

A Digest of Good Stories & Humour sent to 10,000 Households

# HORIZON

## Magazine

May 2010

**Cottonwood  
Stopping  
House**  
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Photo by Mimi Desautels

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# Cold War

by Lisa Pfau of Toronto, ON, formerly of Rimbey, AB

## SMACK!

A wrinkled yellow hand retracts from the back of Elizabeth's now throbbing hand.

"That's not for you! That's uncle's orange." Elizabeth's middle-aged, future mother-in-law sputters in Mandarin.

Elizabeth sits stunned on the edge of her seat, subconsciously rubbing her hand. Every other morning since she arrived in Beijing two weeks earlier she'd shared the oranges from the communal plate with her future in-laws. She looks down at Uncle, shoulders hunched, staring timidly into his congee, his plate stacked with half chewed apple slices - not an orange rind in sight. She looks up at Auntie's fierce black

eyes and flushed cheeks.

"Hao... (OK)", Elizabeth nods. She grabs a whole orange from the fruit bowl on the far side of the table and begins to peel it with her teeth. Auntie snorts, indignantly shoveling steaming congee into her down-turned mouth.

~~~~~

This is right out of Hong Lou Meng (Dream of Red Mansions)! I have the mother-in-law from hell!

**Next she will be telling me to get down on my knees and massage her feet while scrubbing the floor with my backside.**

I already gave her a gift that was more expensive than my own mother's Christmas present, not to



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mention the groceries and little chocolates I brought home last night.

I clean up after myself, use my own soap and towels, stay in my room and don't intrude on their space. I let her know when I'll be home so she doesn't have to worry.

I even drew a cute little card and wrote a message in Chinese to show my appreciation for their hospitality. No matter what I do, I'm not good enough for her, her family, and most of all, her son!

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I would love to dump that oozing, juicy bowl of oranges onto her lap and watch her squeal. But then, she would call Jimmy in Toronto and tell him that I'm a horrible, disrespectful, abusive witch and he'd better call it off or his poor, delicate mother might die of sorrow. God forbid! They weren't kidding when they said "love hurts". Smile and keep it together the Chinese way.

Elizabeth smiles cheerfully at her in-laws and inquires about their weekend plans. Uncle perks up, enthusiastically outlinging his newest renovation project at the hotel he manages while Auntie glares at the two of them from across the table.

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What does my son see in this girl? My bright, precious son. I miss him. And instead of visiting, he sends this stranger to my home.

**Why couldn't he find a nice Chinese girl? His father knows so many pretty, polite, high positioned daughters.**

This Westerner is a farm girl and not even beautiful.

Look at her munching on the skin of that orange, juices running down her neck. Slurp! Slurp! Disgusting!

Look at my gentle husband, happily chatting and even laughing at her jokes. What has she done to him? He normally never laughs; he's always serious.

Last night when he saw those ridiculous chocolate playing cards on the table, his eyes light up like a child's and he giggled with glee.

And that card she made, afterwards he told me that we should try to be more understanding of her and help her with her Mandarin. Help her?!



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**EVENTS**

**April 30 & May 1 :** Wetaskiwin Chamber of Commerce Spring Trade Show  
Wetaskiwin Drill Hall, 780-352-8003, [www.wetaskiwinchamber.ca](http://www.wetaskiwinchamber.ca)

**May 22 - 24 :** Rawhide Rodeo, Wetaskiwin Agriculture Society,  
Agricultural Grounds, 780-352-2780, [www.wetaskiwinag.com](http://www.wetaskiwinag.com)

**May 29 :** Short Cut to the Cure  
Wetaskiwin Civic Centre, Arena One, 780-352-7423

All I do is help her - wash her clothes, help her find groceries in the hope she'll stop sending me messages about dinner, give her soap and towels that she refuses to use.

And what do I get in return? She hides in her room talking to my son on the phone while I sit alone in the livingroom hoping my husband will come home before 10pm tonight. No, she will not win! He's all I have.

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Auntie pushes her chair back, scraping its legs along the shiny dark wood dining room floor, slams her palms on the table, and swiftly clears it. Uncle and Elizabeth abruptly stop their conversation and get up to leave. As they turn away, Auntie grabs the plate of untouched orange slices and tosses it into the trash.  
— The End

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