

FICTION

# THE TEXT

• PART 1 •

Dawn noticed the text as she made breakfast that Thursday morning. It came at 1:19 a.m. That told her Elaine, her daughter, had wrestled with sending it.

by CHRIS FABRY

“I NEED TO TALK. Can we meet at the coffee shop?” Dawn stared at those two sentences for what seemed an ice age. There was so much she couldn’t discern in those 11 words, but they felt like a direct answer to prayer. She had asked God for some glimmer of hope, and here it was.

Dawn wanted to speak with her daughter again, the one who had cut her out of her life. They called it estrangement, but that word was too kind. She ached for contact, even for a conversation with angry words, name-calling, and rage. That would have been better than the years of silence. The years of questions. The broken heart.

Dawn wanted to be in her grandchildren’s lives, too, but she could only send cards and gifts for birthdays and Christmas. And she didn’t know if the children ever received them. There was no response from that house only a few miles away.

So close, yet so far.

At church she saw others her age with grandchildren in tow, and the sight was like a knife in her soul. When the pastor mentioned the importance of grandparents being in their grandchildren’s lives, she wanted to stand up and scream.

She studied the text again. The words felt cold. Distant. It was a little calculated, perhaps, like it was a text by committee. Maybe Elaine had asked a counselor or some friends how to make contact, and this was the result.

Dawn tapped the screen.

“I would love to! Oh, Elaine, I’ve waited so long to hear from you! I’ve prayed that you would reach out at some point, and we would be able to restore our relationship. My heart aches to be in Amanda’s and Kenny’s lives. You don’t know how hard this has been ... ”

Dawn wanted to speak with her daughter again, the one who had cut her out of her life.



She stopped. Something wasn't right. Elaine didn't need a paragraph. She just needed a response. Something short. A long, involved message would push her away. She deleted the words and tried again.

"Yes! How about Saturday? Pick the time, and I'll be there."

Should she say more? Should she thank Elaine for texting?

She hit Send.

Dawn made coffee, returning to the table to check the phone. After an hour, when she hadn't heard anything, she put the phone in her pocket and moved on with her day.

She was in line at the nearby pack-and-ship store, along with a dozen others who were returning online purchases like she was doing. She was two people away from being served when she heard the ding.

"Noon. See you then."

Dawn's heart beat faster from that moment, both from joy and dread. She called a friend she trusted, who knew of the situation and asked for advice. Then she called another friend from her Bible study and asked her to pray for wisdom.

"Remember that verse we went over in James?" her friend said. "Be slow to speak, quick to listen, and slow to become angry. Or something like that."

Dawn had memorized the passage from James 1:19. Her friend had the idea right, but the wrong order. "Quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger." That wasn't bad advice. She wondered if James had children who wouldn't speak with him.

She wanted to back up the truck of her pain and dump it on her daughter. Let her know how much this estrangement had hurt. How unfair it was. Cutting her out of her life and the lives of her grandchildren had left such a deep wound. It was basically a no-contact order that hadn't come from a judge or jury but a phone call that had caught her off guard.

"Mom, this is the last time you're going to hear from me for a while. I don't want you calling me or coming to visit. Stop sending cards and gifts to the kids. I'll get in touch when I'm ready to talk."

It wasn't even a conversation. Dawn hadn't been able to catch her breath. She managed to choke out, "OK. I love you." But the line went dead.

For months afterward, Dawn read everything she could about estrangement and how to restore a broken relationship. And she discovered she was not alone. Other parents were going through the same painful experience, and many times the reason was traced to religion and how the son or daughter had been raised. Many parents had waited years for a child to open the door to communication. Some never had closure, and that frightened her.

She reached out to a counselor who listened and allowed her to talk through her feelings. Dawn had lost her husband two years earlier, so the rejection by her daughter was a double wound. It seemed cruel. The counselor suggested she talk with her son about the situation and see if she could glean something from him. But Larry was tight-lipped.

"Mom, I don't agree with what Elaine did or how she's doing it, but I know she thought it through for a long time."

"She talked with you about it?"

"Yes. She didn't want to hurt you, but she just needed some space. And some time."

"But for how long? And why cut me off like this? I wasn't a bad mother. We never abused her. How can I apologize? I don't know what I did wrong."

Larry paused. "Those are good questions, Mom. But I think that's something you and Elaine will need to work out."

"But how can we do that if she won't talk to me?"

"You can't. You'll just have to wait until she's ready."

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Dawn sat in the coffee shop parking lot praying and trying to process all she felt. She wanted to get this meeting right. She wanted to say the right thing, do the right thing that would open the door of healing and reconciliation. But there was so much out of her control. There were so many things she didn't know and couldn't anticipate.

GETTY IMAGES

She felt a warmth inside, the kind of sensation that comes when someone who loves you whispers truth that goes straight to the heart.

A stubborn leaf let go on a maple tree planted on an island in the parking lot, and she watched it flutter to the ground. That leaf felt like her hopes and dreams. She wanted to pour herself into her grandchildren. She wanted to just sit and read stories to them. Laugh. Bask in their wonder at the world. She would even figure out how to connect by video online — a thought that scared her and pushed her to her technological limits. She would do anything to be in their lives again.

*Anything?*

It wasn't a voice. It was more of a thought that lingered. Would she really do anything? She felt a warmth inside, the kind of sensation that comes when someone who loves you whispers truth that goes straight to the heart.

*Would you listen to her?*

Dawn closed her eyes and spoke aloud. "Of course, I would listen. I want to hear from her. I want to know what I did so I can fix this."

*What if it's not about fixing this?*

The words simmered in her heart. She argued with the whisper. "Why wouldn't it be about fixing this? When there's a break, you set it and let it heal, don't you?"

No whisper came. She was alone with her thoughts. And like another whisper, there came a soft patter of rain on the windshield. ☔

Note: Look for the conclusion of Chris Fabry's article in the September 2025 issue of *Mature Living*.

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