

**Edwina**

**by**

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## Chapter 1 It's My Room

Friday afternoon and I'm at Dad's farm for the weekend. I race up the stairs with my back pack then freeze in the doorway to my room. Dad walks up behind me clearing his throat the way he does when he's upset.

Dad told me this was my room. It would always be here for me for weekends and the summer. Nothing was going to change after the divorce.

My bed is shoved over against the far wall. My dresser is shoved against the wall in the center sticking out like a barrier. The barrier is continued with another dresser facing the other way. Another bed is against the near wall. The room is split in half.

I step inside the doorway staring. A poster loosely rolled is on my bed. My poster! I love that My Pony poster. Here it is tossed on my bed in what was my room.

"Dad, what is going on?" *This didn't happen while we were driving here. He knew and didn't tell me.*

Dad clears his throat again. "Well, uh, you see..." his voice trails away.

"What is going on? This is supposed to be my room!"

Dad shifts from one foot to the other. "I know I told you this would always be your room for weekends and summers."

"And?"

"Now, Honey, Georgia was asked to take in foster twins and we needed a room for them. So Megan moved in here. You're only here weekends."

*You liar! You promised me this was my room. We were still family. Then you took up with Georgia. Now Megan is your favorite. Megan gets my room. I hate you!*

Words boil and seethe inside of me. Screams choke me. My fists clench. I stiffen filled with the desire to hit him, to hurt him for lying to me.

*This is childish. Stop it.* I swallow the words, the fury, the screams. I force my fists back into hands. I'm only here two nights a week. That leaves the room, my room, empty the rest of the week.

"Hey, Aleta, how about this?" says Megan pushing past me into what had been my room and going to what is evidently her dresser. "Now we have half a room each. I wanted to put up my Bieber poster so I took yours down. Hope you don't mind."

"No, I don't mind," I force out through clenched teeth. *Bieber! I may be sick. If you tore my poster, I'll kill you.*

Stiffly I circle around her dresser and into my half of my room. My back pack slides onto the bed as I pick up my poster. It seems to be all right. Wait. One corner is torn almost off.

I close my eyes and swallow. It is only a small corner. The rest of the poster is fine. My hands curl into fists digging my fingernails into my palms as hard as I can.

I want to beat Megan up, pull her hair out, throw her out the window, hurt her. But I can't. Dad wants us to be friends. Fat chance.

My hands hurt as I roll up my poster. I will take it with me and put it up in my bedroom at Mom's house. I open my top dresser drawer to get a rubber band. My things are shoved around.

I keep my things neatly folded and stacked. Everything has a place and it is in that place. Now my things are in heaps. I search for and find a rubber band. *You went through my things, you twerp. You didn't even care if I knew you did, twerp. Share a*

*room with you? Not if I can help it. Be friends with you? There is no chance on Earth that will ever happen.*

Where is Fluttershy? Mandy gave me that figurine for my birthday. I left it on my dresser last Sunday.

“Dad, where’s Fluttershy?”

“Fluttershy?”

“The My Pony figurine Mandy gave me for my birthday. I left it on my dresser last week. I brought it to show you and forgot to take it with me. It was there on my dresser.”

“I remember it now. No, it wasn’t on your dresser when I moved it Thursday.”

“It has to be here somewhere.” I start looking through all my dresser drawers. Megan went through all of them. All my clothes are shoved around. Megan!

Megan is walking out the door when I stand up. “Megan, what did you do with Fluttershy?”

“Fluttershy? That pony thing?”

“My best friend gave me that pony thing for my birthday. What did you do with it?”

“Aleta, it may have fallen on the floor,” says Dad.

“That’s it,” says Megan. “I found it on the floor.”

“Where is it? It’s mine. Give it back.”

“How was I to know?”

*You knew, twerp.* “You know now. Where is it?”

“I found it. It’s mine now.”

“Dad, I want Fluttershy back. Make her give it to me.”

“Megan, it is Aleta’s. Please give it back to her.”

“You aren’t my father. You can’t tell me what to do.”

“You aren’t my sister and I don’t want you in my room or touching my things.”

“Too late. This is my room too and I’ll do whatever I want to in it.”

“Stop it, girls,” says Dad. “The two of you have to share the room. That doesn’t give either of you the right to get into the other’s things.”

“You can’t tell me what to do,” says Megan. “It wasn’t like I went through her drawers. She left it out.”

“It was on my dresser in my room!” *And you did too go through my drawers.*

“Big deal! You’re here two nights a week. I’m here all week and this is my room now.”

“What’s going on in here?” asks Georgia. “I can hear you all over the house.”

“Aleta left that pony figurine here last weekend,” says Dad. “You remember. She showed it to us. It was a birthday present. I guess Megan took it and won’t give it back.”

“Is that true, Megan?”

“It was on the floor.”

“I remember Aleta showing it to us last weekend so you knew it was hers.”

“Yes.”

“Where is it?”

Megan goes to her dresser, opens the top drawer and takes Fluttershy out. “Is this it?”

“That’s it,” I say and start over to get the figurine.

“Give it back to Aleta,” Georgia tells Megan. “Tell her you’re sorry you took it.”

Megan's hand closes around the little figure. Her eyes close a moment. Her hand draws back and hurls my figurine against the wall over my bed. It falls with broken legs onto the bedspread.

"I'm not sorry. You don't live here anymore. I do. This is my room and I can do what I want to in it." Megan turns and stomps off down the hall.

I pick up my figurine. One leg falls off. I can feel tears coming and I am not going to cry. I'm just not!

"I'm sorry, Honey," says Georgia. "We'll buy you another one."

*How dare you call me Honey? How do you replace this one? Mandy gave me this one. It's special! What happens to Megan for breaking it? You won't do anything to her, will you? I hate you! I wish you and all your kids were dead!*

"It was only plastic," I tell her. I walk out of the room pushing past Dad who is standing there looking stupid. I walk out of the house and across the yard. I walk across the field below the yard down to the far corner.

I don't run. It's undignified. I don't cry. I won't let that twerp see me run or cry because of her. Adults don't do those things. One more year and I'll be a teenager. I need to act like an adult.

I hate getting covered with bits of weeds and plastered with sticky weed seeds.

I'm terrified I'll step on a snake.

Getting spiders webs in my hair is disgusting. Coming face to face with a spider makes me shudder and scream.

Dad's farm, it was mostly Mom's farm before the divorce, isn't bad. The fields are clear. The weeds are cut short. The lawn is mowed. There's no place to hide and I want to hide.

At the edge of the farm is wild land belonging to the neighbor. He never keeps his fences up so his cows come up into our yard now and then. The brush is tall and tangled.

I step over the barbed wire hanging inches over the ground and begin running blasting my way through the brush. I keep running until I can't run any further. Then I collapse on the ground and beat the broken figurine into the ground. The plastic edges cut back into my hand but I don't care. I hit the ground over and over. My tears are hot on my cheeks. I'm never going back there. Never!

Dad will be sorry he took up with this Georgia. She only wants a place to raise those brats of hers. Megan is a thief and stupid and deserves to die! He prefers them to me so I will leave.

I sit up. That's it. I'll run away. That's what I'll do. Dad won't care. Mom might but she'll get over it. I'm old enough to take care of myself.

"I'm running away. I will run away. Where will I go?"

"Hello there little girl."

My insides freeze. I realize I'm out in the middle of somewhere all alone. It's late afternoon. I sit up on my knees and start shaking. Who could be out here? I don't look around. Maybe whoever it is will leave if I ignore them.

"Cat got your tongue? I said hello. You're supposed to say hello back."

"Hello. Now I said it. Please go away."

The stranger laughed. "Why would I do that? I just got here. By the way, where is here?"

"How would I know?"

"Because you came from somewhere around here."

“So did you. You should know where you came from. Go back there.”

“It’s no fun back there. You look interesting. Do you like to have fun?”

“I don’t know you. Please leave me alone.”

“I’m staying. I’m your new best friend. Now, what will we do next?”

*Best friend? No way are you my best friend.* “You’re not my friend. I don’t know you. I don’t want to know you. Go away.”

“Don’t you need a friend? You will if you run away. We need to make plans.”

“Who said we were running away? Why would I go anywhere with someone I don’t know?”

“You said you wanted to run away. Let’s see. We need money. Do you have any?”

“No.”

“I don’t either. That may be a problem. How about food? You do have some food with you?”

“No.”

“No? We’ll starve to death out in this wilderness. Wait. I smell a rabbit. Do you know how to cook a rabbit?”

“Why would I want to cook a rabbit?”

“So we don’t starve. I’ll catch the rabbit and you cook it.”

“This is stupid. I’m going back to my house.” It isn’t really my house anymore but whoever this is doesn’t know that.

“You just ran away from there. Why would you go back?”

“To get away from you.”

“That’s not nice. But we haven’t really met yet. I’m Edwina. What’s your name?”

“Aleta.” I stand up expecting this Edwina to grab me any second. I slowly turn around.

## **Chapter 2 Edwina**

A big black dog, a really big black dog is sitting behind me looking at me. I look all around for Edwina. Only the dog is sitting there smiling, looking at me with these red eyes.

Wait a minute, dogs don’t have red eyes. I’ve seen dogs with blue eyes. Most have brown eyes. I’ve never seen or heard of a dog with red eyes.

“Edwina?” I call.

“Yes, I’m Edwina,” says the dog.

I collapse back onto the ground. Dogs can’t talk. Dogs don’t talk. I’ve gone crazy, totally bonkers.

This dog looks at me. I could swear it’s almost laughing at me. Dogs don’t do this. I have got to get away from this thing whatever it is. It may look like a dog but I’m sure I’m seeing things.

Slowly I get up. “Good dog. Be a good dog and stay there. I’m leaving now. You stay there.”

The dog’s smile fades. It watches me intently. I back away catching myself in the brush, afraid of snakes but more afraid of what this dog is going to do. It seems to be staying put. I let my breath out and relax a little glancing behind me to make sure I’m still going back the way I came into this spot.

When I look back, the dog is standing there shaking its head. It seems to sigh. I guess dogs can sigh. It takes a step in my direction. I shriek, turn around and bash my way through the brush.

Thorns and stickers seem to be on every bush. My arms are scratched. My hair is pulled. I keep on going until my foot catches in that stupid barbed wire and I nose dive into the ground.

“Is that house where we’re going?” asks Edwina calmly.

I glare at this dog without a single sticker in her fur. Then it occurs to me. She’s in front of me. How did she get ahead of me?

“You are a mess,” continues Edwina. “I don’t understand why you insisted on running through all those bushes.”

“I don’t see you. Dogs don’t have red eyes. Dogs don’t talk. I’m imagining you. I’m going back to the house and you will be gone.” I get up. My ankle hurts where barbs dug into it. I start limping across the field toward the house.

“You are not imagining me. I am here. I am staying with you. Are you going to get something to eat at that house? I’m partial to chocolate chip cookies myself.”

I don’t answer. Maybe if I ignore this dog, it will go away. Imaginary friends are for little kids, not me. It’s a long walk to the house with a sore ankle and Edwina follows all the way tut, tutting.

I have lost it. The strain of the divorce and Georgia and now Megan moving into my room are too much. My mind has snapped. That has to be the problem or I wouldn’t see some red-eyed, talking dog.

Do I tell Dad? No. He wouldn’t care. He’d tell me to stop making trouble and then tell me to get over it.

Do I tell Mom? No. She would get upset all over again. She would think I have gone bonkers and need to see a counselor or something like that.

What do I do? Keep Edwina a secret. That’s the solution. I’ll pretend she isn’t there. Everything is fine. Everything is normal. I’m sure Megan’s brother Doug won’t mind having her around. He wants a pet dog. I don’t care what Megan thinks.

“All right, Edwina,” I say, “you can’t talk around these people. And I’m not going to answer you.”

The house looks like when I left it. No one seems to have noticed I was gone. Big surprise. It must be close to dinner time. I am getting hungry.

“Hi, Aleta,” calls Doug from where he’s playing in the yard. He’s six and loves trucks. He’s not so bad. If I had a little brother, I’d want him to be like Doug.

“Hey, Doug. What’re you doing?”

“Playing with my trucks.” Doug crashes one into another making crash noises.

“Doug, it’s time for dinner,” calls Georgia out the screen door. “Is Aleta out here? Oh, there you are. Come on in for dinner.”

“What kind of cook is she?” asks Edwina.

I pretend I don’t hear Edwina. I certainly can’t talk to her in front of Doug. He’ll tell everyone I’m talking to some dog.

“Food is food,” continues Edwina. “I’m hungry.”

I follow Doug into the house trying to shut the door in front of Edwina. She makes it inside. Georgia should say something about this big dog in her kitchen any time. She doesn’t.

Doug didn't say anything about Edwina even when she was talking right next to him. Now Georgia doesn't seem to notice her. Maybe no one can see or hear this dog but me. That makes me nervous. I must be crazy.

Megan opens the screen door and comes in. She bumps into Edwina. "Move, Aleta. I want to come in."

I'm not in the way but I move. Edwina moves. Megan comes in and goes the other way around the table. Maybe I'm not crazy. Maybe Edwina is for real. Megan did run into her.

During dinner Dad announces we will watch a movie after washing dishes. This isn't news. We do this every Friday night. Megan and I are to wash and dry the dishes.

"You will share with me?" says Edwina.

I look over at Edwina. How am I supposed to sneak food off the table for her? I start cutting my hamburger patty in half and pretend my knife slips. Half of it shoots off my plate and onto the floor.

Except it doesn't fall on the floor. Edwina is a good catch. "Not bad."

"Pick it up and throw it away," says Georgia.

I get up and pretend to pick up something off the floor and throw it in the trash can. Then I get another piece of meat to put on my plate. Megan is watching me with this smirk. She mouths "Clumsy" at me. I glare back.

I eat dinner leaving the other half of the first piece on my plate. I watch but Megan doesn't take her eyes off me. I move the piece to the side of my plate. I take a drink of milk, set the glass down, Megan looks down at her plate a moment, and I pick up the piece and slip it to Edwina. It disappears.

There must be a better way. Maybe Edwina will eat leftovers. Doug and the twins will leave food on their plates. Well, Doug will. The twins seem to leave it on the floor. They look to be about four. Edwina notices the flying food and slips around to a place behind the source. It starts disappearing before it hits the floor.

Edwina will be a real help. Georgia was trying to get the food off the floor but had given up. Megan and I would be cleaning it up before doing dishes. I for one won't miss that chore.

I get Megan to wash tonight. She thinks I will be stuck cleaning the floor. I take my time clearing the table as Edwina finishes off the leftovers. For once I'm glad Dad never bought a dishwasher.

After dinner Dad gets everyone into the front room and sitting down to watch the weekly movie he has picked out. This is usually boring. Movies Doug can and wants to watch are too babyish for me. My favorite kinds of movies are boring to Doug. Georgia likes mushy movies. The rest of us hate those. Now, with the twins, the movies will probably get really childish.

Dad's movie was a superhero type. Colorful and action packed the twins were glued to the screen even though they didn't know what was going on. Doug likes any movie with lots of car chases. The superhero was cute for a change. And he had a girlfriend. It lasted until bedtime.

In my room I look in my dresser drawer for pajamas. I'd forgotten about this mess. I start with the bottom drawer folding and arranging my clothes. I'm to the top drawer when Megan wanders in.

"You were in my dresser drawers," I say to Megan.

Megan ignores me. *Twerp*. I finish folding and arranging my clothes. Nothing seems to be missing. I decide to pack all my things and take them home with me on Sunday.

Lying in bed I decide to not take all my clothes home. Megan is trying to drive me out of my room. This is my room and she can't chase me out of it. I start thinking about Edwina wondering where she went during the movie. I know she's not a dog, but what is she? Is she a friend? And what about that question about whether I like to have fun? It's a long time before I fall asleep.

### **Chapter 3 Edwina Is Invisible**

Megan is up, dressed and downstairs by the time I wake up Saturday morning. I get up. Her things are there. I look out the door and don't see anyone.

I don't steal. It's not right. My Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Grier, makes a big deal about lying and stealing. Megan should start listening to her.

So I open one dresser drawer and take half the things out. These go into another drawer. Half the contents of that drawer go into the third drawer. Half those contents go back in the first drawer. I go down for breakfast.

I'm the last one in the kitchen. Dad has finished and is going out the door. "Morning, Honey," he says. "I'll be working on the tractor if you want to come down and see me."

"Morning, Dad." Working on the tractor means dirty, oily rags and tools. I think I'll skip that.

The twins are finished eating and making a mess with the rest of their cereal. Georgia grabs their bowls telling them to stop doing this. She sets the dishes on the sink. I wonder if Edwina likes cereal.

Megan finishes, washes her bowl and takes off out the door. "I'm going to talk to Mrs. Johnston."

"Wait," calls Georgia. "Why don't you and Aleta go together?"

Megan disappears without answering. She doesn't want me along. I wouldn't mind going. Mrs. Johnston makes great cookies especially chocolate chip. Maybe I'll go to see her too. Edwina might like some cookies.

Where is Edwina? I haven't seen her this morning. Maybe she got bored and left. I'm relieved and disappointed. It was kind of fun having her around.

After breakfast I decide I will walk down to talk to Mrs. Johnston. I can call Mandy on the way. My phone isn't in my pocket. I turn around and go back upstairs. It isn't in my back pack. It wasn't in Megan's drawers. Where is my phone?

I had my phone in my pocket when I met Dad last night. That means it was in my pocket when I got here. That's the last time I remember having my phone. Did it fall out of my pocket back in the bushes?

Mom and Dad won't get me another phone for a long time. They told me this one was expensive and I better take care of it. I've got to have my phone so I have to go look for it.

The way across the yard is easy to see. The phone isn't on the ground anywhere along my path. I can see where I went across the fence and into the bushes. I still don't see the phone so I will have to go through the bushes again.

Shuddering and watching for snakes and spiders I start back through the bushes. It's surprising how big a path I made last night. At least it's easy to follow but all the plants make it hard to look for my phone.

The path goes a long way into the brush. It must be the wrong path. I almost stop and turn around but think I'll go a little further. There's the broken Fluttershy figurine. Georgia's already forgotten about it. Nothing happened to Megan for stealing and breaking it.

Megan wanted the figurine so badly. She can have it. I pick up the broken pieces and shove them into a pocket.

Where can the phone be? I start looking around. I don't see it.

"Why are we back here? Have you decided to run away again?" asks Edwina.

I jump. "Hey, Edwina, where have you been? I thought you'd gotten bored with me and left."

"No. I went looking around last night."

"I lost my phone. I was hoping it was around here but I don't see it."

"What's it look like?"

"It's plastic about so big." I show Edwina with my hands. "It's purple with sparkles. Oh, dogs can't see color."

"I see colors just fine."

"You do?"

"Is that it over there?" Edwina points with her nose.

My phone is under some leaves. It's dusty but looks okay. I flip it open. The screen lights up. There's no signal here in the bushes but the phone still works even after being out all night.

"Thanks, Edwina. Let's go back to the house. Have you had breakfast yet?"

"I ate at a restaurant this morning."

This didn't sound like a subject I wanted to know more about. A big invisible dog in a restaurant full of people with plates full of food. Maybe I better walk back to the house. It's still early enough to visit Mrs. Johnston to get some cookies.

The bushes seem thicker on the way back with more thorny branches sticking over my trail. My arms get a new coating of scratches. My jeans keep catching. The thorns sound like a zipper unzipping against the denim as I push on past them.

Having Edwina along makes me feel safer. I look back to see her as she hasn't said anything for a long while. She isn't there.

I half turn trying to see further back along the trail I opened through the brambles. Edwina is not there. The barbed wire slips over my foot trapping it, digging barbs into my ankle as I again pitch face down into the grass of Dad's field for the second time in two days.

"Do you always do this?" asks Edwina.

"How did you get ahead of me?" I demand as I untangle my foot from the barbed wire. My ankle hurts where the barbs dug in and a little over that.

"It's something I can do."

Cautiously I stand up. My ankle sends shooting pains up my leg when I put weight on it. The house looks far away now. I take out my phone but there is still no signal. I will have to walk to the house.

"It's too bad you're not a horse Edwina. I could ride you up to the house." Step by mincing step I inch my way toward the house. My ankle slowly starts working again but stays sore.

"Will you play with me?" asks Doug when I get close to the porch.

"What are you doing?"

"Making a road with my trucks. Will you help?"

"Later."

Doug's smile vanishes. He looks lost as he turns back to his trucks.

"I fell down and need to clean up. Then I'll come back out." Walking to Mrs. Johnston's is not possible now.

Doug's face lights up. "How'd you fall down?"

"She's clumsy," says Megan coming out of the house onto the porch munching on a cookie and looking me over. I seethe. "Stupid too. Fell into some brambles? You should be more careful."

I start to answer but don't. Dad will be mad at me if I say anything. *It's fine if she does but not me. I should know better. She's my age. Shouldn't she know better?*

I start up the porch steps. Megan doesn't move.

"Please move," I say.

Megan looks at me and laughs. Edwina slides by me. Suddenly Megan bounces down the steps past me on her butt!

"You did that on purpose! Mom! Aleta pushed me off the porch."

Georgia comes to the door. "What's going on here? Aleta, what happened to you?"

"I fell down in some bushes. I want to go in and clean up."

"Yes, go do that." Georgia moves over holding the door for me. "What were you yelling about, Megan?"

I close the bathroom door, lean against it and laugh quietly. The look on Megan's face as she bounced down the stairs was amazing. She deserved every bounce.

Edwina pushed her off the porch. I saw her do it. Megan didn't see Edwina and accused me. That opens possibilities.

"You're for real for sure," I say to Edwina. "I can see and hear you but other people can't."

"You are a little slow but you are catching on."

"Thanks for getting Megan to move. We'll have to watch. She's going to be mad and try to get us back."

"Life just got interesting. This may be fun and I was so bored."

That doesn't sound good. What else is Edwina planning?

After cleaning up, I take the figurine up to set on Megan's dresser then go back outside to play with Doug. Mom would be upset about her flower bed but she doesn't come here anymore. I shrug. Doug isn't digging up the roses or peonies.

"Where is the road going?"

"That's here," said Doug pointing toward the porch where the flower bed begins. "That's town." Doug points the other way.

"What do I do?"

"You know Megan's mad at us?"

"At me. Yes, I know."

"She looked so funny I laughed. Ma didn't believe you pushed her. She got mad at me too."

“Let her be mad. What do I do?”

Soon Doug and I are busy building his road. We finish in time for lunch. I look around for Edwina and realize she has been gone for a while. She’ll show up for lunch, I think. She seems to like food.

Edwina may want me to feed her at the table like I did last night. We were lucky last night but Megan will really be watching today. How am I going to feed Edwina without her noticing? I’ll have to sneak some food after lunch for Edwina. I’ll have to be careful. Georgia told Dad I’m getting fat.

One thing is certain. I tell no one, not even Mandy, about Edwina. She is my secret. If anyone finds out, I’ll never live it down.

Doug and I go in to get lunch. It’s the usual tuna sandwich. Edwina still isn’t around. I begin to get uneasy. She’s up to something I don’t want to know about.

“Who’s digging holes in the front yard?” roars Dad coming in the door. “Doug, you know not to dig in the front yard!”

“Aleta and I were in the back yard,” whimpers Doug sliding over behind me.

“Aleta?”

“We were building a road along the roses and peonies.”

“Where’re Megan and the twins?”

“We haven’t seen them.”

“I called them for lunch,” said Georgia. “I can’t believe Megan would dig up the yard. She hates to get dirty. The twins are a bit young.”

“Someone dug up the yard. Where are they?”

Megan opens the screen door to let the twins in. The two have muddy hands.

“Where were you?” demands Dad.

Megan glares at him and shuts the door. She takes the twins out the other door toward the bathroom without saying a word. Dad starts to follow them.

“Wait,” says Georgia. “I’ll go.”

Dad paces the kitchen. He is furious. I know Edwina dug those holes, just know it. I want to get out of the kitchen but want to hear what will happen to Megan. She and the twins will take the blame. I feel sorry for the twins.

Doug pulls at my hand. “Let’s go outside.”

“We can sit on the porch step.” That will be out of the kitchen but I can still hear. Edwina shows up as soon as we sit down. Her front paws still have a little dirt on them.

“Time for lunch,” remarks Edwina. “I’m starving. What is it? Tuna? Not my favorite but I’m not picky.”

I don’t answer. Doug sits there staring off across the yard. Sure enough he hasn’t heard a thing. I break off a bite of my sandwich and slip it to the side away from Doug.

“Not too bad. You’ll have to get more food or both of us will be hungry.”

I look at Doug. He’s still not paying attention so I break off a bigger piece of my sandwich for Edwina.

“We did not dig holes in the front yard!” Megan is screaming in the kitchen. “The twins found a mud hole on the side of the house where the hose is.”

I look pointedly at Edwina’s paws. She seems to smile.

“Aleta and Doug were in the back yard. You say you and the twins were on the side of the house. Someone dug those holes and it wasn’t me!”

“It wasn’t us.”

"I still think you left the twins to play in the mud and dug those holes to get Aleta and Doug in trouble."

"Are you calling my daughter a liar?"

"She lied last night about Aleta's figurine. Why wouldn't she lie now?"

"I'm not lying!"

"Paul, you've made the twins cry. Let's leave this until later. Here's a sandwich."

Dad didn't have the sandwich when he flung open the door whomping Doug who yelped and dashed off the porch. I hugged the side of the porch as Dad stomped by.

"Your father has quite a temper, doesn't he?" remarks Edwina. "He didn't take the sandwich. Maybe you can get it for us?"

"Are you all right, Doug? Come on back on the porch now."

"Is he gone?"

"Did you finish your sandwich?"

"I dropped it. There it is on the porch."

"I'll go get us another one." I pick up the dropped half sandwich and place it on the step by where I was sitting and go into the house.

"Doug dropped his sandwich. May we have another one?"

"Take that one," snaps Georgia not turning around. I can hear Megan crying as I take the sandwich and go back outside.

"Ma, we didn't dig those holes," sobs Megan. "We weren't in the front yard. Why can't we move away from here?"

"Paul's a good man. This is a good place to live."

"I don't like him. We did fine without him."

"No, we didn't. We almost starved. We lived in a dump."

"We did fine. We were happy without him around, just the three of us and the foster kids."

"Let's get lunch for the twins."

For once I agree with Megan. Mom, Dad and I were happy before the divorce. If they leave, maybe Dad will remember that. I want to live here again, just the three of us.

I hand Doug half a sandwich. I pick up his dropped half. It was on the porch, not dirty really. Edwina is a dog. I hand it to her.

"That's great. Hand me the half dropped in the dirt."

"It-" I stop. Doug looks up at me. "It's nice out here in the sunshine. What will we do after lunch?"

"I'm tired."

"Are you going to take a nap?"

"Will you take a nap too?"

"I have a book to read." Really I'll go down out of sight and text Mandy and play some computer games on my phone. I would go to my room but Megan is probably in my room.

Doug sighs, gets up and goes into the house.

"You're really going to do something as boring as read a book?" asks Edwina.

"Books aren't boring."

"I'd rather go do something."

"Like dig another hole?"

"The digging is fun. Getting dirt out of my paws isn't. It did get everyone riled up."

"Who are you talking to, Aleta?" asked Georgia coming out the door.

“Myself. Doug went in for a nap and I was wondering what to do now.”

“You and Megan could play a game up in your room.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Megan’s a nice girl. You don’t give her a chance.”

I get up shrugging my shoulders and walk off scowling. I know that’s rude but I don’t care. Georgia is trying to get me to like her. I don’t like her. I don’t want to like her. I want her to take her brats, well, Doug’s okay, and move away, leave my Dad alone.

Megan is a liar and a thief. She’s not a nice girl. I don’t like her. I don’t want to share a room with her. I am definitely not going to play games with her.

“Let’s go for a walk,” I say to Edwina relieved my ankle is feeling okay again.

## **Chapter 4 Mrs. Johnston’s Cookies**

“Can we have some of those cookies Megan was eating?”

“Georgia doesn’t bake cookies. Mrs. Johnston does. We can walk to her house. It’s not far.”

“They smelled like chocolate chip.”

“She makes those a lot.”

“What’s the deal with Georgia, Megan and the rest here?”

I fill Edwina in on the divorce, moving to town and Dad taking up with Georgia. She listens then walks silently along beside me. I hate remembering all of it and feel bad. I want to scream but don’t dare.

“You want things back the way they were before the divorce?” asks Edwina finally.

“It won’t happen.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

“Things were simple then. I liked living out here. My Mom liked living out here. Town is okay but not nice like here.”

“So ask your Mom to move to the country.”

“She can’t afford it. She works all the time but doesn’t make much money.”

“You come here. Isn’t that enough?”

“But I’m not wanted here. Dad has Georgia and her kids. He doesn’t need me any more. He doesn’t even like me any more.”

“Then why does he bring you out here?”

“Because the judge told him to.”

“Are you sure? Have you asked him?”

“I can’t do that. He’d lie. There’s Mrs. Johnston’s house.”

I wipe my eyes and practice a smile. Edwina and I walk up to the door. I knock.

“Hello, Aleta. This must be my day for visitors. Megan was here earlier.”

“I had something else I had to do. I wanted to visit while I was here for the weekend.”

“Come on in.” Mrs. Johnston opens the door wider and moves aside so I can walk in. Edwina beats me in. Mrs. Johnston shakes her skirt frowning a little. “That felt like a tail going by. It must have been a bit of wind because you don’t have a dog.”

“Your kitchen smells wonderful.”

“I’ve been baking chocolate chip cookies. Would you like some?”

“Yes, please.”

Edwina is already in the kitchen. Cookie crumbs are on her whiskers. I hope Mrs. Johnston won't notice some cookies are missing. At least the whole plate isn't empty.

"I thought there were more cookies on this plate. Maybe Megan took more than I thought. Still, there are plenty left."

"They're delicious," says Edwina. "She bakes a spectacular chocolate chip cookie."

Mrs. Johnston gets me a glass of milk. I sit down and take a cookie to nibble on. She asks me about school.

I tell Mrs. Johnston about my classes, my friends and how my Mom is. She misses seeing Mom and wishes she would come and visit. I promise to tell Mom.

Edwina keeps moving closer until her head is in my lap. I wonder if dog drool is invisible too. I sneak her a cookie. Now there is dog drool on my hand. Ich. We will have to get this straightened out after we leave. No more dog drool on my hands or clothes no matter what the food is.

Later we head back to the farm. I feel almost good after several cookies and a glass of milk. Edwina agrees to limit the dog drool factor as long as I do feed her, especially Mrs. Johnston's cookies. We will visit her again next weekend.

Dad is waiting for me in the kitchen when we get back.

"Where have you been?" demands Dad.

"I walked over to see Mrs. Johnston."

"Why didn't you tell Georgia where you were going?"

"She wasn't around."

"After this, you go looking for her or for me. You don't go off without telling us where you are going."

"Whatever."

"Why were you in Megan's dresser drawers?"

"She was in mine. She went through all my things."

"You know better than to get into someone else's things without permission."

"What about Megan?"

"I'm not talking to Megan right now. I'm talking to you. You are to stay out of her things. Do you understand?"

"I get it." *Yeah, I get it. I'm to be little Miss Perfect. Megan can do whatever she wants. She's important to you. I'm not.*

"Megan is sharing your room. You stay on your side of the room."

I shrug. I love Dad. I liked being his little girl. I want to be his little girl again. He doesn't care about me any more. I want him to care again. I'm crying on the inside but he can't see that and, if he's too dumb to figure it out, I won't tell him. I set my mouth to hold all the protests and anger and misery inside.

That night I go up to bed and find the My Pony poster torn in half with the figurine stabbed through it. I gather it up and push it into the wastebasket wishing it were Dad's face. My drawers are open. My clothes are tossed around in the drawers and across the bed. I pick them up, fold them and put them back where they go.

Above my bed is my very favorite poster. One corner has been torn down partly across it. I get up on my bed to smooth it over.

My grandparents gave me this poster of fairies when I was little. The beautiful Fairy Queen is in the area now torn. Around her are the fairies of her court.

I look over toward the third picture on my walls. The framed picture of Jesus isn't touched. Maybe Megan thought she better not touch a picture of Jesus. Maybe she didn't toss it on the floor because it is in a frame.

Biting back tears I start carefully working the corners of my fairy poster off the wall. Each fairy has a name by it. I look at each one as I take the poster loose. Down in the lower corner the poster is darker. A black fairy sits there eating. It has red eyes. Pooka is the name by it.

My Grandnana told me the fairies protect anyone who truly believes in them. My friends now all laugh at that saying there are no fairies. I keep quiet trying to keep believing. They couldn't protect their poster, so how can they protect anyone else? But this was only a picture on a piece of paper.

Megan comes in the door with a smirk on her face. She waits a moment. I guess she thinks I will say something. I don't. I carefully roll up my fairy poster and put it by my back pack. Then I get my pajamas and go into the bathroom.

I am so mad my fists are clenched, my teeth are grinding, my chest hurts. *I hate you. I want to tear your hair out. I want to scratch that smirk off your face.*

After a time my fists unclench. The skin is broken where my nails stabbed my hands. I want to cry, to sob out loud and try to fill the emptiness inside. But Megan will hear. I put my pajamas on and wash my face. The anger is fading but my muscles in my chest are still so tight I have trouble breathing. My stomach is cold and empty. It is a long time before I can go to sleep.

Sunday morning I pack my things in my back pack. I leave a few clothes in my drawers but nothing else. I get ready for church and go downstairs.

Breakfast is cold cereal. The twins are making a mess keeping Georgia busy. Megan goes by behind me trying to make me spill my bowl on my clothes. I didn't put any milk on the cereal so it is now food for Edwina. Except Edwina isn't there to clean it up. Georgia tells me not to bother as she has to clean up after the twins.

"Stop it, Megan," says Doug. "You made me spill my cereal. My shirt has milk on it."

"I did not."

"Did so."

"Did not."

"That's enough. Megan, sit down. Eat your breakfast. Doug, finish yours then go change your shirt."

Megan smirks at me. I ignore her. Georgia looks up in time to see the smirk.

"That is enough from you. Wipe that smirk off your face. I know you pushed Aleta and Doug. We have to get to church and don't have time for this."

"I didn't push them."

"Don't lie to me especially on Sunday. Eat your breakfast. Not another word."

Megan starts eating looking up between bites to glare at Doug and me. I hope Edwina will get back soon. We will have to do some planning for next weekend.

Edwina is sitting out in the front yard when I go out to get in the van. I'm lugging my back pack bulging with the clothes and other things from my room. I left the bare minimum and will bring duplicates of those next weekend. Megan will have the room to herself all week.

"Where are we going?" asks Edwina.

"Church," I whisper. Doug looks at me. "Hey, Dad, is Mom still picking me up at church?" I say in a normal voice.

“As far as I know.”

“I’ll meet you in town,” says Edwina then gets up and trots off down the road. I notice she stays on the edge of the road. She may be invisible but cars don’t need to see her to flatten her.

“Move that thing away from me,” gripes Megan when I set my back pack down near my seat in the van.

“It’s over as far as I can get it.”

Megan shoves the pack over until it traps my legs against the wall. “Stop it! I need room for my feet.”

“Put them on top of it. What’ve you got in there anyway? Take your whole room?”

“Almost. I left the figurine you broke and the poster you tore up.”

“Girls, can’t you stop for Sunday? Aleta, what’s that about a poster?” asks Georgia.

“First my new My Pony Fluttershy gets broken. Then the My Pony poster I had on the wall gets torn in half.” *As if you care*, I add to myself.

“I saw Megan take that poster off the wall. One corner got torn a little. You are exaggerating.”

“I saw that when I rolled it up, put a rubber band around it and left it on my bed to take with me today. I put it in the wastebasket after finding it torn in half and tossed on my bed along with a bunch of my clothes last night.”

“Megan, you will buy her a new poster and a figurine out of your allowance money. You are to stay out of her things. She is to stay out of yours.”

Megan sits back looking daggers at me. I know Edwina and I need plans for next weekend. Otherwise I’m in trouble.

## Chapter 5 Trouble Brewing

When we get to the church, I move my back pack to Mom’s car. No way am I going to leave it where Megan can get to it easily. Edwina meets me by Mom’s car.

“What do we do here?”

“I go to Sunday School and then church. You would probably be bored. Megan is really mad at me now. Georgia told her she is buying me a new figurine and poster out of her allowance money. We’ll need to make plans this week for next weekend.”

“What happens between now and then?”

“I have school during the day.”

“Does everyone go to school?”

“Adults don’t. All the kids go.”

“Who are you talking to?” asks Doug looking all around as he walks up.

“Myself.”

“They want you to hurry up.”

“Let’s go.” I shut the car door as Doug looks at me with a strange expression on his face. I get the impression he doesn’t believe me. I will have to be more careful talking to Edwina. I hope she doesn’t decide to follow me to school.

“What took so long?” asks Dad.

“It was big and heavy.”

“You can leave more clothes to wear at the farm.”

I shrug. Dad has obviously not been listening. I’m not important enough to pay attention to.

Mom hugs me at the church door. I guess she misses having me around when I'm at Dad's. I don't see why. I'm no prize. Dad doesn't want me so why should she?

Edwina follows me inside and down the hall to the Sunday school room. I take a far seat so Edwina has room to sit down next to my chair. She should lie down and sleep through the lesson.

"Who are all these children? Are they friends of yours? Do they like to have fun?"

"Ssh," I whisper. "I can't talk to you in here."

"Well I can talk to you."

"Good morning, class," says Mrs. Grier. "I'm glad to see you."

"Good morning," answers the class.

Mrs. Grier is an old lady and very old fashioned. Being in her class is like being in an old time school class with formal manners and the class answering all together. She has us memorize a new Bible verse every week.

"Today we're having a lesson from Psalms 121."

The class listens as Mrs. Grier reads the psalm. Then we start memorizing each verse and talking about each one. Edwina listens. She makes comments to me now and then. I don't answer.

When class ends, Mrs. Grier tells us she is looking forward to seeing us the next Sunday. We will do another psalm.

"You do this every Sunday?" asks Edwina as we walk toward the church.

"Almost," I whisper.

"What's next?"

A crowd of people surround us so I keep quiet. Edwina is next to the wall so no one runs into her. I wonder what someone would think after colliding with a big invisible dog.

Once we get in the church I bend over as though to adjust my shoe. "Edwina, sit near the wall," I whisper. "No one should run into you there."

"Whisper, whisper, why don't you speak up?"

I ignore this question and go to sit down next to Mom. She hasn't noticed anything. Doug is turned around watching me. He has a frown on his face and keeps looking over where Edwina was and I had stopped.

The problem with Doug is how old he is. He's six and probably can't keep a secret. He looks at everything and spots anything odd immediately. He is very suspicious about me after catching me talking to Edwina by Mom's car. I'm hoping he will forget about it by next weekend. He does forget things quickly because he gets busy with something else.

By the end of the service, Edwina is lying down sleeping. I'm jealous. The minister keeps talking and talking today about Job. God tests us, he tells us. Well, if Megan is a test, I'm flunking and I don't care. I start to fall asleep but Mom pokes me until I straighten up.

After church, Dad, Georgia, Megan, Doug and the twins get in the van and leave. Mom and I go to her car. Edwina follows. I open the rear door pretending to shift my back pack but let Edwina get in. Then I get in the front seat.

"You brought a lot of stuff home," says Mom.

"Megan had to move into my room and there wasn't room for lots of stuff."

"Where did the twins come from?"

"They're foster kids. They have Megan's old room."

“Your Dad will have to build more bedrooms if Georgia keeps getting foster kids.”

“Maybe.”

“Did you have a good weekend?”

“It was okay. My posters got torn. Can you help me fix the fairy one?”

“We’ll take a look at it when we get home. Is all your homework done?”

“Yes.”

“I got a letter saying you haven’t turned in some assignments. Your math teacher wants me to come to school for a conference.”

I stare out the window. Mom is strict about homework. This could be trouble.

“Are you sure you have all your homework done?”

“I forgot to bring my math book home. I can do the worksheet as soon as I get to school tomorrow.”

Mom sighs. I’m in big trouble. I’ll be in bigger trouble after she talks to Mr. Worth. I shift in my seat. Tut, tutting comes from in the back seat. That’s all I need, Edwina on my case too.

“We can’t afford to have internet at home,” says Mom. “You know that. The assignments are listed online but I can’t take work time to look them up. You know that too. What do you suggest?”

I sink down in my seat staring hard out the window. It’s always seemed strange to me how Mom can make me feel so bad without yelling or even raising her voice. Dad was the one who yelled.

When we get home, Mom has me call Mandy. Mandy has her math book and the worksheet. Mom watches as I write out the problems and thank Mandy. After saying good-bye, I hand Mom my phone and sit down to work on the problems. Edwina sits down nearby watching me.

The problems aren’t that hard. I get them done soon. Mom looks them over then has me put them in my book bag to take to school.

“Can I have my phone back now?”

“It’s may I and the answer is no. You can read a book or join me in the yard. I want to work in the flower beds.”

I didn’t really expect to get my phone back. Mom is mad at me and this is our agreed upon punishment. I’m glad she isn’t going on and on about how I’ve disappointed her. I guess she thinks I know that already.

“Will you look at my fairy poster? Please?”

“Go get it. I’ll get the tape.”

Mom is good at fixing things. She puts the tear back together again and has me hold it as she tapes it together. When I turn it over, I can hardly see where the tear is.

“Thanks, Mom. I’ll put it up in my room here.”

“How did it get torn?”

“Megan got mad at me.”

Mom’s mouth goes straight. I’m glad she’s not mad at me. “I’ll get some special stuff to put it up with tomorrow. Just put it in your room for now. I’m going outside.”

Edwina and I go out into the back yard. I flop down on the porch step. I’m bored and can’t think of anything I want to do except call Mandy or play a game on my phone.

“Why didn’t you do your homework?” asks Edwina.

“Not you too.” I look around but Mom’s in the front yard.

“I just want to know why you didn’t do something so simple and stay out of trouble.”

"I didn't want to do it. School's a waste. Nobody cares about my grades or me."

"Your mother seems to. Why don't you?"

"Mom will get over it."

"Mothers don't get over being disappointed in their children."

"Is yours disappointed in you?"

"Not that I know of."

"Where is your mother?"

"Far away."

"I know you're not really a dog. I've had a dog before and he wasn't anything like you. What are you?"

Edwina smiles. "I'm your new best friend, remember?"

"So you say. I have to go to school tomorrow. What are you going to do?"

"I'll go to school with you. I've never been to school. It should be fun."

I laugh. "School isn't fun. School is work, work, work and more work. Write sentences in one class. Answer questions in another class. Work math problems. Nothing but boring work."

"You do the work and I'll have the fun."

Edwina laughs to herself. I start to get worried. Having an invisible dog at school doesn't sound like a good idea to me.

"You know I can't talk to you at school?"

"Why not?"

"Because I'm the only one who can hear or see you. Everyone will think I'm nuts."

"That worries you?"

"Yes."

"Why does what they think matter to you? You said no one cares about what you do."

"Just because they don't care about me doesn't mean I don't care what they think."

Edwina shakes her head. "That doesn't make sense to me. So you won't talk to me tomorrow?"

"No."

"No matter what I do, you won't talk to me?"

"I will if no one is around. Maybe I can whisper other times."

"I can still talk to you?"

"Sure. No one else can hear you."

"School has possibilities."

I suddenly feel uneasy. "What possibilities does school have? What are you planning?"

"I'm not planning anything. Will Megan be there?"

"She goes to my old school out by the farm. It was lots better than the one in town. I liked school out there."

"Why don't you go there now?"

"I live in town so I go to the town school."

I have trouble sleeping Sunday night. Nightmares keep waking me up. Every one starts Edwina doing some stunt tripping people, knocking things over, eating people's lunches. I feel terrible when it's finally time to get up.