



Enough!

By Gayle Roper

Excerpt provided courtesy of www.gayleroper.com

Chapter 1

“Mom, we’re going to be late! We’re always late. It’s embarrassing.” PJ stood patiently at the front door, arms crossed over his chest. He looked like a bouncer having a bad night at the club.

Molly clutched her robe tightly and grabbed her husband Pete’s jacket from the closet. She slid it over her robe, promising herself that some morning when she drove one of her children to school, she’d wear clothes like real people did. Such phenomena must occur somewhere besides commercials.

“Mom!” Amie came bursting down the hall. “Where’s my white blouse, the one with the bow at the neck? I have to wear it today because we’re singing for the assembly.”

Molly sighed. Senior Singers had proved to be one of those two-edged honors a mother could live without.

“I haven’t seen that blouse since you wore it last. Why not wear the pleated one?”

“Are you kidding?” Amie’s expression showed clearly what she thought of her pleated blouse. “Everyone’s wearing bows. Everyone.”

“Mom!” PJ rattled the doorknob pointedly.

Jordan loped past on his way to the breakfast table and his usual three bowls of cereal.

“Mom, did you make me two sandwiches for lunch?” he asked. “I never get enough to eat anymore. I think you’re trying to starve me.”

“Butt out, Brace Face,” said Amie with her usual elegance. “I’m talking to Mom.”

Jordan assumed a look of wounded surprise. “Mom only talks to you these days? I think not.”

As Amie snarled, PJ rattled, and Jordan pontificated, the phone rang. Everyone looked at Molly.

“Other people can pick up the phone too, you know,” she said. “Get it, Jordan. You’re standing right beside it.”

“But it’s never for me,” he said, then grabbed the phone and grunted into the receiver. How, Molly wondered, had he lived with a phone-o-phile like Amie all these years and still not learned the basics of phone etiquette?

“Hey, Dad,” Jordan bellowed. “It’s Pop-pop for you!”

Pete hurried down the hall from the bedroom looking unhappy. Calls from his father before work always meant it would be a bad day.

“Is wearing my jacket over your bathrobe a new style statement?” he asked Molly on his way past. “And if you’re leaving, is my lunch in the refrigerator?”

Molly’s shoulders sagged and she held her forehead. She hated Monday mornings. “I never got to your lunch, Pete. I’m sorry.”

His muffled snort told her what he thought of her memory.

She grabbed the loaf of cracked wheat bread and slapped some ham and cheese between the slices, ignoring PJ’s wail of distress.

“Mom, I can’t be late!”

“Another minute won’t make that much difference,” she said as the plastic mustard container squirted yellow water all over the bread.

“Pop,” Pete said, “it’s all settled. Remember?” We agreed a month ago that I’d meet with Farmington Manufacturing and with Arleigh Fabricators to try to get their business. I’ve already met with Farmington successfully, and I’m meeting with Bud Carson from Arleigh today.”

Molly tossed his lunch into his briefcase. When he shut the lid, he would probably bruise the banana, but that was on his head.

“Pop, we can’t change course mid-stream!” In spite of his starched collar and silk tie, Pete looked frayed. He closed his eyes in pain. “Pop, I’ll talk to you at work, okay?”

He hung up and shook his head as if to clear it, looking a lot like Trojan, Molly’s Mom’s Newfoundland, when he came in from the rain. He turned to Molly. “I just remembered.” He grinned at her apologetically, and Molly couldn’t help grinning back.

Even after twenty-one years of marriage, he still had the cutest smile in the world. “I don’t need lunch. Bud Carson is taking me out or I’m taking him out or something. Anyway, no lunch.”

He grabbed his briefcase with the lunch he didn’t need and kissed Molly somewhere in the vicinity of her left eye. “Good-bye, love.”

Molly combed her hair with the fingers of one hand while she hugged him with the other. He climbed into his car and drove off without even a wave.

Do I have time to brush my teeth before PJ pulls the doorknob off?

Sadly she decided not.

“Mom,” Amie shrieked, following Molly out of the house. “My blouse!”

“Stop screeching, Amie. It isn’t ladylike. Wear the pleats.”

“But everyone’s wearing bows!”

“Were you told to wear bows by Miss Hilbert? Don’t clam up on me now. Were you?”

“Mom!” yelled Jordan from the breakfast table. “There’s no more milk!”

“Too bad he can’t sing,” said PJ. “He’s got the lungs of an opera star.”

“Amie, as you go back inside to put on your pleated blouse, tell your brother to try the refrigerator,” Molly said.

Without taking a step, Amie bellowed, “Try the refrigerator, nerd!”

“Okay, dork!” screamed Jordan.

Molly closed her eyes and pretended she didn’t know either child. Then she walked to the car, and her stomach turned over.

PJ was in the driver’s seat.

“Mom! My blouse!” yelled Amie.

“Mom! No milk!” yelled Jordan.

“Mom, come on,” yelled PJ.

“I’m going to change my name,” muttered Molly as she climbed into the car. “Then I won’t have to answer any of you.”

“Don’t let us get to you,” PJ said. “We just like to make you feel guilty.”

“Well, you’re succeeding. And please. Don’t talk. Drive. Concentrate. Jerk like that when you go for your license, and you’ll fail the test. I should be so lucky.”

“Relax. I’m a clever kid,” PJ said. “I can drive and talk at the same time.”

Molly moaned.

“Why are we taking you to school at this awful hour anyway?” she asked. “The janitor probably isn’t even there yet.”

“I have to work out with the weights. Mr. Davenport says I have a good chance of wrestling varsity if I apply myself. So I’m applying.”

Wrestling varsity, another two-edged honor. What joy to watch one’s sixteen year-old first starve himself, then twist himself and some worthy opponent into grotesque knots.

“Does that mean you’ll want to get to school early every day?” What an appalling thought.

“Nope. Only three or four days a week.”

PJ screeched to a halt before the high school. Tenth graders were supposed to feel awed by the privilege of attending, to be overwhelmed by the upperclassmen, and to proceed with all due caution until they’d tested the social waters. PJ never considered such things.

He’s not mine, Molly thought as she watched him stride up the walk. I’m forty-four, and I haven’t a quarter of his confidence. There was a mix-up in the hospital nursery, and some other woman’s got a shy, awkward, late-blooming boy who’s really mine.

She suddenly realized she couldn’t slide across the front seat because of the gear console. She’d have to get out of the car and walk around. Glancing furtively to the right and left, she opened the door, then slid her feet, shod in their furry flipflops, gracefully to the ground. She hugged Pete’s jacket to her chest and made a run for it, her pink robe fluttering beneath the navy jacket.

She was just reaching for the door handle when a deep and definitely masculine voice said, “Allow me, Mrs. Gregory.”

“Mr. Davenport,” she said. “How nice.” She lowered her arm and stood daintily aside as PJ’s coach opened the door for her. She slid in.

“Marvelous boy you have, Mrs. G.” said Mr. Davenport. “He’s a real go-getter. If desire were all it took, he’d be state champion. Besides that, he’s nice. Pleasant. Good standards.” Mr. Davenport nodded approvingly. “All in all, a rare kid these days.”

“Thank you.” Molly smiled with genuine pleasure and hoped her teeth weren’t fuzzy.

Mr. Davenport gallantly slammed the door, shutting six inches of flowing pink robe outside.

“Whoops! Sorry.” He opened the door, and Molly reeled in her robe. The second slam was successful.

As she drove home, Molly told herself she wasn’t embarrassed. So what that Mr. Davenport was Superman, Cary Grant and Tom Cruise all rolled into one. Charm was deceitful and beauty vain. She was worthy of praise in spite of the headache that fretted her brow. She didn’t believe herself for a minute.

Driving down her street, she passed PJ and Amie’s school bus and felt relief that her daughter was gone.

She glanced at her watch. In thirty minutes Jordan’s bur would come and she’d have six and a half whole hours to build herself up for the evening’s onslaught. How did working mothers do it?

Molly hung up Pete’s jacket and went to the kitchen to survey the damage. On her way she collected four dirty glasses from the living room. Her nose told her to search further, and beneath the recliner she found a banana peel. She didn’t even ponder how it found its way there. Some mysteries of life were unsolvable and therefore unworthy of contemplation.

She had just put the peel into the garbage and the glasses in the dishwasher when Amie spoke from behind her. “If we leave now, I’ll still be in time for rehearsal.”

“Amie! You’re on the bus!”

“No, I’m not.”

“But I don’t want to drive to school again.”

“Sure you do. Besides you have to. Will you tie this bow? You do it better than me.”

“Better than I,” Molly corrected automatically. Her hands made a perfect square knot while her mind kicked and screamed. “Where was the blouse?” she asked through clenched teeth.

“In the hamper.” Amie patted her bow. “I ironed it.” With such pride must Columbus have spoken of crossing the Atlantic. “Come on. Let’s go.”

Molly sighed and got Pete’s jacket out again.

“I’ll drive,” Amie said. At eighteen she was an excellent driver, fastidious and cautious.

“No,” said Molly, visions of Mr. Davenport dancing before her. “I’ll drive.”

Amie settled contentedly in the front seat beside Molly, chatting amiably. It pleased Molly to see how mature her daughter could be when she chose. It was as if the girl who lived in the Gregory house ceased to exist when she emerged into the real world. Manners, charm, and a sense of cooperation replaced the tempestuous Amie. It was a wonder the girl wasn't schizophrenic from the constant shifts.

"Thanks, Mom. You are a dear," Amie said as she climbed out of the car. "Now don't forget to hem my new slacks."

On the way home, Molly considered taking her hands off the wheel to knead her tense neck muscles. The car could drive itself home like Old Paint. It certainly knew the way well enough.

At the red light by the supermarket, Molly stared at a group of strikers walking in circles, their signs held high.

Unfair to workers.

No contract/no work.

On strike for better conditions.

We demand respect.

The blast of a horn forced Molly from her pensive study of the last sign, and she lurched forward with a jerk that would have made PJ proud.

Jordan sailed out of the house just as Molly reached the door. She grabbed him and hugged him, kissing him noisily on the cheek, taking advantage of the propitious and all too rare opportunity.

Jordan pulled back quickly and self-consciously. "Hey, lady! That's no way for the maid to treat the son of the house."

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