

John F. Sissons

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American Girls

I was looking forward to a little down time at our vacation cabin. But, my son called to inform me that he was on his way to drop his daughter off. Well, my granddaughter is cute and we get along very well. My son drove up as he spoke to me. Lizzie likes to be carried; she leapt from her father's arms to grab my neck. She kissed my right cheek and giggled, "HI!"

Soon, my phone rang again. This time it was Lyllia, my wife. Her brother and sister-in-law were coming to attend a conference. Lyllia's brother has three girls. Mary Beth is a twelve-year-old redhead with blue eyes. Sara is a nine year old with brown hair, bright dark blue eyes, and my official goddaughter. Sally is a swaggering, freckled, six year old blonde who really wishes that she was the oldest of the three girls.

My doorbell rang as I hung up. I opened the door and received a bit of a shock. Betty, a brassy yellow headed green eyed ten-year-old, was standing at my door. I held the door for the skinniest kid on Earth and her valise. Almost immediately I received a text, "Expect Betty."

I am up at 7 on Saturday to read my newspaper. The other three girls did not show up last night. At 9 a car drives into my driveway. I heard running footsteps before banging on my front door ensues. The girls run up to me, hand in hand. "Uncle Donny, we want to go to Blockbuster." I tease. "What on Earth do you want there?" Sara has a way of looking like she is pouting when she asks a big favor. "We want a movie." Mary Beth will lead them to the kid's movies. All I will have to do is keep Sally from absconding with candy. "Ok. Get in the car. Sara, could you please wake up Betty?" Sara lets out a "Wooot! Betty is here? Is she with Aunt

Lyllia?” I feel confused. “No, she should be in the guest bedroom.” Mary Beth looks confused. “I just put our luggage on the big bed. I did not see Betty.” Damn, damn, damn. We all march into the guest bedroom. “Mary Beth, look under the blankets. Betty, are you in here?” A moment later, a triumphant Sara pulls her second cousin out from under both the bedclothes and the luggage by her feet. Mary Beth just stares.

Sara pulls Betty onto the floor with a THUD! I suppose it is like an ant falling. Since she can't weigh anything, she can't hurt anything when she lands. Betty bounces up to hug Sara. I laugh. “Ok, people, who is going to Blockbuster with Sara and Lizzie?”

The girls have chosen two cartoon monsters and a Mary Beth selection. Sally looks up at me. My face is reflected in her light blue eyes. “I want that.” She points to a thirty dollar doll. I laugh. “Kid, I want a trip to Europe first.” Mary Beth snorts. “He means ‘no,’ shortness.” Sally spins around to yell at her big sister. I intercept the retort so that there will not be a verbal bloodbath. “Sally, we can go to the dollar store for a toy later.” Sally holds her tongue. We go home to watch movies.

Later I hear Betty whisper to Sara, “Make him take us to a restaurant.” Sara turns to me, “Betty is hungry. She wants to go to a restaurant.” I make a quick calculation. Five kids would be one hundred dollars if I do not eat. I say, “We should walk to the sandwich shop and then to the dollar store for a toy.” I add, “Ok, ladies, let's go.”

The sidewalks in my subdivision failed a long time ago. Then the next door neighbor girl went to university. She is now the City Engineer. The best part is that our sidewalks were repaired the month she was promoted. Sally walks between me and the stroller; I have to remember not to kick her. Everyone stops to look at a dead squirrel in the street. The ants have

got it already. Sally pokes it with a stick while Mary Beth admonishes with a blue painted index fingernail. “Sally! Don’t you dare touch that! You will never wash your hands enough to get the stink off!” I keep the deceased, flattened, squirrel in view for Lizzie. She is straining her tiny neck to see it.

We shuffle into the sandwich shop at noon. The girls line up to place their orders. I lean over the blue stroller, “Lizzie, do you want a sandwich?” Lizzie begins to think while looking up at me with steel gray eyes flecked with green. I point to the colorful lunch sacks: Lizzie nods. The girls head for a big table. Sally asks, “Uncle Donny, where is the dollar store?” I point. “It is two doors down. Turn left when we leave the front door.” Sara tugs on my sleeve. “Why are we going there?” I shrug. “I promised Sally a visit. She wanted an expensive toy at Blockbuster, but the toys here are a dollar each.” Later, we stream in to the dollar store; I follow Sally with the stroller. Mary Beth sees a big bright green sign. “All shoes five dollars per pair!”

When we leave, I look at Sally. I need to frisk her. “Sally, I have to pay for that slingshot.” Sally tries to look innocent. “I’m sorry.” I lecture. “Sally, I live here. These people see me walk here every day. You cannot forget to pay.” Sally begins to cry. “Sally, just pay for it.”

When we walk into my house Mary Beth makes a report. “Aunt Lyllia, we ate at that sandwich place and Uncle Donny bought us all shoes.” Lyllia looks at me when Sally runs inside. “Uncle Donny, where is my slingshot?” I pull it out of the box holding her sandals. Lyllia turns to Sally in surprise. “He bought you a slingshot?” Sally waves the purple plastic toy over her head, twirling it with both hands. “Yep, and we are going to Europe!”