail, twisting the ends together at the point of the heart, she put her finger in her mouth and smiled away the bloody curse.

Finn patted my knee, took the wire, and handed it back with a smile.

“For you.”

Some days, I am a good mother because I coaxed the toddler into eating string cheese and the almost-kindergartener didn’t learn the word “shit”.

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Kyle recited numbers – gauge of wire, weeks until the next stage, months until the move. We were getting close. We’ll be in by Valentine’s Day, for sure. Maybe just after Christmas, can you imagine!

Finn’s fingers curled around the top of Kyle’s belt. He hopped but didn’t swing. Last month, he broke a belt loop and Kyle put an end to that game.

“Honey,” I interrupted. “Someone is being very patient.”

Kyle looked down. “You are, aren’t you, buddy?”

“Please!” Finn nodded.

Kyle cleared his throat. Hallie clapped.

“Step on up, folks.” Kyle gestured up what would be the walkway. “Allow me to show you the extremely well-presented, custom design-build here on thirty-nine Gambel Avenue.”

We moved toward the concrete slab.

“Little man, you’re going through the wall.” Kyle bent and steered him, his hand covering the top of Finn’s head. He mimed turning a door handle. “Ladies first. Home sweet home. Let’s put away our shoes.”

We pretended to take off our shoes and ventured in; blue desert sky filled the gaps and the beams made lines on the concrete, pressing down on us, the ribs of a prehistoric beast that had swallowed us whole. Zebra stripes covered our faces and arms.

“Here is the kitchen where Mommy will make delicious dinners. Quick, pretend you’re eating spaghetti. Now let’s watch a movie.”

It was an open plan ranch-style house – one floor with a basement – on two acres of land. We were the first to build out this direction and I couldn’t see another house. There would be three bedrooms on the ground floor, and the living room and kitchen would be separated by a kitchen island with a big bookcase on the back.

Finn hurried away with Neeley to show him his new room – or what would be his new room – and his running startled a whiptail, which skittered into the desert.

We played house, kicking corners of plywood and shuffling through piles of sawdust. The heat of the day crept up and we retreated back to the trailer, our temporary home of the past year and a half. My period was three days late and Kyle shooed me away to take a nap with a smile on his face. I lay on my back and stared at the peeling ceiling and cracked plastic blinds which were screwed shut against the sun. There’s no way I was pregnant again. I couldn’t be. Beads of sweat rolled from

the crease of my knee down my calf. I felt footsteps and heard him shush the children on the other side of the flimsy door.

Living in the trailer was an adventure; to Kyle, everything was an adventure. He laughed when the air conditioning broke for the first time on a 117-degree day. He drove us to the Hitchin' Post and bought us soft-serve. We swiveled on stools and counted the red cars and blue cars on the highway as sweat dried on the back of my neck and the rosy plumes on the children's cheeks melted away.

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I told Kyle I didn't feel like myself.

In *Mormon Wives Monthly*, I'd been promised this would "open up the dialogue". But Kyle heard from a co-worker that a father of a cousin of a friend said low thyroid or hormonal changes or wonky iron levels could lead to hysteria and depression in females. When I tried to explain that "hysteria" was an outdated and medically inaccurate term, he said the father of the cousin of a friend of the co-worker is a doctor, so perhaps I didn't know everything after all.

I interrupted: I want to go back to school. Part-time, nothing crazy.

He looked sad. "You don't find your life fulfilling?"

He means that there are no unhappy mothers in this town. Not a single one. We are thankful that we can stay at home and raise our babies while our husbands tough it out in the working world. We are thankful that we don't live in Vegas, where our children are exposed to drugs and immoral behavior in school. We're safe here, special, not part of Clark County except in name. We make elaborate headbands and bows to put in our daughters' hair and we sew capes for our superhero boys. They play in the desert, catching lizards while we cheerfully cook and put clean sheets on the beds and kiss husbands and have more babies. We are satisfied with our well-oiled clock of domestic bliss. We are good families that raise good children.

"Finn is about to start school." I leaned forward. "And then Hallie

in two years. We'll be done with the house. I could study, finish my degree."

"You don't need a degree." He frowned.

"I want this," I said. "Could we look into it?"

"We don't have the money. We can't afford it. Let's move and then – hey." He pulled me into a hug. "After the house, you're going to be spoiled rotten. Do you want a sewing machine?"

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Kyle seemed to forget the house-building idea wasn't his. There was an afternoon where Dad had expressed that there was something special about the primal rawness of his family sleeping and laughing in a shelter that had made him cuss, bleed, and sunburn. Maybe in another life, eh, Kyle?

He and Kyle had clinked beers, and I scowled and rested a lemonade on my belly. The baby kicked and the glass tremored, like in *Jurassic Park*.

I daydreamed of moving to someplace cool, with trees – even snow, maybe. A town big enough where I could be invisible if I didn't wash my hair. But a few short years later, we had land and blueprints. Kyle raised a radioactive-green Gatorade at the ground-breaking: a toast to his devoted wife who brought lunch, stayed to support, and managed to look after two young children. The hands of neighbors and Kyle's co-workers, orange-brown and cracked from sun and dirt, applauded.

It was exaggerated generosity, but I took a bow which was more of a curtsy, smooshing Hallie's sleepy head against my boob. I bought buns, coleslaw, and aluminum trays of pre-cooked pulled pork. I directed a few teenage boys to fill coolers with ice and drinks under a borrowed canopy. I circled through the men to remind them to reapply sunscreen and drink water. They said bless you, Meg, you're an angel. Some of them called me Little Greene or the Boss, nicknames



from when I used to help Dad at the hardware store during school breaks.

In the car across the street, I held Hallie – whose fuzzy wisps of hair flickered from the AC vent, whose ears I checked with the back of my fingers for a chill – as she napped while Finn pressed his nose to the glass to watch the earthmovers. I couldn't believe this was happening. I convinced myself it was best to not think about it, and with the children, I didn't have time to think.

But with the property and a loan, blueprints and borrowed diggers, the evidence loomed over me. The Dust Control Permit sign on the corner of the lot, in eight-inch letters, peppered with the limp remains of Finn's water balloons, declared CARSON RESIDENCE. Hallie stirred and rubbed her eyes. The men scratched their necks as the water truck did a lap to tame the dust.

In the evening, on the compacted dirt, with Hallie's hand clenched around my hair and Finn throwing rocks into the dirt pit that would be our basement, I smiled and said we couldn't wait to invite everyone to the housewarming party. Kyle's thumb hooked into my belt loop, and he thanked them. In future summers, our children will tumble and run in the cool playroom that will take up the basement. We have labored to yank up the caliche, we have triumphed over Mother Nature, and you have helped us secure our dream. Thank you.

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Limbs flailing, Finn soared over me, cackling, and fell into Kyle's place on the mattress. Hallie was next and Kyle plopped her on top of me. I took an elbow to the stomach. Good morning to you too.

I put dry cereal in bowls, milk in sippy cups, and made coffee for our outside breakfast. Sunglasses didn't help the headache and I went back inside for Advil. We sat barefoot on the rickety wooden steps I built last year – one of Sister and Brother Nielsen's prerequisites for otherwise free rent. The trailer was a single-wide, the kind you'd find

in a trailer park with a satellite dish and pink plastic flamingos. It had two microscopic bedrooms, and it took Finn exactly eighteen steps to run the length of it – from the window in the master bedroom to the refrigerator. Twenty if he had to dodge Kyle’s work boots.

They fidgeted. I wished Kyle had let me sign them up for swim lessons. I indulged myself in a daydream of drowsy babies content to laze through the afternoon in front of our struggling air conditioner. It was a waste of money having teenagers teach them. I knew how to swim, right?

I gave them strawberries sprinkled with sugar. It bought me five more minutes.

“Love you like to kiss you.” Hallie planted wet red stains on my cheek and the back of my hand.

“I love you too.” I untangled Hallie’s bedhead. “Once you’re done, let’s run errands before it gets too hot.”

In the early days, when I winced at the trailer’s avocado shag carpet and peeling faux wood panel walls, I timed errands with her naptime. I lined up single items on the bumper for Finn to carry: a box of Cheerios, sacks of flour, two-liter bottles of soda, all hugged tight to his rotund belly. I would leave sleeping Hallie in her seat with the doors flung wide to circulate the hot air buzzing with cicadas and humming with air conditioning units.

I peeled the towels back from the car seats, but Hallie still yelled at the hot buckles on her bare legs.

On our way into town, I swerved around a roadkill jackrabbit and two turkey vultures. They were sinister creatures – black, twice the size of crows, and with naked blood-red heads. They always looked like they were in the middle of a satanic ritual.

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The trailer was on Fulmer Street – a road of thin, grey asphalt and no paint lines. The county had put down a few token lane dividers,

gigantic yellow hockey pucks stuck to the road, but these were scars of glue after the neighborhood kids chiseled them up years ago. I have one in a box somewhere, surprisingly heavy.

Brother and Sister Nielsen never developed this spare acre of land. I reckoned they'd pass it on to one of their kids someday, probably the youngest – Elder Hyrum Nielsen – who was on his mission. The older kids had houses and spouses; Hyrum had a motorcycle.

It was about fifteen minutes to the house. We had to go through town, back out the other side, and into the desert. Dirt road, a wood sign for Gambel Avenue, and here was our new home.

The noise – of air conditioning blasting, Finn and Hallie bickering, whizz pop beep beee-ooooh toys – snapped silent behind me when I shut the door. It was the first time I'd been here without Kyle since the framing. The house looked bigger, the sky rushing back as it towered over me.

I hauled the spools of wire out of the trunk – heaving, panting, rolling them in the sand, where they stuck and spun like Looney Toons car tires in mud. Kyle told me he'd unload them tonight, but I couldn't shake that Greene stubbornness. I was a stay-at-home mom and I kissed bonked heads, sure. I also cut my own hair. I'd never had a manicure. I could use a jackhammer, a table saw, a power drill, you name it. Sometimes I needed a chore like this.

Once the spools were upright and out of the sand, I surveyed what would be my domain – a real-life castle where I was the queen. Stripes on the concrete, the breeze of the desert skimming the rafters, and me alone in the skeleton house. I could see right through to the sagebrush and orange dirt leading to the mesa, and behind the indigo mountains and the huge blue sky, not a fluffy white cloud in sight. Out there, rattlesnake dens, mountain lions, and places where the sand would disappear and collapse under your feet – not quicksand; these were relics from the Gold Rush. Our license plates read “The Silver State” because back in the day the place was flooded with prospectors

who drilled holes all over the landscape. These abandoned mine shafts number in the hundreds of thousands – unmarked, uncatalogued. Every few years some unlucky person walking their dog or riding their dirt bike falls to their death.

I saw a shadow move from the corner of my eye, but nothing was there. Just me and the desert.

It's being able to picture it for the first time, I told myself. The seriousness of three dimensions. Maybe it's an aura before a migraine? I didn't get migraines.

It didn't help; I was spooked. I walked quickly back to the car, the small of my back arched in and vulnerable. The car was unlocked and how I left it – keys in the ignition, the engine running, and Hallie and Finn singing and bickering. I locked the doors, waited a minute, and drove away.

The roadkill jackrabbit was gone except for a pulpy lump of fur, and the turkey vultures were nowhere to be seen.

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Across the street from the trailer, Krissy supervised Caleb as he watered their sprawl of jungle-like lantana. She crouched and pointed at an iridescent shimmer in the air. The hummingbird hovered over the corner of their ROMNEY 2012 sign and flitted away.

Finn hopped out of the car and danced from one foot to the other. “Mom, can I see if Caleb can play?”

I should ask him to help with the groceries, but we left Story Hour early and he entertained Hallie while I argued with Hello My Name is Darrel at my own hardware store.

“Look both ways,” I said.

Hallie was my helper instead. I rearranged sacks to be light enough for her to carry, and I brought in the rest and tripped at the top of the steps.

“Hallie, I'm going to break my neck! Kitchen floor. Kitchen.”

She stood up on the sofa and blinked. “Wanna play Finn an' Caleb.”

I persuaded her to ferry items from the doorway as I crouched on the floor with the cupboards open. Finn named this space the livitchending room – Mom, get it? 'Cause it's a living room, kitchen, and dining room all in one!

To kill some time, Hallie and I arranged the cans with the labels facing out. I clutched the countertop, dizzy. I remembered to feed the kids but not myself. I spread peanut butter on saltines and pressed four raisins into each: Finn's favorite snack, and four was Finn's favorite number.

I looked out the window. Finn and Caleb tiptoed on the outskirts of the lantana, blooms violet and yellow. Their heads were thrust forward, elbows up. They communicated through gestures: a nod, point, a wrist bending. Finn sprang forward and sprawled across the low shrubbery, arms outstretched. Caleb jumped, and a moment later I heard a whoop and holler. Finn pushed himself up on his elbows, hands clasped – the same techniques my brothers and I used to employ for lizard hunting.

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Some women might fear their husband was having an affair when he ducked outside to take furtive out-of-state phone calls. I knew better. He was up to something. For the past week, I'd watched him through the blinds, circling and kicking dust. What was he plotting now?

Finn and Hallie watched *The Rescuers Down Under* on the laptop while I made dinner. Kyle came inside, unlaced his boots, and walked over to wrap his arms around me.

“Hey babe, before I forget, I need you to go to the hardware store.”

“I already did.”

“You perfect woman!” He kissed my neck and gave me a spank. “Let me unload it for you.”

I smiled behind Kyle's back as we traipsed outside. He aimed a kick at a two-inch stink beetle. It soared into the darkness and he did a victory dance on his toes.

“I fought for this. I bribed the kids with a chocolate donut. Then they were out of chocolate donuts.”

Kyle laughed, opened the trunk, and it was empty.

“Babe?” He looked at me, puzzled.

“I already dropped it off.” I grinned.

“Bad girl! You shouldn’t have done that.”

“It’s my God-given right to bear arms.” I flexed my arms.

Kyle squeezed my muscles – pinched between forefinger and thumb, my biceps chicken wings in his huge, calloused hands. “Impressive. Do you work out?”

“High intensity with toddlers.” I grabbed my wallet from the console and handed him the receipt.

“This says twelve.” Kyle squinted in the dusk light.

“Yep. Practically had to arm-wrestle Darrel – Mike Wells’ kid, has braces. Come on, agree with me: Darrel is the name of a sixty-year-old with chewing tobacco and a beer gut and—”

“I need fourteen gauge. This is twelve.”

“What?” I squinted. “Isn’t that what you said?”

“No. I said fourteen.” He pushed the receipt back at me. “You misheard. That’s ok.”

“I was sure you said twelve. I wrote it down.”

“It’s ok, honey. You misunderstood.”

I stepped back as he slammed the trunk.

“You’re a busy woman. Don’t worry. You can take it back tomorrow.”

Tomorrow was the third of July – Hallie’s birthday party with my parents. Next day was a pool party and fireworks at the fairgrounds. I needed to frost cupcakes, wrap presents, make side dishes, and I was down to my last pair of underwear. I didn’t have time to wrestle the wire back into the car and exchange it.

“Can’t it wait till next week?”

For a long moment he watched me. “I need to work before we go to that party.”

Kyle was tiling a house less than a half mile from the hardware store. He could easily make the trip.

“We want to be moved in before Easter, don’t we?”

That old line. It’s for the house. For the family. It’s good we were moving in February or I’d lose it. I was sick of being a slave to a construction site.

“I’ll call Mitch tomorrow and he’ll have it ready. Easy.” He went to chuck me under the chin, and I dodged.

“Don’t call my dad.”

The heckling I’d get from my father for getting the wrong size of wire. That’s funny, kiddo – I thought baby brain was over by the time they started walking!

Kyle didn’t blink. “I’m trying to make it easy for you.”

“It’s fine, I’ll do it.” I clenched my teeth.

The receipt crumpled in my fist. He said twelve. I wrote it down. I wrote it in purple crayon on the back of a Froman’s receipt.

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We sang “Old MacDonald” in the car, and when it was Hallie’s turn, she chose French fries, the r’s sloughed out as w’s. Finn’s voice rose above our singing.

“No, it’s not McDonald’s the place, but MacDonald the farmer. Mommy, tell Hal she’s wrong.”

Hallie sang on with her eyes closed, shaking her head side to side.

“Sweetie, how about we let her sing it the way she wants?” I tilted my chin up to meet his eyes in the rear-view mirror. His eyebrows pressed together. “She isn’t old enough.” I gave him a wink.

He smiled and tried to wink back, but instead closed his eyes, looking like a happy little drunk.

Dad supervised the coals, lighter fluid in the air, beer ensconced in a new Rebels koozie. He gave us each a malty kiss, except Hallie, who wouldn’t go near him. She gave him the stink eye and ran inside to Grandma.

“Tell me you’re not keeping that,” I said.

“Maybe it’s a little out of hand.” Dad frowned after Hallie and stroked his new moustache.

“Looking very OTM.” Other Than Mormon. I pointed at the koozie. Dad scowled, but he ruffled my hair.

Hallie and Finn stripped at the wading pool. Mom had swept the patio and laid their swimsuits on the table. I reached for Hallie’s hand but she dodged me. She grasped the side of the pool and leaned until her hair dipped in. I picked her up and retrieved her swimsuit. We were on the brink of one of her last Terrible Two tantrums and Dad looked up from the coals.

“Drop it, Meg.”

“The suit, or trying to get my feral child to wear clothing?”

He didn’t answer, mesmerized by fire.

I tossed the suit on the concrete, dragged a chair to the edge, and rolled up my jeans. I held Hallie’s hand and she got in. When she sat, the water was at her armpits.

“Mom, did I do it right?” Finn shuffled to me.

“Not quite, buddy. Here.” I took the laces from his hands. He’d twisted them together into a rope. I showed him how to tie a bow.

“I wasn’t even close. Will they teach me at school?” He peeked through his eyelashes. He had a smudge on his face and his fingernails were filthy. I forgot to have him take a shower last night after lizard hunting.

“You’ll know how before school. We’ll make it our secret mission, ok?”

He didn’t look convinced. I picked up a squirt gun and caught him in the belly.

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I startled when Kyle cracked the door. He smiled and held his finger to his lips. He motioned for me to get Dad’s attention, gave a thumbs-up,



and they disappeared into the house before the children noticed. Mom shrugged.

They returned singing “Happy Birthday”. Kyle carried an enormous red box tied with a white ribbon, and Dad had a tray of cupcakes. Hallie and Finn screamed and scrambled from the pool. Kyle set the box on the ground and I passed him a towel. He wrapped Hallie, picked her up, and planted kisses on her wet cheeks and hair. Finn hugged his legs.

“Let’s have the birthday girl open her present, huh?” He bounced her. She framed his face with dimpled hands.

“Bristly.” She wrinkled her nose.

“Yep. Daddy needs a shave.” He made motor noises and brushed her hand on his stubble. She giggled.

“So on Daddy it’s ok, but not on Pops?” Dad twitched his mouth to make his moustache wiggle. Hallie squealed and hid her face in Kyle’s shoulder.

Kyle set her down and made the towel snug under her armpits. Hallie knew that boxes with ribbons were for opening and she reached.

“It’s a surprise for you too.” He whispered to me and took my hand. “You said you weren’t feeling like yourself. This’ll help.”

I pulled my hand away. Where was an object that size going to fit? The overflowing closet that wouldn’t shut? The gap by the dresser under the window? The top popped off and Hallie erupted at the lopsided ears, one pricked and the other flopped, a black nose, pink tongue, and big tan paws. Finn jumped and clapped his hands.

“What will we name her?”

“Him,” Kyle corrected. “Little boy – eight weeks and two days old. The whole family can name him.”

“Puppy.” Hallie reached to pick him up.

I jolted forward. The pup snuffed the underside of my chin. Hallie and Finn leaned on my knees and held out their hands, and Kyle watched with a grin. He covered the pup’s head with his hand to waggle its ears.

“A puppy?” It came out as a petulant whine. The out-of-state phone calls. The hidden checkbook. The couple of times he surfaced the topic, and each time I told him no. Not now.

“Gentle with his ears, Hal.”

“Kyle, we talked about this.” I searched his face, pleading for him to acknowledge in some small way that this wasn’t what I wanted. All I needed was an infinitesimal frown. He didn’t even have to say sorry. Admit that he couldn’t help himself.

“You’ve been feeling blue. He’ll cheer you up. You’ve always wanted a dog, haven’t you?” He squeezed my knee. “Someone to keep an eye on you three when I’m not around.”

“What kind is it?” Mom asked.

“German Shepherd.” I said before Kyle could.

“They use them as police dogs. They’re loyal, great with kids, and protective. Perfect for my family.” Kyle had the serene expression of a husband who has bought a surprise purebred but told his wife they can’t afford swim lessons.

“They get big.” The pup nibbled my ear and his tooth caught my earring. My eyes watered. “They’re headstrong. They need a lot of training.”

“Which is why we decided this is the best time.” Kyle put his arm around my shoulders. “He’ll be housebroke before we move. Who cares about that grubby trailer carpet, right?”

I’d used that phrase before: when Finn upturned a bowl of soup. When Hallie “colored” with a grape popsicle. This was different and he knew it. Heat bloomed on my cheeks. I fiddled with the dog’s red collar. It was on its smallest hole, the remaining nylon stiff and sticking out, but I could fit my whole hand between the collar and his fur.

“What do you say, Mom?” Kyle nudged me. “Not going to send the puppy away, are you?”

“Mommy, you can’t!” Finn buried his face into my lap, and the pup mouthed his hair.

“I’ll think about it,” I said, and Finn began to cry, and this was a battle I was never going to win.

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Caliche is nature’s concrete.

It’s a local menace to anyone trying to dig a goddamn hole. A sedimentary rock made up of calcium carbonate, sand, and pieces of stone, it lurks beneath the surface, a hibernating beast. When you dig, you never know if or when you’re going to hit caliche.

The tumbleweeds are easy enough – short roots – and the sand is soft. You could use a kitchen spoon. But the resistance lies further down, impossible to reason with, impossible to dent.

Sometimes you’re lucky and it’s a thin layer or a pillow-sized chunk; other times, you’re contemplating dynamite when digging up your basement.

We broke two jackhammers before we wrapped a chain around the biggest chunk – the size of a sofa – and dragged it out with the neighbor’s excavator.

Sometimes, before I fall asleep at night, I hear the scream of metal on rock.