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## **Hung up with a Happy Family**

Guy came down from the mountain where he'd spent the summer and stayed a week at his ancient cabin across the road from our place in Whitney Valley. He got ready to head south about the time migrating birds did, like he did every year.

He took care of most of his own needs, but he'd seen more than 75 years, and sometimes he needed help. He looked wistfully up at the stovepipe emerging from the his cabin. He said, "I need to take that pipe down so it won't rust away, and I have to cover the hole so rain and snow don't get in. I got this ladder here," he pointed to an old, homemade ladder against the side of his cabin, "but I don't know about climbing up there."

I said, "I'll take care of that before it rains or snows."

The next day, I helped Guy load his possessions into his pickup, and he drove south, toward warmer country. I motorcycled across the meadows, improved ditches and set them up for spring. Laura's mother came to visit.

Next time I came in from working on the meadows, I stopped at Guy's cabin. Dark clouds spread across the western sky toward evening, and a cold breeze warned us of winter. I climbed the ladder to take the stove pipe down. Part way up, the rung under my right foot broke. I stepped down hard into clear mountain air and hung on with my hands, thinking, "Whoops, this is a dumb time to remember, inspect a ladder closely before I climb."

My right foot kicked empty air, and my left leg bent sharply and slipped under and pushed hard against the rung above it. I hung there. Because the rung above my left thigh bore down tightly on my thigh, I couldn't push outward far enough to get from under the rung that kept me from pulling myself up. My left leg was tightly enough trapped that I couldn't move down, either.

I wasn't hurt. I had a good grip with my hands. Not a problem, because my family was in our house right across the road, and they would be glad to help me, so I called.

I couldn't see any of them, but I heard Juniper and Amanda playing together and laughing. They laughed a lot. Several people had commented, at various times, "Those girls laugh a

lot,” and I had agreed. “They do. They’re happy and expressing that happiness most of the time.” I was really pleased that they were happy children. As I hung on the ladder, six feet above the ground, I wanted to encourage them, “Be happy and express that happiness in a very quiet manner for a little while, and I’ll get your attention, and you’ll all come running over and help me get down. After that, you can resume laughter.”

I thought that toward them with intensity. Nothing changed. Apparently, psychic contact wasn’t working. I could hear Laura talking with her mother, Leslie, and sometimes they laughed. They had a lot of catching up to do. They hadn’t seen each other for a year. I heard Leslie telling Laura about some bread she made. I could hear them clearly. Why couldn’t they hear me?

I shouted louder, without effect. I could hear them when they didn’t hear me, because I was in quiet surroundings, listening. Sound came out of the cabin better than it went in. I’d never thought much about why that was nor seen any particular significance in it. Now I did. However, I wasn’t willing yet to shout as loudly as I could because I would feel silly, and it might momentarily panic all those lovely people across the road conversing, playing and laughing.

I was willing to panic them if necessary, so I could get free of this too affectionate ladder before night fell, but I owed it to the pleasantness of the day to try some more first. After all, what could they do if they came to help me? I would still be stuck on the ladder, and they would be on the ground looking up at me, asking, “Now that we’re here, what can we do?”

I enjoyed the view of the outside cabin wall, of old, weather-greayed wood, but even the most intricate patterns of wood grain can become boring if one has nothing else to look at. I could see the sky and landscape left and right if I turned my head all the way to the side, and I did that once in a while to get a different perspective on existence. Mostly, though, I concentrated on the task at hand.

I applied all the strength I could muster to straightening my left leg. Nothing changed. I did that again at the same time I pulled upward with my arms. Wood cracked. The sound echoed against the beginning of dusk. I rested, applied force again, and the rung imprisoning me broke free of the right rail, pivoted, and I was free. I cautiously lowered myself to the ground and took the ladder down. Later, I would cut it up and burn it in our heater. Later, with a better ladder and in daylight, I would finish the job of taking the stove pipe down and covering the hole the pipe’s removal left.

Laura was lighting kerosene lamps when I walked in the front door. She smiled at me and said, "You're late. I started to wonder if you were all right."

I smiled at her. When I finished expressing gratitude in my own thoughts for a laughing, happy family and for my escape before dark, I would tell everyone what had happened. The experience would become another amazing adventure we all shared.