

NOT READY!

By Kelly Meadows

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It's the worst thing you can hear on a date. Worse than when she says "I want the steak," and you're budgeted for tacos. Worse than when she says "I really like you, but.... you know!" It's not even from the girl at all. It's from her mother.

It's **(as mother, as his own character becomes frightened)** "She's not ready yet. Just have a seat."

(HE's still frightened.)

Not ready! I've got to have her home by eleven; it's seven o'clock now, and we have six hours worth of things to do! And if I was late?

Sure: **(as the date)** "You don't care about me! I've seen sitting here so long I had time to catch up on my homework! I really like you, but... you know!"

I learned to be on time. But since my reputation for showing up late smeared me faster than cream cheese on a raisin bagel, I had to pay the price.

(as mom, but also with sarcasm from his own character)

"She's not ready yet."

Okay, frankly, I'd rather sit in the car with the air off and the windows rolled up than wait on the couch with someone's **(almost gagging)** family – at least there's a chance you'll survive in the car. There was one seat left, as everyone was gathered around like zombies watching *America's Funniest Home Videos*.

(not meaning any of it)

Hilarious. Rollicking. I couldn't stop laughing.

Okay, her brother. He looked about thirteen, 40 pounds overweight, and was turning more orange by the minute from dipping his hand in a bag of cheese puffs, **(with amazement)** few of which actually made it into his **(disgusted at the thought of it)** mouth. All that orange powder made him look like a toucan, but with a larger beak.

So I had to sit next to *that* – and like it. I tried to focus on the **(sarcastic)** “hysterical pandemonium” generated by the *Home Videos*. Kid falls off her bike, cracks head, emergency vehicle crashes into a hydrant on the way up the street and floods the neighborhood sewer system while little girl lies screaming and bleeding on the pavement in an ever rising pool of water.

(with a forced laugh)

It just doesn't get any better. Finally, little brother speaks up as a shower of cheese curl flies across the room to land haphazardly on the carpet and in a bowl of dog water. They puffed up and floated on the top like dead bodies after the sinking of the Titanic.

(as the boy)

“You actually want to go out with my sister?”

Daddy pipes up from behind an old copy of *Forbes*.

“Stop that, Kirkham.”

“Well she's just so gross!” snorts Kirkham.

Like he didn't *invent* gross!

(as father)

“Don't talk that way about your sister.”

What I *wanted* to screeeam is “Why are you watching this drive!?” Next thing up, someone's dog stepped in a birthday cake and went nuts from eating too much icing. Then the kid on screen starts eating it up after the dog is done. Kid goes nuts, too. Turns out someone left the icing out too long, and the sugar turned into some sort of amphetamine. Ambulance comes, knocks out a telephone pole on the way up. No phone service in North Dakota for three days. Long video. I feigned interest to avoid Dad.

His eyes peer over the *Forbes* like a kleptomaniac looking to heist a tube of lipstick off the Walgreen's cosmetic counter.

“Come to think of it,” Dad winks at me, “why *do* you want to go out with my daughter? HmMMMMM?”

“Well, to save her from her family,” is what I wanted to say.

Then I wanted to say “because all the boys say she’s a great kisser.”

Then I wanted to say “I think I’ll just go wait in the car with the windows rolled up.”

“Yeah,” says young Kirkham. “tell us. Since she’s so gross.”

“We have a lot in common,” I say. “We both like history. And ping pong.”

“You’re a geek,” Kirkham was nearing the end of the curls, only to start on a new and larger bag just three feet away. “Boys don’t like history.”

(as his date, from a distance)

“Kirkham! Shut up!”

Finally, she’s out of the bathroom, screaming from the top of the stairs.

“Don’t talk to him about me.”

“Last time she made her date wait an hour!” said Kirk, smiling like a boy scout at a panty raid.

“So you’re going to be sitting on this couch forever and ever.”

Shelly called to me from the top of the steps!

“I’ll be down in just a few minutes!”

Right. I know what “a few minutes” means to a girl like that! It’s like at the airport, when the lady at the counter says “We’ll just be a few minutes late!” And an hour later, she repeats “We’ll just be a few minutes late!” Only an airport and a teenage girl can turn a few minutes into six hours.

So I stared at the audience watching these upchuckingly hilarious home videos. I felt sorry for them. They were laughing at human pain, human misery, and apparently at a city with a very inept emergency vehicle department. The real story of human misery was on the couch, next to Kirkham and his lost city of cheese curls! My heart, my soul, being grilled like a salmon filet by this family of imbeciles. Why don't you just flip me over and cook me Cajun!

(as Kirkham)

"Ew, she's probably putting on that stupid red lipstick and then she's going to kiss you, and **(making fun)** you'll be wearing it too!"

(as father)

"Kirkham, don't talk about your sister."

(as Kirkham)

"Dad, there's nothing else to talk about."

Please! *Find* something else to talk about.

Dad finally asked me what I was taking in school.

"Volleyball."

I don't know why I said it. I was afraid of Kirkham. I study! Really. But I said volleyball.

(as Kirkham)

"Only girls play volleyball."

"Do you want to *be* a volleyball?" I said back. I meant it, too. I have a mean spike.

"Daaaad!"

Mom walked in about now, wearing a dishrag around her wrist and clinging to a pasta spoon like she was Marie Antoinette desperately holding onto her head in 1793. She couldn't address me directly, of course. Probably because she was a queen.

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