

## Crossing the Line

Grant paced with about twenty other teachers before the high school. He spotted Josh limping to the picket line.

"Did you bring my lunch?"

"Oops," Josh said.

That goofy grin. Grant stifled his irritation. He was hungry, he'd been marching in the snow and slush for the last three hours, and here his lazy lout of a brother-in-law couldn't even make a sandwich.

"Why are you wearing that?"

Rolling his eyes, Josh touched at his paper Burger King crown. He shrugged.

"Found it," he said.

"Okay. Well, thanks for nothing."

Grant took up his sign and rejoined the picket line. He was also stifling his irritation with his fellow strikers--they acted as if they were at Mardi Gras! Cars honked; people shouted and waved. Sure, he understood it was a break from the normal Monday routine, but they needed to maintain an appropriate level of seriousness. The district would crack so long as they stayed strong and united.

Josh had limped away in his baggy jeans to talk to someone. A young woman.

Grant switched the sign to his opposite shoulder and waved at a honking car. On his way back, marching in a long, looping circle, he saw Josh gesturing, laughing. Wait-- Was that Nellie? Yes, it looked like Nellie from his Algebra II class. She was sixteen. Seventeen, at the most.

What the hell was he doing? Did he just put his crown on her head?

Grant craned his neck. Here he was slogging around in the muck, hungry and tired, his spine striking sparks of pain with each boot stomp, while his brother-in-law was using the protest as an opportunity to seduce teenage girls! When he came around again, on the verge of going over there and possibly having an ugly confrontation, he saw Josh had left.

Thank God.

\*

After the protest ended for the day, Grant drove to Milford Middle School to pick up his son and daughter. Franklin was in eighth grade, Anne in sixth. Neither concealed their joy about the strike. While they still had to go to a teacherless school, they reported they did nothing except watch movies and play games on their phones. It had been great fun.

"Is anyone going to ask me how my day went? It was a different sort of day for me, too, you know."

"How long's the strike going to last, Dad?" Franklin said.

"Do we have to go tomorrow?" Anne said.

"I don't know. We'll have a family discussion about it when we get home. I can't believe they just had you watch movies all day."

"We saw *Incredibles 2*. It was so funny!"

His children didn't care about why the teachers were striking, or how aggravating it was for their father to be marching around in the cold weather when he should have been teaching. Not that he expected them to care or understand. All the same, their chatter was exasperating; he wished they would just be quiet.

"Is Uncle Josh going to get us pizza again?"

"I don't know," Grant said. "Your Uncle Josh is..."

"What?"

"Nothing. I don't know if we'll have pizza. Maybe Mom will make something healthy. We'll see."

"Aw."

Grant longed to teach Josh a lesson. The last straw had been seeing him with that girl. He'd *clearly* been hitting on her. Look, it was none of his business who Josh consorted with or how he spent his leisure time, but there were limits. What if his children found out Uncle Josh liked to date high school girls? What kind of example was that setting? No, it wasn't funny or cute anymore. Josh had to go. He was sorry he had lost his job cartooning for some local paper in Alaska. Not that it was a surprise. For years Grant had been baffled by Josh's cartoons. Not only were they unfunny, but the drawings were embarrassingly crude. Of course, Josh's cerebral palsy had something to do with that: the guy could barely grip a pencil. While some people found a disabled man drawing cartoons to be wonderfully charming, apparently, it didn't mean he could do whatever he wanted without consequences--depicting Sarah Palin, in one notorious instance, as having sexual relations with an alpaca. Jessie naturally and consistently defended her brother, and Grant strove to be compassionate. Didn't he teach students with disabilities, making

accommodations for them in his classes per federal guidelines? He even acquiesced in Josh staying with them over the holiday break. In fact, he had been fine with it. The first few weeks had been fun and Josh could be a hoot. Things had been building over the last month or so, and Grant had always taken the high road; but now it was mid-February and Josh was no closer to going back to Alaska, or doing anything else useful. To complicate matters, Grant's father had also moved in while they were researching affordable assisted-living situations. Josh and Barry were piled together in the guest bedroom, with Josh claiming he was happy "crashing" on the air mattress. There were nights when Grant, pausing outside the door, thought he heard the two men conspiring in low voices, complaining, chuckling, hearing his name...

"Dad? Mom wants to know if you're coming inside."

Grant started. He was sitting in the driveway, hands clutched on the wheel. "Yes, yes, just thinking about what to get for dinner."

"Pizza?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Yay!"

\*

Over boxes of pizza, no one seemed particularly interested in hearing what Grant had done on the picket line. He tried to make them understand how important it was. That the union was angry with the district and their insulting contract offer; that teachers needed to stand up to such lowball tactics.

"Blah blah," Josh said, shaking grated parmesan on his pizza.

Grant frowned. "In fact, I'd love to throttle the superintendent's neck. As I was marching I thought about his smug face and that gave me energy to keep at it, though it didn't help that scabs were crossing the picket line right in front of us. Just shamelessly walking through. In fact, there was all sorts of shameless behavior going on."

"Josh?" Jessie said. "How do you want your brownie? With ice cream?"

"Yes, please!"

"And what about you, Barry?"

Barry mumbled. Unshaven, lip hanging, wisps of white hair on his scabrous head, he stared at his slice of pizza. Just yesterday he'd been alert and joking, like the old Barry they all knew and loved. Grant was convinced his father put on the confused act because of a stubborn streak in his personality, maybe even from perversity. Of course he didn't want him driving a car anymore, but that was only due to safety concerns. Otherwise, his father was fine.

"Come on, Dad," Grant said. "Snap out of it. After so many years of getting on my case about finishing my plate before dessert. Come on, just one bite."

"Oh, let him be," Jessie said.

"Yeah, let Barry-bear get his honey," Josh said.

Grant scowled. There were flakes of parmesan all over the table. Then he spotted Oscar, their dachshund, climbing on the sofa.

"Oscar!" he roared. He clapped his hands. "Get off! Bad!"

Oscar reluctantly came down. He whined.

"Has anyone walked him today? Anyone?"

Jessie chewed, shrugged. "I was busy today. You know that."

Grant gave his wife a look: *we need to talk*. She pursed her lips in response. As she went for another slice she talked about getting close to her first big sale. Last summer she'd earned her real estate license, and now she was going off on sales appointments nearly every day.

Oscar continued to whine.

"Looks like it's my turn again, somehow," Grant said. "Before there's you-know-what everywhere."

"Dachshund doo-doo," Josh said. Parmesan clung to his goatee.

The children giggled.

\*

One hand gripping the leash, the other kneading his lower back, Grant stepped around patches of ice as he followed the dog. Lattices of shadow crossed the snow; yellow squares glowed in houses. Each square mutely testified to a different family situation. He doubted any were as crazy as his. Later he'd tell Jessie it was time for Josh to leave. She would have to understand it was best for all involved. It simply needed to happen.

Everyone was watching TV when he got back. Grant preferred family time together by doing something educational or playing a game like Monopoly, but he'd relented and made accommodations for Josh and his bottomless appetite for dumb comedies. He didn't like it, though. Life, he was waiting for an opportunity to say, was not a sitcom.

Jessie, Josh, Franklin and even his father watched with rapt attention. Anne, at least, was working on her oceanography project.

"Need any help, honey?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Okay."

Grant smiled at the diorama of plastic fish and coral glued to the painted cardboard ocean. Anne emptied a baggie filled with seals and dolphins, several bouncing off the table.

"Careful!"

Grant stooped to pick up a loose seal when he noticed crumpled jeans in the corner. He picked up the jeans. Baggy jeans.

"Excuse me? I don't want to nag about this, but..."

Josh turned. "Nag away, bro."

Out of the jeans tumbled tiger-striped underwear. As Grant tried to catch his wife's eye, his face dark with disapproval, a dolphin crunched under his shoe.

"Da-ad!"

"Sorry, sorry, honey. Let me give you a hand with that."

"Just let me do it."

"All right."

Meanwhile on the screen a man was unaccountably yelling about his six-thousand-dollar suit. Someone was trying to get the man to settle down, which led him to start spluttering:

"Oh, sh-sh-should should sh-should should... should... should sh-should..."

Grant was stunned. The man was viciously, blatantly mocking someone with a disability. And Josh was barking with laughter! And everyone else! Come on.

"Excuse me, everyone. Jess? Is the heating pad upstairs? I think I hurt my back today."

"In the closet."

"Okay. Well." Grant stood behind the array of heads on the couch. His father sat hunched behind his laptop and TV tray and brownie crumbs. "I'm going to bed, then."

Josh looked around. "The party's just getting started, bro!"

"Pretty tired. Trying to fight for justice, and all."

Grant wasn't sure but it seemed everyone--even his father--rolled their eyes.

\*

"I thought you were tired."

Grant was sitting up in bed. "There's something we need to talk about."

"Oh, boy. Let me guess. Josh is sorry, okay? He sometimes forgets to do things. I had your lunch here and he just forgot to bring it."

"This is about Josh as a person, not as a lunch bringer."

"He walked all the way to the school for you. At least he had good intentions."

"Yes. Intentions. That's what I wanted to talk about, thank you. I honestly believe he had other motives to come to the school."

"Wow. You never have a nice thought about anybody."

"Look, don't make me the bad guy in this. I thought we agreed on how long he could stay. And I like Josh, I do. I mean, he's nice enough. He's droll at times, but..."

"Of course: but."

"But he just... I saw something today. Something disturbing. I think you..."

Jessie ducked into the bathroom. From downstairs came hoarse guffaws and the hiss of a beer can. Josh was still in the living room watching TV--his hairy, horny feet likely propped on

the couch. And why not? He had no job, nothing to do or get up for in the morning. Other than put on his tiger underwear.

Toilet flushing, the door opened.

"I saw him with a young girl today. He was *clearly* hitting on her. She was probably no more than sixteen."

"Are you sure you weren't seeing things?"

"Yes. It was not an illusion. Everyone could see it."

"All right." Jessie tugged down her pajama top. "So?"

"*So?* It was really inappropriate! He was bringing my non-existent lunch as an excuse to prey on teenage girls. You think that's okay?"

"Honey, you're spitting."

"Are you going to do something about this?"

Jessie got into bed and set the alarm.

"Well?"

Jessie said nothing.

"Great. Fine. I guess we're not talking about this, then. But, seriously, what if he brings a girl back here when we're all gone?"

"Then Barry will get a good show."

"Dear God." Grousing, groaning, Grant positioned the heating pad under his back. "But why am I not surprised."

"Good night."

The lights went off.

Silence.

"What," Grant blurted into the dark, "in the world would your brother have to say to a teenage girl? I mean, really. And she's attractive, you know. I know who she is."

"So you've been checking her out?"

"You know what I mean. It was obvious the way he was hitting on her--hell, everyone on the picket line could see it! There we were, fighting to get justice and fair pay, and your brother was being a complete sleaze."

Jessie sighed. She tugged on the blanket.

He tugged back. "Look, I know he has a disability. I'm sensitive to that, I really am. But that doesn't mean he can squat here indefinitely. Right? And I don't mean kick him out tomorrow. But we should have a timeframe. Say, by the end of the week. This weekend."

Jessie said nothing.

"Well?"

"The kids love him."

"They also love pizza, but we're not going to open up a pizzeria in our house."

Jessie said nothing.

"I'll tell him, if you can't do it."

"Please don't. I'll talk to him."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

"Thank God."

\*

The next day Grant was hailed as a hero. When he picked up Franklin and Anne at school, he told them what had happened.

"There was an accident near the picket line," he said. "And the car caught fire. The door was stuck, so several of us ran over and helped pull the woman to safety through the window..."

"Wow!" Franklin said. "Was she burnt up?"

"What? No, she wasn't burnt up. I rushed over there without even thinking and pulled on her arms. Flames were shooting out of the hood. Flames were everywhere. It was a really scary situation. I'm still shaking a little."

"And the lady is okay, Dad?"

"Yes, and I'm okay, too. The lady had some broken ribs, but she'll be okay. The paramedics worked on her. And firefighters sprayed foam on the car. It was quite the scene. Someone got video of it on their phone. I could be on the news tonight."

"Woowww."

Relishing his children's awe, Grant drove home and pulled into the driveway just as his father was stumbling out the front door in his pajamas. He had a ring of keys in his hand.

"Dad! What are you doing?"

"Taking a drive. Taking a drive."

"Oh, no, you aren't! And who gave you those keys? Those aren't even the car keys. Come on, Dad. Let's go inside. Anne? Get your grandfather a glass of water."

Oscar barked and whined as they came into the house. In the living room Josh lounged on the couch, bare feet propped on the arm. He put down his copy of *The Old Man and the Sea* and chuckled.

"There's the warden! He almost made it out of here alive."

"What the hell is going on?"

"I was just trying to help him."

"Help him?"

"I was telling him about Alaska, how beautiful it is. You know? Then I told him we could drive there someday, and stuff. I guess that sort of set ol' Barry-bear off."

Grant stared into his father's face. "Dad? If you want a ride somewhere just ask me. Are you hearing me? Now, Dad... Dad!"

"Taking a drive. My keys."

"He seemed pretty determined. He went all over the house. Then he found some keys, and he just tore out of here."

"And you did nothing?"

"He seemed pretty determined." Josh grinned.

Grant turned back to his father. "Dad? Sit down, please. We have your laptop. Okay? We'll put the game on. Sit down, please!"

"My keys."

"Those *aren't* your keys. Now, don't you want to hear about how I saved a woman from a burning car? You'll be proud to hear about it. Dad? Come on."

"You did what?" Josh said.

"Dad's a superhero," Franklin said. "He saves burnt people!"

"He's going to be on the news!" Anne said.

"Yes, possibly."

"Slow news day!"

Once Jessie got home with a bucket of chicken, and Grant made a salad, they sat before the TV. On the local news a shaky phone video was replayed.

"That you?" Josh said. Standing, he pointed his half-eaten banana.

"Doesn't look like you," Jessie said.

"That's not you, bro."

"It is! See? That's me on the other side of Wayne. I mean, we were trying not to get burned, and with all the smoke..."

"Definitely the work of a flamer."

"Did the car explode, Dad?"

"It didn't. And that's not the lesson here. When people are in distress, it's incumbent on us to always be a good Samaritan and lend a--"

"Blah blah." Josh aimed the remote. "Come on, enough of this superhero stuff. We're almost done with season one."

While the comedy show played, Grant managed to find the full video on YouTube. He thrust his phone before the faces of his family.

"See? Right there. That's me." He pointed a pinky nail at the screen. "Right there! I was pulling on her arm."

"So it is," Jessie said. "Good for you, honey."

Cheek full of pretzel, Josh said, "Yeah, we knew."

"But you said--!"

"I was kidding, bro."

"My keys."

"Okay. I'm going to bed."

\*

The next morning Grant was printing out worksheets. They had decided the children should stay home since school was currently a joke. He arranged the worksheets into piles labeled WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, FRIDAY. Josh peered over his shoulder.

"Surprised you don't have Saturday and Sunday, too."

"Kidding. I get it," Grant said. "But it's not a bad idea."

"Aren't we going to the cabin this weekend?"

"Doubtful. Very doubtful."

"Okay. Hey, can you give me a lift today, bro? I have a meeting with the *Post* comics editor. He likes my work."

"I don't think I can," Grant said. He tapped on Friday's pile. "Sorry."

"I'll take you," Jessie said from the hallway. "Is this the guy who wanted to meet you last week? This is so exciting!"

"Don't get your panties in an uproar, sis. But we'll see." Josh grinned.

Wincing, Grant left the study and set the worksheet piles on the dining room table.

"Wait," he said. "Who's going to stay and watch the kids?"

"I can't," Jessie said. "This is the day we're closing."

"I thought you could? Great. So now what? We need someone here."

"Can't you stay?" Jessie said. "You're the teacher, after all."

"They want everyone on the line today. It's mandatory."

"Well, it's not our fault your union is so stubborn that you..."

"Right. Now it's the union's fault. I'm just asking for you to stay for a day. You know, if you weren't so..." Grant met his wife's eyes. "Never mind. We'll have Dad watch them. I'm sure he can handle it, just for a few hours."

"Don't sweat it, bro," Josh said. "The kids will be fine. They'll probably just spend the day..." He pantomimed putting a cigarette to his mouth.

Grant stared, outraged. "Are you implying my middle-school children will be smoking marijuana cigarettes?"

Josh shrugged. "Hey, when I was that age...?"

"Don't kid like that, Josh. Come on. Let's go."

Grant went over to his father. "Dad? Dad! Are you okay?"

"Mm?"

"We're going to need you to..."

Grant stopped short. The look in his father's eyes startled him, made him briefly frightened. But he put the thought quickly out of his mind.

"Dad, make sure the kids do those worksheets when they get up. Okay? And that they get a good breakfast. I have to go."

Barry blinked.

"Anyway, we'll be back in a little bit. You'll be okay?"

"Then we can go for a drive."

"Sure, sure," Grant said as he hurried out.

\*

It was later in the afternoon than he'd planned, but Grant returned home energized. Everyone had talked about his heroism during the car accident, and then there were rumors of the strike ending. Justice, it seemed, was prevailing.

"Hello?"

Crumpled Burger King sacks littered the dining table; the worksheets were covered in childish drawings.

"Hello?"

There wasn't a note on the refrigerator, or anywhere else. How hard was it just to leave a note? Then he spotted Oscar on the couch.

"Hey! Bad! Get up, you. Come on."

Oscar ignored him, curled comfortably on a pile of baggy jeans.

"I can't stand it."

Grant went to the sliding doors. Josh sat by the fire pit, flames leaping.

"Hello? Didn't you hear me? And where is everyone?"

Josh wore a black leather jacket and fingerless gloves. He held a beer; by his sandaled foot was another bottle, half full. In the snow a line of footprints snaked out to the back fence. Behind the garden shed. Grant squinted in the low sun.

"What's going on?"

"Nothing, bro."

"Uh-huh."

Branches rustled, snow sprinkled-- A squirrel jumped.

"Franklin and Anne are at some neighbor kid's house. Jessie set it up. And Barry-bear is doing what he does best: taking a nap."

"Mm."

"Save anyone from burning buildings today?"

"Nope," Grant said. "And what exactly are you doing out here?"

"Just chilling. Literally."

"Uh-huh."

"I was just thinking how you must be loving this strike. I mean, all you have to do is walk around for a few hours outside in the fresh air. It must beat teaching."

"It doesn't, actually. It's not fun at all. And it's very stressful not knowing how long this will go on or if we'll ever get paid again."

"Blah blah."

"Drinking with a friend?"

"No, just me."

"With two beers?"

"How I roll, bro."

The footprints were a chain of bluish integers, leading to a solution just beyond... just beyond... Grant charged off the deck and ran along the footprints. In his mind a teenage girl was crouched behind the shed, stifling laughter--

Nothing. Nothing but two dog turds.

He stared. His fingers clutched by his side.

Huffing smoke, he made his way back.

"See something?" Josh grinned, his face and saliva bubbles at the corner of his mouth variably lit by the flames.

"You have a girl with you somewhere. Right?"

"Maybe!"

"Look, I'm sure this is a real blast for you, but I have my children to think about. I don't know what you're up to. I wouldn't normally care, actually, if it wasn't for my children. But I won't have you turn my house into a bordello."

Josh laughed. "What? *Bordello*? I was just sitting out here by myself."

"You're going to have to go. I mean it. Pack your bags."

Josh stared.

"Not so funny now, is it?"

Grant stifled an urge to slap the bottle from Josh's hand. Then, as he went inside, he snorted louder than he intended.

\*

A beribboned bottle of champagne stood on the kitchen counter. Jessie was beaming. The house had sold after hours of negotiation.

"That's great."

"We should celebrate!" Josh said.

Grant scratched his cheek. "Honey, can I have a minute? Just a minute. I want to show you something."

"Stop pulling on me."

"Just come here. See?"

They stood at the sliding doors.

"Is Franklin making a fort, or a snowman?"

"No, over there. You see those? Leading to the fence. I think Josh had a girl with him.

Those are her footprints, as she was running away. I came home earlier than they expected, and she ran to go hide. I'm sure of it."

"Oh, come on. Did you actually see her?"

"No, she probably got over the fence. But what else could those footprints be?"

"How do you know it wasn't the meter man?"

"Only leaving...?"

Josh limped over to them. "How's my Nuremberg going?"

Grant faced Josh. "I was just telling Jess what you've been up to while we've been gone. And it has to stop. You have to go."

"Okay, can we just...?"

"No. There's no room for negotiation here. I'm serious. Bringing underage girls to have a beer might mean nothing to you, but this is--!"

Franklin came up to the doors, cheeks flushed. "What's going on?"

"Nothing, nothing," Grant said. "By the way, there's poop all over the yard. Get your sister and clean it up before dinner. Okay?"

"I'll help them," Josh said.

"Don't you dare," Grant said.

\*

More snow started to fall that night. From his bedroom window, Grant watched the footprints slowly vanish. At one point the security light clicked on. A squirrel, he thought. But maybe not.

"He's really upset," Jessie said, coming in. "You can't at least give him another week to find a place somewhere?"

"He already has a place. It's called Alaska."

"I'm so tired." Jessie lay on the bed. "Can we please talk about this tomorrow? Or this weekend? I promise we'll get him to move out."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

The prints, like stains in a magic trick, had disappeared. His back was feeling much better. Grant sat on the edge of the bed and gave his wife's foot a gentle squeeze.

"I'm proud of you," he said. "Sorry if I didn't say that before."

Just then Josh, making a mess of an ice cream sandwich, poked his head in the room.

"Awright. You guys starting early on Valentine's?"

"Close the door, Josh."

\*

Negotiations throughout the night had found a compromise, there was a new structure for salaries and bonuses, both sides claimed victory... Grant went to the children's rooms. It was six in the morning.

"Hey," he said. He slapped on the doors. "Get up, wake up! The strike is over, you two. You have to go to school."

"Nooo."

"No complaining. I have to go, too. Let's go!"

Stumbling from the bathroom, Josh rubbed his eyes. "Goddamn, bro," he said. His gut stretched his t-shirt. "This must be the happiest day of your life."

"Maybe! The strike is over. And you're out of here."

"Blah blah."

The school day was predictably chaotic, as students could hardly settle down, but finally Grant was able to bring some order. With all the work that needed catching up, he was later than usual getting home. Once again no one was around. Then the sound of the garage door, and a clatter of feet. Everyone had gone to get dinner, but there had been an accident. The mini-van had hit another car, denting the fender. No one was hurt, at least.

"I drove!" Barry said.

"What?" Grant wheeled around on Jessie. "Why in the world did you let him drive?"

"You said I could," Barry said. "You said. Damn you."

"That's right," Jessie said. She shared a look with her brother. "He kept saying you had wanted him to drive. So we let him, a little. He was so happy. And it was no big deal, really. Everyone was okay."

"I never said that. But never mind. Dad? Last time. I'm sorry. But that's the last time."

Mumbling, Barry clawed through the bags of Taco Bell. Grant ordered the children to set out plates and silverware and then, as they began to eat, he asked for everyone's attention.

"Uncle Josh is moving on," he said, aiming for the right note of regret in his voice. "It was great having him here, of course, but he has things he needs to do back in Alaska."

"But I thought he was going to make cartoons here," Anne said.

"Nope. I guess he'll be making cartoons for all those polar bears!"

Grant smiled gaily around the table. Everyone hung their heads.

\*

That night Grant thought he heard the squeaking of a mouse. He lay in bed telling himself it was nothing as he drifted off... Early the next morning he found a magic marker on the kitchen counter. More importantly, there was a suitcase by the front door.

"Thank God."

At the breakfast table, Franklin looked around. "Did Uncle Josh go already?"

"I'm not sure. Finish your cereal."

Jessie got up from the table. Then the children wandered off, and Barry, even Oscar trotted to the front door. Grant put down his paper.

"Hello?"

He went to the door. Everyone had gathered on the porch. Josh was limping up and down the snowy sidewalk, holding a sign: UNFAIR BROTHER-IN-LAW.

Jessie was chuckling; the children giggled. Josh waved mournfully as he went by. Neighbors were out with snow shovels, some stopping to point.

"Stupid," Grant said. "Just stupid."

"Oh, it's funny. He's so clever sometimes."

"Is he? Come on, everyone. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Let's go! And Dad? You should know better. Let's not encourage him."

No one moved.

"Come on, come on. Let's go. We get the point already!"

No one moved, as if hypnotized by Josh's antics. A neighbor laughed.

Finally, Grant charged down the walk. He went up to Josh and ripped away the sign. Josh looked stunned.

"What? Forgot to say *blah blah*?"

Grant clutched the sign and waved it over his head.

"This is you!" he roared. He kicked out his legs, spastically jerking around. "*Phhffffbbb!*  
*Phffhhph!* Hey, everyone! Blah blah! *Phffssbbb!* I'm a goddamn *idiot...*!"

He limped back and forth with the sign. When he heard no one laughing he stopped and glanced back at his family arrayed on the porch. They all wore the same look: horror.