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Agent/Query Submission Central

Final workshop with evaluations for Linda, Vicki, and Janet.

From Linda~

Who? Sally Harvill

What does she want? To atone for killing her mother (or family survival)

What stands in her way? Chaos when Sherman invades Georgia

Worst possible outcome? She will never see her family again

Log line: While Georgia falls to General Sherman's army, a young woman runs away from home after she accidentally kills her mother, and travels with two other refugees who show her the depth of family love.

Query 1st paragraph: In the summer of 1864, Sally Harvill and her family leave Petersburg, Virginia after a Union mortar shell reduces their house to matchsticks. They move to an unkempt farm in Conyers, Georgia, that Sally's father inherited. The destruction of her home leaves Sally's mother terrified of an enemy invasion. When Sally's sister needs to sneak in the house, she lures her mother off the porch by screaming, "The Yankees are coming!" She watches in horror as her mother collapses from a heart attack. Crippling grief saps her father's energy. He spends most of his time in his rocking chair, staring at nothing. Her sister's bursts of temper followed by floods of tears, and her young brothers' sobs at night tear her apart. Her father, an attorney, can't run a farm and he worries his children will starve. Seventeen-year-old Sally receives a proposal from the overseer of a nearby plantation, but she hears the man is cruel and promiscuous. The overseer promises to provide food for Sally's family, and her father tells her she needs to make a sacrifice after she's left her siblings motherless. Sally runs away, planning to get a job in a large town so she can send money to feed her family, and perhaps atone for her sin.

Query, Paragraph Two: Just a few miles from Conyers, Sally discovers a discharged Confederate soldier, John Whitman, who's determined to get home before he dies from gangrene. Sally believes saving John's life will ease the guilt

that tortures her. Desperate for help, Sally finds a farm with one resident, Ruth, a black slave “doctor”. She cures John’s infection. By mid-October John is well and anxious to continue his journey. When he hears Sherman’s armies are staying in Atlanta, he decides to leave immediately. Sally joins him since he’s going to Augusta, a city likely to offer employment. Ruth hesitates to go with them. Her son has escaped into Sherman’s lines and enlisted in a colored regiment. She believes he’ll come to her cabin after the war, and she wants to be there. John convinces her she’ll run out of food if she stays. The three of them Ruth go with John and Sally to Covington. They find it in shambles after thousands of Union soldiers have passed through. Sherman’s troops have also visited Conyers, Sally insists she must check on her family without being seen. Once she sees everyone is well, she is anxious to leave, but John wants her to stay there. Ruth stops the argument by telling John Sally is pregnant and ashamed to go home. Sally has fallen in love with John, and she’s angry that Ruth’s lie lowers his opinion of her. Ruth is upset that John won’t tell Sally he has a fiancée. As the three travelers approach John’s home, they don’t know what fate waits for them, hope, sorrow, or disillusionment. Will Sally win John’s love and learn to accept the forgiveness her family offers?

I NEED TO CUT 150 WORDS.

MY COMMENTS:

As written, this is not a query, but more an important description for you to trim and hone into more of a query format.

I feel as if you haven’t reached the bottom line for your story core. WHAT IS HER BOTTOM LINE? GUILT RELIEF IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING SHE WANTS.

Is her quest to get away from the family? From the guilt she feels coming from them. Ages of siblings. 5, 7, and 15 and brother in army.

You wrote:

Query 1st paragraph: In the summer of 1864, Sally Harvill and her family leave Petersburg, Virginia after a Union mortar shell reduces their house to matchsticks. They move to an unkempt farm in Conyers, Georgia, that Sally’s father inherited. The destruction of her home leaves Sally’s mother terrified of an enemy invasion. When Sally’s sister needs to sneak in the house, WHY? she lures

her mother off the porch by screaming, “The Yankees are coming!” She watches in horror as her mother collapses from a heart attack. Crippling grief saps her father’s energy. He spends most of his time in his rocking chair, staring at nothing. Her sister’s bursts of temper followed by floods of tears, and her young brothers’ sobs at night tear her apart. Her father, an attorney, can’t run a farm and he worries his children will starve. **TIGHTEN THIS: WHEN HER FAMILY IS THREATENED BY STARVATION, HER FATHER PARALYZED WITH GRIEF AND HER SIBLINGS STRUGGLING WITH THE LOSS OF THEIR MOTHER,** Seventeen-year-old Sally receives a proposal from the overseer of a nearby plantation, but she hears the man is cruel and promiscuous. **HE** The overseer promises to provide food for Sally’s family, and her father tells her she needs to make a sacrifice after she’s left her siblings motherless. Sally runs away, planning to get a job in a **NAME THE CITY** large town so she can send money to feed her family, and perhaps atone for her sin. **SO, WHERE’S THE TEASE?**

THE FAMILY needs saving. She becomes the most logical one. Marriage is one answer, but finding her way to a city for work is another.

Query, Paragraph Two: Just a few miles from Conyers, Sally discovers a discharged Confederate soldier, John Whitman, who’s determined to get home before he dies from gangrene. Sally believes saving John’s life will ease the guilt that tortures her. **HOW WILL SAVING HIS LIFE FEED HER FAMILY AND CHANGE THEIR DESPERATE SITUATION? DOESN’T MAKE SENSE THAT SHE WOULD CHANGE COURSE.** Desperate for help, Sally finds a farm with one resident, Ruth, a black slave “doctor”. She cures John’s infection. By mid-October John is well and anxious to continue his journey. When he hears Sherman’s armies are staying in Atlanta, he decides to leave immediately. **THE POWER OF YOUR STORY JUST SHIFTED TO JOHN WHO MAKES THE DECISION TO GO TO AUGUSTA WITH SALLY AND RUTH, DESPITE THEIR MISGIVINGS.** Sally joins him since he’s going to Augusta, a city likely to offer employment. Ruth hesitates to go with them. Her son has escaped into Sherman’s lines and enlisted in a colored regiment. She believes he’ll come to her cabin after the war, and she wants to be there. John convinces her she’ll run out of food if she stays. The three of them Ruth go with John and Sally to Covington. They find it in shambles after thousands of Union soldiers have passed through. Sherman’s troops have also visited Conyers, Sally insists she must check on her family without being seen.

Once she sees everyone is well, DOES IT MATTER HOW THEY SURVIVED? DO THEY STILL NEED HER HELP? she is anxious to leave, but John wants her to stay there. Ruth stops the argument by telling John Sally is pregnant and ashamed to go home. PREGNANT BY JOHN? NO. TIME LINE IS UNCLEAR. WOULDN'T HE WANT TO MARRY HER? Sally has fallen in love with John, and she's angry that Ruth's lie lowers his opinion of her. AHAH! SHE IS NOT PREGNANT? YES OR NO? Ruth is upset that John won't tell Sally he has a fiancée. As the three travelers approach John's home. They don't know what fate waits for them, **hope, sorrow, or disillusionment**. NICE CHOICE OF THREE REVEALING WORDS Will Sally win John's love and learn to accept the forgiveness her family offers? WHAT FORGIVENESS? WHEN DID THIS OCCUR AND/OR HOW DOES SHE KNOW SINCE SHE HASN'T SPOKEN WITH THEM? She needs to find someone to guide her to where she wants to go. Going to Augusta to find factory work. One of the higher paying jobs women can find at that time.

Vicki~look at Vicki on Facebook HW for 3.31

From Janet, her first 20 pages:

Tapping into her intellect and femininity, Grace appeals to Beau's masculine desires with flirtations and food. She provides support to Gen who also has been wounded by marital infidelity. On Christmas Day, Lily cries when she receives a bike from Beau. She tells him "only daddies should give bikes to little girls." Touched by Lily's tears, Beau realizes he how much wants her and Grace in his life. The next day he asks Grace and Lily to marry him. Six months later, Lily announces to the wedding guests, "We just got married."

NAGNAGNAG:

I'M STICKING TO MY EARLIER COMMENT THAT BEAU MAKES THE DECISION TO ASK HER. TAKES AWAY HER POWER. CAN'T SHE ASK HIM? YOUR STORY IS VERY "NOW," ESPECIALLY WITH GAY NEXT DOOR NEIGHBORS. INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR HIM TO ASK, DON'T EMPOWERED WOMEN, LIKE GRACE, ASK FOR WHAT THEY WANT WITHOUT MANUPILATING THE SITUATION? OK I'VE SAID MY PIECE ON THIS POINT.

NOTE:

This is how Janet's manuscript sample pages will be read by the agents she is querying.

Chapter 1

December 2008

“Whoa, Dr. B!” A male student raced toward the English Department just as Dr. Grace Black-Stone headed to the exit. “Your Beemer’s been beamed.”

She came to an abrupt halt. “What are you talking about?”

He panted and pointed outside. “You gotta check it out.”

Grace hustled past him and swatted open the double doors. Campus security cruisers blocked the street. A fire truck rumbled in the faculty parking lot.

Then she saw it.

The obelisk of an I-beam rose into the air, attached by a chain to the long arm of a tower crane. A second, shorter chain dangled in the wind. The opposite end of the girder had imbedded itself into the middle of a BMW and folded it upward like a taco.

Grace choked down a snort of hysteria. Her dead husband’s babe-mobile was impaled with the biggest phallic weapon of destruction she’d ever seen. She skirted milling spectators and headed to the curb.

The girder swayed in a strong gust of wind. A fireman, spraying a foamy chemical around the car, shouted and backed away. From a cluster of hard-hatted workers one man sprang forward and climbed into the crane’s cab with nimble grace. He lowered the beam toward the upturned front bumper. Metal screeched as the vehicle collapsed under the weight.

Another worker in a hard hat intercepted Grace when she crossed the street. “You have to stay back, Miss.” With his hand on her elbow, he turned her around. “Do you happen to know the name of the professor who owns the BMW?”

“Black-Stone.”

“Is he in there?” He nodded to the building ahead of them.

“I’m Dr. Black-Stone.”

His eyes widened. Without a word, he spun and propelled her back toward the scene of the accident.

Meanwhile, the quick-thinking hero who HAD lowered the beam descended from the cab. With long strides he headed back toward the men. “Where the hell is Joe?”

“He’s getting the professor who owns the car.”

“Goddamn it!” The man joined the other hard hats. “Why couldn’t the four-eyed, pencil-necked nerd have a Kia or Escort? This is a fucking disaster.”

“Uh, Boss.” Joe halted with Grace behind the group. “This is Dr. Black-Stone, the car’s owner.”

The boss spun around and cocked his head. He stood over six feet tall, tanned, and muscled.

Thick dark brows arched above golden eyes. Cropped brown hair furred his head and stubble darkened his cheeks and chin. He frowned as he peered at her. “Gigi?”

She forced a smile at her rejected **speed date #10**. “Hello, Beau.”

Chapter 2

Beau seemed larger and more imposing in work clothes. He raised his eyebrows. “Dr. Black-Stone, huh? It’s nice to see you again.”

Grace tilted her blonde head back to look at his face. “What happened?” Her voice was croaky.

“We’re not really sure. I’m sorry about your car. What do you need me to do right now?”

Kiss me. The words raced unbidden through her brain. A pulse deep inside throbbed with the involuntary clenching in her belly. She cleared her throat and checked her watch. “I have to make arrangements to pick up my daughter at three. Can I get some things out of my car?”

Beau gave her a bug-eyed look. He spoke in measured tones like he had to explain a vague concept to a dull-witted individual. “It’s too dangerous. We can’t get close. The gas line ruptured. What’s so important in there?”

Joe stood beside Beau and smirked. The other workmen had tuned into the conversation like curious children eavesdropping on an adult conversation. Several snickered. Beau flashed a patronizing smile.

Grace assumed a look of intense concentration. “Well, let’s see. Because Christmas is in a couple weeks, I was storing presents in my car until I could get them wrapped. I had two Gucci handbags, one for my mother and sister. I had two new iPods for my niece and nephew.” Beau gave her a sharp look, but she continued her recitation. “There’s a TomTom satellite navigator for my brother and a new MacBook laptop for my father.” The faintest hint of belligerence crept into her voice. “My daughter will be disappointed if I can’t get replacements for her Leap Frog computer system and singing Hannah Montana doll.”

All the men faced her with expressions of stunned amazement. The only one who looked skeptical was Beau. “Is there more?”

Yeah. I wish I had all those relatives to buy presents for. “Last, but not least, I had my grandmother’s fifty year collection of Hummel figurines in the trunk.” Grace gave him a baleful stare. “We pencil-necked nerds know how to shop and pack a car.”

Their stare-down lasted several seconds, then Beau smiled. “You certainly do. What do you need from...” . . . He pointed to the twisted heap of metal. “What do you need from there right now.?”

“I wonder if the transponder for the entry gate at my development and my SunPass device are salvageable. They were on the left side of the windshield. And I’ll need to buy my daughter a new car seat before I pick her up.”

“Can you give me some time to get things in order here? I can take you to get a car seat and pick up your daughter. Afterward, I’ll make sure you get home. How does that sound?”

She checked her watch again. “Remember I need to be at her preschool by three.”

“How about waiting in my car to save time? It’s right over there.” He pointed to the street then looked a little sheepish. “It’s the black BMW.” They walked to his car, a newer model than hers. He opened the passenger door. “How much of the story about the car’s contents is true? I’m just asking as a heads-up for insurance.”

“Don’t worry. No Christmas presents were in there.”

Grace settled in the front seat and watched the crew’s efforts to reattach the beam to the crane. After nothing much happened, she graded exams. At one-thirty, she beeped the horn and pointed to her watch when she had Beau’s attention. He nodded and held up his finger. She returned to her work and lost track of time. When she looked at the dashboard clock, it was two-fifteen. This time she held the horn down until Beau came on the run.

He flung himself behind the wheel and started the car. “Sorry. Where to?”

She was angry with him for the wait and herself for not paying attention to the time. “We’ll have to pick up Lily first.”

“What about the car seat?”

“Her preschool is not far from the store. You better drive as carefully as you can. I may be reasonable about my car, but I will go psycho on you if anything happens to my daughter.”

She directed him to the Montessori Early Childhood Education Center. Beau waited in the car while she went inside. In a few minutes, she returned with a blonde pixie in white tights, a pink corduroy skirt, and a white, long-sleeved shirt.

Grace knelt to face Lily. “I need to talk to you. There was an accident with my car. A big metal bar fell on it.”

“No, Mommy. Your car’s there.” She pointed to the black BMW which idled at the curb.

“That belongs to the man who’s taking us home. But first, we need to buy you a new car seat.”

Grace walked Lily to the rear passenger door and deposited her Dora the Explorer backpack on the floor. The little girl crawled inside. Beau turned with his arm stretched across the center console. Grace reached over the small body to fasten the center seatbelt.

Beau smiled. “Hi.”

Lily stared at him. “What’s your name?”

Before he could answer, Grace said, “Mr. Charvet. Right?” Beau nodded. The lettering on his hard hat was Charvet Crane. Grace sat next to her daughter and shut the door. “I’m going to sit with her until we get to the store.”

The little girl leaned forward. “My name is Lily Anne Stone.”

Beau twisted to face her. “Isn’t your name Black-Stone like your mother’s?”

Lily frowned. “Mommy’s name is Stone. Like mine.”

Grace patted her daughter’s knee. “Black-Stone is my hyphenated professional name. In my personal life, I go by Grace Stone.”

Beau blinked. “I thought your name was Gigi.”

“Mommy’s name isn’t Gigi!” Lily squealed with annoyance.

Grace sighed and directed her explanation to Lily. “Gigi was my nickname when I was little like you.”

Beau put the car in gear and headed out of the parking lot .

Lily stared at the back of his head. “What’s the man’s name, Mommy?”

“I told you. Mr. Charvet.”

“What’s his other name?”

He spoke over his shoulder. “Beau.”

“Mommy, can I call him Mr. Beau?”

“Yes, you can call him Mister Beau.”

They rode for several minutes in silence until Lily spoke. “Mr. Beau, my daddy’s in heaven. Maxi and Erin have two daddies. I only have mommy.”

His gaze remained focused out the windshield. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

In the last several months, Lily had become concerned with her lack of a father and peppered Grace daily with questions and demands about getting a new one. She refused to accept that it wasn’t as easy as ordering pizza, ~~even though a man always came to the house when you did it.~~

“Do you have any little girls, Mr. Beau?”

He stopped at a traffic light and craned his neck around. “Not yet.”

“Why not?”

“Because I haven’t found a mommy for my little girl or boy.”

Lily’s face soured. “A boy?”

“What’s wrong with boys?”

“They only want one thing.”

Beau’s shoulders shook in silent laughter. “What’s that?”

“Video games. They won’t play house. They don’t like dolls. They—”

The light had changed to green and a car behind them honked. Beau faced forward and accelerated through the intersection.

Grace looked down at her daughter. “Remember what I said about letting the driver concentrate on the road.”

“Does Mr. Beau know who broke our car?”

“Yes. It’s a man who works for him.”

“Did Mr. Beau put him in timeout?” Suppressed sputters sounded from the front seat. “Brandon was in timeout today. He ran into Tyler two times with the Big Wheel. He said it was a accident.”

“Well, this was an accident. A chain broke and a heavy bar dropped on the car.”

A few minutes later, they arrived at Babies ‘R’ Us. Grace unfastened her seat belt and Lily’s. She opened the door, climbed out.

When Lily got off the seat, she tapped Beau’s shoulder. “You coming?”

“I sure am.” He opened the driver’s door and walked with them to the double doors.

Lily wrapped her palm around his pinkie and ring fingers. “Let’s go, Mr. Beau.” She pulled him inside.

Once inside, Grace scanned the overhead signs and led them to the car seat display. The store had two with a five point harness upholstered in pink, Lily’s favorite color.

Beau asked questions and read the product information about construction and safety. “I’ll pay for it. My secretary will take care of filing receipts for the claim. It’ll be one less thing you have to do.”

At the car, Beau followed Grace’s directions for getting the base secured. At one point, his hand brushed against her breast. They both froze and Grace backed away from the open door. Once Lily was buckled in, Grace sat up front to give Beau directions. At the entrance to her gated community, a pickup truck with Charvet Crane painted on the door idled at the curb.

Beau pulled in behind it. “That’s my ride. You can drive my car until you get a new one. Let me check with Joe and see if they got your transponders out.”

“Wait. I can’t take your car. What if something happens to it?”

“It’s insured. Besides, you’re used to driving a BMW.” He climbed out and shut the door.

Grace turned to face Lily, “I’ll be right back.” She exited the car and approached the men.

“Here’s your toll road and gate devices.” Beau handed her the items. “If they don’t work, let me know. We also have the paperwork from the glove box.”

“How did Joe know where I live?”

Beau pointed to the paperwork in her hand. “From your registration. We needed it for my insurance and to schedule the tow. Can I get a contact number for you?” Grace rattled off her mobile number which he put into his phone. He handed her a business card. “I’ll be in touch. Is it okay if I say goodbye to Lily?”

She nodded.

Beau walked to the rear door and opened it. He bent down and had a quick conversation with the little girl. Lily wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed his cheek.

He returned with a wide grin. “She’s a great little girl. If you need anything, call me.”

Quickly he pecked at Grace’s cheek, walked to the truck, and waved goodbye.

Inside the BMW, Lily giggled from the back seat. “Mr. Beau kissed you, Mommy.”

Chapter 3

The following morning Grace dropped Lily next door then headed to her advanced yoga class. Grace’s devotion to the regimen enabled her to sail through natural childbirth. She did her best

not to miss this once a week class. She had started the program as a teenager when her mother claimed it was the only exercise that kept her body lithe and limber.

For Juliette IS THIS HER MOTHER'S NAME? HAVE WE READ IT BEFORE? is was probably a job requirement, like firefighters who LIFT WEIGHTS.do weightlifting.

AFTER CLASS, GRACE Upon her return, she entered the neighbors' screened pool enclosure and crossed HER NEIGHBORS' patio to the open French doors. Robert Chan read the newspaper at the breakfast table while his partner, Dr. Tariq Mahmoud, stood at his state-of-the-art coffee maker.

As soon as she stepped inside, Robert stood and pushed his glasses up his nose. "You do not have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be repeated. You do not have the right to consult your daughter. Do you understand your rights as I've explained them to you?"

Grace laughed. "Should I also assume the position?"

"Yes." Tariq set a mug of foamy cappuccino on the table. "Sit your sweet tush down and talk."

He sat next to her and tucked his long legs under the table.

"So Lily told you about what happened yesterday?"

Robert nodded. "Yes, but she waited until I was carrying three glasses of milk to the table. Then she said, Mr. Beau broke our car and kissed Mommy."

Tariq put his arm around his partner's shoulders. "I was so proud of Robert. He never spilled a drop despite screaming like a girl."

Grace related meeting Beau for the first time at speed dating, then the adult version of yesterday's accident, and the return home. "I wasn't expecting him to kiss my cheek before he left." Both men gave each other a secret smile. She eyed them. "What do you know that I don't?"

Robert smirked at her over the rim of his coffee cup. "Lily told Mr. Beau he should kiss her mommy because she really, really needed it."

"Oh, my God."

Tariq patted her leg. "Your daughter is more determined than your friend, Alice, to find you a man."

Two weeks earlier Grace had driven with Alice to a casino in Hallandale, Florida. In the car, her friend and colleague had the determined expression of a bounty hunter on the lookout for an elusive bond jumper. Alice had speed dated three times in the last year and urged Grace to give it a try.

RaceDate.com promised they would meet a minimum of ten local singles who were professionals between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-four. Grace registered as Gigi Black. The alias would keep her professional identity private to anyone she met. Alice was going by Ali for the same reason.

"Tell them you're a teacher, not a professor. A lot of men are put off by women with PhD's."

"What about being a single mother?"

"If the guy doesn't appreciate that you pay your own bills and take care of your kid while working full-time, then you don't want someone who just fell off the stupid truck."

Upon arrival at the Mardi Gras-themed casino, they were greeted by a man dressed as a court jester. He held out his arm. A line of plastic beads hung from it like clothes on the line. "Are you ladies here for the corn hole competition?"

Grace jerked her head toward Alice. Corn hole?

Her friend waved off the beads and brushed past the jester. "I know where we're going." They hustled along carpeted walkways with bad lighting and a stale smell. Grace shivered in the chilly air conditioning and pulled her white denim jacket tighter. Old folks milled around the garish setting forcing her and Alice to walk in wide berths to pass them.

When they reached the bar, a perky blonde at a table with a RaceDate check-in sign marked their names off a list. She handed them adhesive name tags. "Please put these where they're easy to read." Next, she gave them a rectangle of printed card stock. "Here is your Race Card. There are some helpful hints on the back. Gigi, you're at table six. Ali, you're at ten. We'll be starting in a few minutes. You were the last to check in. Have fun and I hope you both find Mr. Right tonight."

Grace did a quick head count of the people in the roped off area. Counting her and Alice, there were twelve women and ten men. "They're two guys short. I thought there would be the same number."

Alice glanced around the room. "The hosts try to get even numbers, but some may have cancelled." She clasped Grace's elbow and steered her to the right. "Let's ~~go to the bar~~ and get a drink before we take our seats."

The bartender wiped the counter. "What can I get you ladies?"

Grace reached into her purse. "I'll have a Diet Coke."

Her friend ordered a dirty martini. As they waited, Alice leaned in close, as if she was about to impart state secrets. "Now remember. Don't hold your hands in your lap, especially with crossed wrists. It says you're closed off to meeting new people. Mirror his body. It means you're in sync with him. If he puts his ankle on his knee he's interested because his package is on display."

"Are you serious?"

"It's Body Language One-Oh-One." Alice scanned a group of women huddled together. "The competition doesn't look too fierce tonight."

"I'm not sure about this, Alice."

Her friend's face tightened. "It's been four years since Michael died. You need to get back into the world of man-woman relationships. Speed dating is a no pressure way of doing that. It'll give you the practice you need to get involved with men again."

"I am involved. I have a close relationship with two men."

"Your ~~gay~~ neighbors don't count. You need one who doesn't have a pride parade."

"Are veterans out?"

The bartender slid their drinks toward them. They paid and headed to their assigned tables. Grace was at a two person pub table in the middle of the room. Alice's place was a bench along the wall with a chair and low table. The sound of a microphone being tapped quieted the conversations.

"Welcome, everyone." The blonde from the check-in read her clipboard to the attendees. "Please be respectful and write each date's name down on your Race Card, even if you're not interested. I'll collect the cards at the end of the evening. On Tuesday, you can check our website and communicate with your matches through our free online email. Gentlemen, please proceed to the first table on your Race Card."

The men shuffled around the room, checking the posted numbers. Grace smiled at the dark-haired man who sat down across from her. The bell rang to begin the first five minute date.

"Hola, ah, hello. My name is Armando." He smiled with white Chiclet teeth and pointed to her left breast. "Heehee?"

Grace touched her name tag. "Yes, my name is Gigi. Where are you from originally, Armando?"

“I am from Peru.”

“How long have you been in the United States?”

“Two year.”

“Your English is much better than my Spanish after two years. Could you speak it before you came?”

“Un poquito. A leetle.” He glanced down at the writing on the back of his Race Card and read aloud from Good Questions to Ask. “What is your yob, I mean, job, Gi-gi?”

“I’m an English teacher.”

Armando’s face lit up. “You are tee-sure for peoples to espeak English?”

“No. I teach literature. What is your job?”

“In my country, I was el farmacéutico.”

“You were a farmer?”

He regarded her with a look of indignation. “I was pharmacist in Lima.”

“I’m sorry. Please forgive my poor translation.”

“Ees okay. I study here to get license. Now I am pharmacy tech at CVS.”

She and Armando chatted about the differences between living in Peru and the U.S. until the facilitator rang the bell. He thanked her and moved to the next table.

One down, nine to go. She smiled at the man who eased his right buttock onto the high seat across from her and glanced at his name tag. “Hi, Jake.”

This date was a thirty-something guy with a round face, square body and no neck. “Hi, Gigi.” He studied her with narrowed eyes. “You got any kids?”

“I have a daughter.”

“When you gave birth did you have a C-section?” Before she could answer, Jake put his palms flat on the table. “Let me explain. It’s been my experience that after a woman has given birth the natural way they’re just not as tight as they used to be.”

“Is that a problem for you?”

It was. Jake began a monologue on the quality versus quantity argument of penis size. After two minutes of lecturing her about sex being more than P in V intercourse, Grace conceded proportion wasn’t important.

But even a glorious dick wouldn’t give this guy an edge. Her eyes shifted to the facilitator. The woman’s finger was poised over the bell as she counted down the seconds on her watch. “Sorry, Jake, but my daughter weighed ten pounds at birth. **She was dragged through me like a marble through a straw.**” **HAAAAHA GREAT LINE!**

After Grace’s sixth dating session, there was a twenty minute break. She sat at Alice’s table. “Al-lee, how’s it going?”

“It’s an interesting mix tonight. Anyone you’re considering, Gi-gi?”

“Not yet.” Not ever.

Alice stood and scanned the room like a meerkat on guard duty. “Has Scott been to your table?”

“I haven’t met anyone with that name.”

“Well, he might be the one to change your mind.” Alice fluffed her shoulder-length, curly dark hair, hiked up the elastic bodice of the strapless dress which almost covered her generous bosom, and sucked in her stomach. “I’m going to get another drink. Do you want anything?”

“I’m good.”

Her friend glided toward the men at the bar as if a mating call had sounded only sexpots could hear. Grace was free for rounds six and seven because of the unequal distribution of men to women. She stepped into a side hall to call her neighbors who were watching Lily.

Tariq, answered on the first ring. “Hi, Grace. Maxi and Lily are asleep. I think Erin WHO? is just pretending. Hold on, Robert wants to talk to you.”

~~Tariq’s partner came on the phone.~~ “Have you met anyone good yet?”

“Not so far.”

“Don’t be too picky. After all, your clock is ticking. Remember what your mother said. The shortest time of your life is as a desirable young woman.”

“I know.” They talked for several minutes more. “I better go back inside.”

She made a quick stop in the ladies room and ran a brush through her long blonde hair. The bell rang for the next round. A handsome, tawny-haired man sat at her table. The cashmere sweater he wore matched his blue eyes. His name tag read Scott. This was the guy Alice mentioned. She boosted herself onto the pub chair with a weak smile. “Sorry I’m late.”

“No problem. You’re worth waiting for, Gigi.”

“I needed to phone my babysitter and check on my daughter.” Grace waited. His slim, broad-shouldered body didn’t tense or lean away from her as if he had just fortified his position on birth control.

Instead he smiled. “How old is she?”

“Four. Do you have kids?”

“No kids. No ex-wife. Someday I hope to have both. I mean, I hope to have a wife, not an ex.”

She inclined toward him. “What kind of work do you do?”

“I’m a contracts attorney. I deal mostly with construction and real estate.”

While she listened, the air seemed to crackle with invisible currents. By the time the bell rang, Grace regretted she couldn’t talk to Scott more. Their conversation had been relaxed and effortless with an undercurrent Grace could not identify.

By the twelfth and final round, she was tired and ready to go home. The tall man who sat down across from her wore jeans and white dress shirt with the tail hanging out. She plastered on a fake smile. His name tag read Beau. He gave her an infectious grin. “I’ve been waiting all night to get to your table.”

Grace opened her palms wide. “Well, here you are.”

“Here I am.”

Grace waited. Beau rubbed the back of his neck as if he had used up all his lines and didn’t know what to say next. Several long seconds of silence descended.

“How did—”

“Are you—”

They both fell silent.

“Sorry, Beau. What were you going to ask?”

“Are you a native Floridian?”

“Born and raised. You?”

“We moved here when I was seven.” He crossed his thick arms on the tabletop. “Have you TRIED done speed dating before?”

“This is my first time.”

“Mine, too.”

She licked her dry lips. Beau’s eyes followed her tongue. Heat rose in her cheeks. “What was the worst question you were asked tonight?”

“She wanted to know my annual income ~~last year.~~”

Grace laughed. “What did you say?”

“Only my accountant and the IRS know for sure. What was your worst question?”

“He asked if I knew he could pick up any woman in this room, including me. I said he could but only if it meant lifting me off the ground.”

Beau chuckled. “Good comeback.”

“Thank you. What’s the worst pickup line you’ve ever used on a woman?”

“You mean other than saying I’ve been waiting all night to get to your table?”

She laughed. “Yeah, other than that one.”

By the time the bell rang to signal the end of the dating rounds, Grace had enjoyed talking with Beau. Like Scott and Armando, he was a nice man. Too bad I’m not going to HAVE DINNER date someone I talked to for only five minutes. **IF THAT IS HER TRUTH, WHY IS SHE SPEED DATING?**

On the drive home, Alice twisted in the passenger seat. “What did you think of Scott?”

Grace’s eyes shifted back to the road. “He was okay.”

“Come on. You have to admit he’s perfect boyfriend material. Blonde, buff, and straight. He’s got a good job with a respected law firm. Never been married, although he was engaged two years ago. He broke it off when he found his values and hers didn’t mesh. He owns his own condo and a Lexus with less than forty thousand miles on it.”

“Did you ask him how much money he made last year?”

“No, but it’s not a bad question.” Alice leaned back and stared out the windshield. “Scott is like an urban legend. The only thing to make him more perfect would be confirmation he’s good in bed. He had only one possible negative.”

Grace chanced a quick glance at her friend. “What?”

“I asked if he had ever voted Republican and if he had, what were the extenuating circumstances? The bell rang before he could answer.”

Grace smiled. “Now we’ll never know.”

“We might if he matched one of us. Did you mark him on your Race Card?”

Grace sighed. “I didn’t match anyone. I’m sorry, SORRY FOR WHAT? but speed dating’s not for me. I need to develop a deeper connection with someone, especially since I have Lily to consider. THEN WHY WAS SHE THERE? What about you? How many men did you pick?”

“Two.”

“Which ones?”

“Well, Scott, of course. I’ll take my chances he’s a liberal and not a conservative. And I matched Armando, the guy from Peru. I loved his smile.”

Grace told Alice about Jake’s penis problem. “I can’t believe the first thing he wanted to discuss was my vagina.”

“That’s why it’s good to go speed dating with someone. You get a different perspective on people. Maybe God blessed him with a Gene Simmons tongue to compensate for the shortage down South. **since he shorted him down south.**”

The one other WHO IS THE OTHER man who piqued Grace’s interest was her final date, but Alice didn’t mention him. DOES IT MATTER WHERE SHE IS? She turned the car her friend’s driveway.

“What about Beau?”

Alice rummaged on the floor for her purse then looked thoughtful. “Was he the one with his shirttail hanging out?”

“That’s him.” UH HUH

Alice winced. “Yeah, that was a deal breaker for me.”

SPEAKER ID HERE: “You passed on a guy because of the way he was dressed?”

“That and he’s a registered Republican.
He VOTED FOR OBAMA, TWICE, BUT THAT DIDN’T COMPENSATE FOR THE SHIRT.
did vote for Obama’s re-election, but it wasn’t enough to compensate for the shirt.”

SKIP TO SEX IN THE GARAGE (with a one-chapter set up)

Chapter 4

On the Saturday following the accident, Grace entered the kitchen from the laundry room and found Lily with her cell phone. The little girl spoke into it. “I’m gonna see Santa today.”

Grace halted with an armload from the dryer. “Who are you talking to?”

“Mr. Beau.” Lily turned back to the phone. “Mommy’s here.” She thrust the device at her mother.

Grace put the warm towels on the tabletop and lifted the phone from Lily’s outstretched hand.

“Hello.”

“Hi.” His voice sounded deeper and huskier. Her heart raced. “I’m calling with some bad news.”

She sighed. “What now?”

“I’ve spoken with my insurance company. They’re willing to reimburse you the maximum blue book value of your BMW plus the replacement of the car seat.”

“So what’s the bad news?”

“The total falls short for a new BMW. You could get a used one, though.”

“I don’t want another one. I did some research last night and I’m interested in an SUV. How much will I be reimbursed for my car?”

Beau told her. She was silent.

“Grace, are you still there?”

“I’m here but disappointed. That’s less than I thought.”

“Listen, I could—”

“Don’t worry, I’ll work this out.” *Unlike my mother, I will not have a man buy me a new car for favors in return.*

“I was going to offer to take you to my brother-in-law’s Toyota dealership for a family-and-friends discount.”

“You can do that?”

“Considering all I’ve done for him and my sister over the years, it’s the least he can do for me.”

Grace thought for a moment. “I’ll accept your help, but not your money.”

“Would you be available this afternoon? You’ll get a check next week and should have a vehicle picked out.”

She glanced down at Lily who sat at the table and colored with markers. “I made a promise to take someone to see Santa today.”

“I wouldn’t mind seeing him myself.”

Grace laughed. “Are you going to tell him what you want for Christmas?”

Beau’s voice went soft and velvety. “If I thought he could make it happen, I’d even sit on his lap.”

Neither of them spoke. Grace broke the silence first. “Where’s the dealership?”

“Where’s the Santa Claus?”

Grace and Beau agreed on a plan then she ended the call.

Lily didn’t look up from her artwork. “Are we gonna see Mr. Beau today?”

“He’s picking us up after your nap.”

“And Santa?”

“We’ll see him after we look at a new car.”

The little girl said nothing but a smile lit up her face.

At one forty-five, the doorbell rang. “It’s him.” Lily ran to the foyer.

Grace’s heart hammered. She wiped damp palms on her thighs before she opened the door. Beau was dressed in jeans and a red cotton Henley shirt with the sleeves pushed up his thick arms.

“Come in.” She took a step back and moved Lily to stand beside her.

Beau filled the doorway and looked around the front hall which opened into a formal dining room and living room. A bank of sliding glass doors stretched across the far wall. The pool and patio were on the other side.

“I’ve never been in this development before. You have a nice place.”

Grace locked the door and stepped around him. “Thank you. Let me get my purse.”

Lily led him by the hand to the living room.

“See our tree. Last year it had red lights and bows. Robert said it was Christmas hell.”

Grace scowled at her daughter. “Lily.”

The little girl ignored her mother. “I like white lights more better.” She cupped the bottom of a shiny, azure ornament in the palm of her hand. “We got this color. The store didn’t have pink. I love blue balls. Do you, Mr. Beau?”

His eyes bulged. “They look nice.”

Grace took her daughter by the hand and headed toward the garage. “Let’s go.”

At the dealership, a dapper, older salesman named Harry offered to take Grace for a drive in the Highlander after he explained all its features.

She turned to Beau. “We’ll need the car seat.”

“I can stay here with her while you do the test drive.”

Lily’s face fell. “I don’t wanna do a test.”

Grace put her daughter in a nearby chair. “You sit here while I talk to Mr. Beau.” They moved a few feet away with their backs to the child. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I don’t know you.”

“I understand. It’s just that getting the seat transferred would probably take longer than the test drive. What would make you feel comfortable leaving her here with me?”

She looked at Lily who hugged her backpack to her chest and pleaded with her eyes. “Give me the car key.” Beau gave her the BMW fob. “Give me your wallet.” He emptied his pockets into her palm. “Promise me you won’t move from this spot.”

He placed his hand over his heart. “I promise.”

She walked back to her daughter. “While I’m gone I want you to stay right here with Mr. Beau.”

Harry returned with the key for the Highlander and a dealer’s plate. “We won’t be gone long and I told the gals in the cashier’s office to keep an eye on her.” Two women behind a half-glass window waved.

Upon their return twenty minutes later, Beau sat in front of Lily while she stood on the seat of a chair behind him. She combed his hair with a pink toy brush. Her other little hand smoothed the top of his head. His eyes were closed and he appeared to be asleep.

Lily put her lips close to his ear. “Mommy’s here.”

Beau's lids snapped open. He twisted around to face his pint-sized stylist. "That felt good."
"Cause you don't have skin like him." Lily pointed to the bald salesman. "Why's he called Hairy?"

With a straight face, Grace faced Hairy/Harry. "Let's go talk price in your office."

"Well, actually—" the salesman said.

Beau came forward. "I spoke with Tom and he agreed to accept the insurance settlement if you were okay with last year's model."

Grace looked between the two men. "I guess I have papers to sign."

Two hours later, they waited in the center of the mall. Santa's red and gold throne was on a platform surrounded by poinsettia plants and large fake presents. The bearded St. Nick was dwarfed by an artificial Christmas tree decorated with basketball-sized ornaments which rose thirty feet toward a glass ceiling. When it was Lily's turn, she marched up the white wooden stairs. After being seated on Santa's lap, her monologue began. Beau and Grace waited by the exit gate. Lily's arm shot out toward them. Santa nodded.

Beau waved back. "Did you see her point us out?"

Oh no. "Uh-huh."

Lily chattered more. The red-suited man looked at Grace and Beau again. At last, she finished and climbed down. She flapped a goodbye to Santa who laughed and waved his gloved hand. Beau lifted Lily into his arms after a helper elf escorted her out. "Is Santa going to bring you what you want for Christmas?"

"He's gonna try. Mr. Beau, you wanna come to our weenie roast? Mommy, can Mr. Beau come? I'll show him how to cook 'em."

"He might have other plans for dinner tonight."

Beau shook his head. "No plans. I'd like to learn how to roast weenies."

When they arrived back at Grace's house, he brought in a bundle of wood from the garage and started a fire in a metal bowl on the patio. When the flames died down, the adults sat in cushioned aluminum chairs pulled close.

Lily stood between her mother's knees and held a grill fork with one hot dog over the red embers. "Don't let it touch the fire, Mr. Beau. The weenie gets black. That's yucky. Turn it when it bubbles."

Beau's fork had two dogs skewered on it. "I haven't done this since I was a kid. Lately, I've just barbecued them on a grill."

"This is way better. Mommy does good things with weenies."

Beau chuckled. "Does she? Like what?"

Grace kept her eyes on the fire.

"She can make an ocka-pus."

"A what?"

Grace lifted her gaze. "I cut slices part way up ~~and grill it~~. The ends curl to look like an octopus." Following a dinner of hot dogs, potato chips, store-bought coleslaw, and baked beans, Lily taught Beau how to play Uno. After the little girl won the game, Grace announced it was time for bed. Lily motioned Beau to bend down. He squatted in front of her. "Thank you for our new car."

"You're welcome."

"And for seeing Santa."

"I enjoyed it, too."

She threw her arms around Beau's neck, squeezed tight, then ran down the hall to her room.

Grace said, “You don’t have to wait around while I get her ready for bed.”
“If you don’t mind, I’d like to stay and talk to you about something.”

Chapter 5

When Grace returned, she found Beau in the kitchen. “What did you want to talk about?”

“Would you go out with me?”

While Grace had gotten Lily ready for bed, she prayed for this. “I’d like to.”

A wide grin lit up his face. “Great. I’ll call you this week. We’ll make plans for next weekend.”

“Will it be with or without Lily?”

“I enjoy her company but I’d like to take just you to dinner, if that’s okay.”

“Sounds great.”

He looked at the door to the garage. “I left some blueprints in the back of the car. Are they still there?”

“I guess. I haven’t opened the trunk.”

Grace retrieved the fob from her purse. She turned on the garage light and hit the trunk button. Inside were several rolls of paper in plastic sleeves. After Beau located the right one, he closed the lid. His bold eyes gazed down at her. Without a word, he propped the blueprints against the bumper, curled his hand behind her head, and captured her lips. He groaned a low, seductive sound. The muscles deep inside Grace contracted. His hot tongue entered her mouth as he pulled her against him. She dropped the key fob and wrapped her hands around his neck. Their tongues dueled for supremacy. His touch ignited sensations from her breast to her groin. With a gasp, she broke contact with his mouth and threw back her head. Beau’s erection pressed against her abdomen. Without shame, she rubbed back and forth against it.

I want this. I need this.

His hands gripped the sides of her waist and he lifted her onto the car trunk. She parted her knees and he stepped between them. With her lips pressed to his, she ran her hands over his shoulders, down his arms, up his back. Grace was so lost in him she didn’t hear him speak at first.

“We need...Grace...we need...to stop.”

She put her hands on his cheeks and looked into his hooded eyes. “I want you. I need you.” Her heart thudded so hard behind her breastbone it was almost painful. The only sounds were their labored breaths.

Beau searched her face. “Are you sure?”

She sighed with a desperation borne from four years of loneliness. “Yes.”

He placed her feet on top of the bumper. “Stand up.”

Grace wore black leggings and a hip-length white cotton jersey. ~~She had switched her ankle boots for soft ballet slippers when they got home.~~ She placed her hands on his shoulders and stood. He reached under her top and pulled the leggings along with her panties to her ankles. She pulled one foot out as he held her clothes down. Her slipper slid off. She sat bare-bottomed, on the cool metal of the BMW trunk. He unfastened his jeans. Her mouth went dry.

“Do we need this?” A condom package lay in his palm.

She nodded, grateful he thought of protection and had it with him. He tore it open and rolled it down his length. She leaned back on her elbows. Beau ran his palms along the tops of her thighs. When he reached the apex, his hand disappeared. Her back arched in pleasure. A sparking current raced from where his fingers worked magic. Her toes curled on the bumper. Beau scooted her hips closer. He slipped his arms under her knees. With a feral growl, he thrust forward. The feeling of fullness after so much emptiness was all it took to send Grace over the

brink. Beau plunged into her over and over. He bowed his back, gritted his teeth, and climaxed. When his shudders ceased, he released her legs, and collapsed on her.

The cold reality of what just happened hit Grace like a hammer blow. *I screwed him. In my garage. On his car.*

In her mind's eye, she pictured herself on the trunk. Knees sprawled wide. Lipstick smeared. Hair mussed. Panties and leggings wadded around one ankle. Her face flushed with heat. Beau raised up on his elbows and gave her a goofy smile. "And I thought Lily was full of surprises."

"Oh, my God, I hope she didn't wake up!"

They bolted upright as if they were Siamese twins connected at the chest. He stepped to the side. Head down, Grace put her foot into her leggings and panties. She slid off the trunk and wiggled her toes into the soft-soled shoe which lay on the garage floor. On the way to the door, she sashayed her pants up to her waist.

Beau's hand snaked out and halted her before she stepped inside. He listened with the alertness of a commando on the edge of enemy territory.

"I don't hear anything."

She sighed with relief. Lily was a sound sleeper unless sick or had a bad dream. Grace cast a wary glance at Beau. *Now I have to say good night to a man I just had sex with for the first time.*

~~"Don't forget your blueprints."~~

He walked to the back of the car and picked up the roll. "Here's the key."

He tossed it in an underhand arc. She caught it and entered the house. He followed her to the front door. After crossing the threshold, he turned around. "Don't forget we have a date next weekend."

"I remember. Thank you again for your help with the car."

"You're welcome. I never appreciated my family discount as much as I did tonight. I'll have to check my finances to see what it'll cost me to get you into a real bed next time." He laughed and walked to his truck.

Grace shut the door and turned off the outside light. She dropped to her heels and covered her face with her hands.

My God! What have I done?

Robert sent her a text the next morning. "Why was a Charvet Crane truck in your driveway until 10 PM?"

Grace answered back. Call you this afternoon.

Later, she dialed her neighbor's phone while Lily napped. "Is Tariq there?"

"We're both waiting to hear about yesterday."

Grace's voice broke. "Can one of you come over?"

"Uh-oh. I'll be right there."

She had the front door open when Robert hustled from his house to hers. His flip-flops slapped the brick pavers of her driveway. As soon as he saw her expression, he wrapped his arms around her.

After a soothing hug, he stepped back. "What happened? Do we need to call the police?"

She shook her head. "No, nothing like that. Let's go into the family room."

Once seated on either end of the sofa, Grace told him about picking out the car at the dealership, the visit to Santa, and the weenie roast. She stared at her hands when she described what happened on the trunk of the BMW.

When she looked up, Robert grinned at her. “Well, it’s about time. But why the garage?”

She shrugged one shoulder. “I wanted to—”

“Bump his bumper, wet his dipstick.”

“Robert!”

“Bend his tie rod, torque his nuts.”

“Stop!”

Her outrage was ruined when she giggled.

“It’s okay.” He patted her knee. “You just wanted to feel like a woman again.”

“But on his car?”

“It was a consensual act between two adults. Right?”

Grace nodded.

“So the place doesn’t matter as long as it’s not inside a shed display at Home Depot.”

She cocked her head. Now it was her friend who couldn’t look at her.

“Ro-ber?”

He flapped a dismissive wave. “What else upset you? I know there’s more.”

Grace repeated Beau’s parting words about the cost of getting her into a bed next time. “After my mother’s death, I found six luxury cars in a storage facility. I’m sure all of them were bought by her sugar daddies.”

“But Beau doesn’t know your history. It’s not like he bought the car for you. You just got a friendly discount.”

“I can’t be with a man who expects I’ll repay him with sex.”

Robert’s brow wrinkled. “You need to talk to him before you shut him out of your life.”

More than Beau’s heedless remark, the intensity of her attraction to him bothered Grace. She was appalled by the loss of her long-nurtured control in the garage last night. It was like the lights of her familiar life shut off without a flicker. Now she had to blindly navigate an unknown expanse as her arms waved through the air for potential hazards.

“I’ll talk to him. But I know what I have to do first.”

When Lily awoke from her nap, Grace told her she needed to sign more papers for the new car.

She left her with Robert and Tariq. At the dealership, two eager salesmen rushed toward her.

“I dealt with Harry yesterday. Is he here?” She was informed that Sunday was his day off.

“Is Tom Lundquist in?”

Beau’s brother-in-law was a tall, slender man with reddish-blond hair and bright, blue eyes. He grasped Grace’s hand in both of his. “I wasn’t expecting to meet you today. Does Beau know you’re here?”

“No. Can we talk in your office?”

By law, Grace had three business days to void the current sales contract. She insisted they renegotiate the out-the-door price of the Highlander without the brother-in-law discount.

Tom placed her paperwork back in the envelope. “Grace, I’m okay with your insurance reimbursement.”

“Thanks, but I know what a fair price for last year’s model is. I’d feel better if I was not indebted to you. . . or Beau.”

Tom gave her a searching look. He printed out another purchase agreement with the new price. Grace handed over a check for the difference. He attached the bank draft to the contract. “You can take all this to the cashier’s office.”

Grace stood. “Thank you. I’ll pick up the car as soon as I have the rest of the money.”

Beau called at three PM the next day. “Grace, what’s going on? Tom said you were at the dealership yesterday.”

“I wasn’t comfortable using your family discount. I don’t want to owe you anything.”

He did not respond for several long seconds. “Is this because of what I said Saturday night? I’m sorry. It was a bad joke.”

“When will I get the insurance check? I want to return your car as soon as possible.”

Beau sighed. “It should be here on Wednesday morning. Are we still on for dinner Saturday night?”

She swallowed hard. “No. I don’t think we should see each other again.”

“But, Grace—”

“Goodbye, Beau.”

COMMENT: Love this chapter.

Just a thought: Speak your dialogue out loud, always, to allow your ear to hear if it’s realistic or not. People don’t always, in fact, rarely speak in full sentences.

WORD: TEXT TO SPEECH.

Also, watch for over explaining/describing. Trim extraneous words wherever possible to keep the story moving along at the crisp pace you have established with your characters. You don’t have to tell your reader everything. They’ll figure a lot out on their own. For example, when Lilly is on the phone with Beau:

You wrote:

“Mr. Beau.” Lily turned back to the phone. “Mommy’s here.” She thrust the device at her mother.

Grace put the warm towels on the tabletop and lifted the phone from Lily’s outstretched hand. “Hello.”

You could tighten this with:

“Mr. Beau. Mommy’s here.”

Grace lifted the phone from Lily’s outstretched hand.

“Hello.”

Over-writing is an issue with all writers. Publishers used to be willing to edit this out. Today's business climate requires that manuscripts do not require massive amounts of editing to tighten them. The time from acquisition to publication is a cost factor. Margins are shrinking. Time really is money in the book biz. You want to make the publisher's job as minimal as possible.

VOICE DREAM READER for text to speech. Can be used on a phone.

Great to use when you make any kind of edits/corrections on your ms. Since we all tend to make errors in the process of editing, when you listen to the edited version, your ear will tell you "whoops, this is not quite right. FIX IT!"