

Cowboy

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I wish I knew where I was. I know I must be somewhere, and I guess I'm not dead or I wouldn't be thinking and wondering where I am, but I can't seem to move anything, or see anything. I feel like I am tied down like Gulliver, but I'm blind too. I can hear a little if noise is loud or someone talks into my ear. My father seems to get real close and talk to me sometimes. He says everything is OK and I will be fine, but where am I, and what has happened to me? There is some kind of whooshing sound right near my right ear. I seem to make the sound when I breathe. Oh God, I'm scared. Sorry, Mama, I know I shouldn't say God like that, but I am really scared. Maybe if I can go to sleep I will feel better when I wake up.

Well, I am awake now, and I am still here, wherever this is.

Maybe if I can remember what happened I can figure it out.

Mama had been called to an emergency board meeting at the university, and I had a little cold so she had kept me home. Lizzy, Mama's good friend who usually stays with me, was teaching at her school, and since it was daytime, all the neighbors were at work. Mama didn't want to leave me alone and she had never done that before, but she said this was an emergency and wouldn't take long. We had had family fire drills, so I knew what to do in a fire, and she had taught me how to dial the new emergency number, 911. And I was NOT to answer the door if anyone knocked or rang the bell.

I was reading *Gulliver's Travels* and blowing my runny nose when the doorbell rang. I didn't open the door, but went to the bay window where I could see who was there. I had seen a picture in a book in Mama's office and when I pulled it out and asked her who it was, she said it was my father, who had gone away before I was born. The person at the door looked



just like the picture, but older.

I didn't know what to do. I wasn't supposed to open the door, but surely that didn't apply to my father. After he rang three times I opened the door.

"Jimmie," he shouted, and grabbed me and kissed my cheeks and neck and held me tight and I think I saw tears in his eyes. He held me for the longest time, but finally he put me down.

"How would you like to take a trip with your father?" was the first thing he said after he put me down. Wow, I had never even seen him and he wanted to take me on a trip, an "adventure" he said. I explained that Mama would be home in a little while and we could plan it with her. His face got a mad look and he said, no, if we were going we had to leave now. We went up to my room and he put some of my clothes in a backpack. I didn't know what to do. I knew we should wait for Mama, but he was almost dragging me around by my arm.

"Is there anything special you want to take with you?" he asked. I said I wanted to take *Gulliver's Travels* and *Swiss Family Robinson*, I could get those into the backpack.

"Can we take my bicycle?" I asked.

"We can get it in the truck," he said, and that really made me happy. I left a note for Mama saying that I was going on an adventure with my father, so she wouldn't worry. Then we put my bicycle into his old red Ford pickup, put the backpack behind the passenger seat with some other stuff, and we were off.

Father said we were going west, and I could be a cowboy. We only got about 200 miles the first day and found a place to camp. Father had a little tent and a tiny stove that burned little white things. Then we would build a real campfire with any wood we could find around. Each day we had donuts for breakfast, would stop at a McDonalds for lunch, and at night father would heat up some beans on the stove and make hot chocolate if we had gotten some milk, but sometimes we had to just use water.

After about three days father began to smell bad and I didn't smell too good either, really smoky, and I was pretty dirty. Mama would have thrown me into the bathtub. So we stopped at a real motel. Father said he was looking for one on the old highway with a garage. He thought it would be safer if the truck and the bicycle were under cover. He finally found what he was looking for, and stayed for the night. It wasn't too modern. Some of the wallpaper was peeling off and there was an old ring in the tub, but we got a bath and it felt really good. Father washed out some our clothes and hung them on a rope to dry. We tucked them in the back of the truck the next day so they wouldn't blow out and let the sun finish drying them.

At night I would read my books by the campfire, or sometimes in the motel, until I fell asleep. I was sure I would finish them before we got to wherever we were going. I asked Father if he knew where there was a library. He said that the only library he knew was at a famous state institution where he had lived. He said he had worked there and studied art. But we

never stopped for more books.

As we got further west we started seeing signs for a big drugstore in Wall. There were signs for miles and miles, and we finally got there. The drugstore was more like a carnival, and they sold everything. Father bought me a cowboy hat, boots, a pair of jeans, and a shirt with shiny buttons that he said were mother of pearl, and after that I wore my cowboy clothes every day. We didn't even wash them.

Father was funny about time. When I would ask him what time it was, he would say Greenwich mean time is whatever and it never seemed like that time of day to me, but he said Greenwich mean time was the only true time.

The last thing I can remember is that we were in Wyoming, camping on a hillside way out nowhere. I saw a few antelope on a hill in the distance. I had never seen antelope before or any animals in the wild. It was a beautiful, clear morning with a warm breeze and I wanted to ride my bicycle. Father said not to go downhill because I might go too fast and fall, but ride back and forth on the road on the hillside.

Now I am here, wherever this is. At first I had to pee really bad, but they stuck something up my johnny and now that is better. Mama said to call it my penis, but I still like johnny. That's funny, I can't really feel most things, but I can feel my johnny and my throat. There is something stuck in there, too. And I have a headache. If I could do anything, I would ask for an aspirin. Every so often something clicks on and off right over my face, or at least somewhere between my ears

I don't know how long I have been like this. I can't tell time, not even Greenwich mean time. I just figure it is day when I am awake, and night if I am asleep. Father talks to me every day and once I thought I heard Mama talking very loud and angry. We probably shouldn't have left without telling her.

Well, I am awake again, and I heard someone say something about a plug. I hope they are talking about the thing in my johnny. I sure could do without that, though I don't know how I could pee.

Father just told me that it is almost over and that we would be going back out to where I rode my bicycle, and I could stay there. He was going to use his art training to design a place for me. That seems like a lonely place to stay. He said my cowboy outfit had been washed and that I could wear that, but we weren't going to go until it was midnight Greenwich mean time.

I am awake again. It must be midnight by father's time. They are taking that thing out of my johnny and, wow, they are taking the thing out of my throat too. Oh, it is a little hard to breathe, and God I am scared again. Sorry, Mama. I need to go to sleep and when I wake up it should all be over. That's it. I need to go to sleep.

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