It was a normal day for me. As normal as my world was, anyway. A skeptic may ask if there ever is a normal. But I was not a skeptic. I was six years old, Daddy’s little girl, Mommy’s helper, the big bossy sister of my two younger brothers, and “normal” for me was traveling the country with my family in my daddy’s big eighteen-wheel semi. I had grown up there, practically. At six weeks old I took my first trip with Mom and Dad, and it had been my life since then.

That day we were trucking down a two-lane highway in Nebraska, and my life was good and normal. I did not think about that changing. The unthinkable had never surprised me, and I had yet to learn that life does not always give warnings for the unknown that it throws our way. I rarely considered the dangers of the road, leaving them to my daddy’s hands. I did not think about how many miles I had traveled or how each mile driven without any accidents was a blessing. I simply sat in the seat beside Daddy or knelt behind him and watched the swan on the hood of our Peterbilt sail over the road before us. Just as I was doing that day.

The wet road was covered in fresh snow, making it a slushy mess. Not many other vehicles were out, and we plowed ahead. Bad weather did not often scare my daddy. He always drove long and hard and got us everywhere safely. I knew the steering wheel was well under control in his capable hands.

But the pickup truck coming toward us was not supposed to be careening into our lane like that. Those little ribbons of Nebraska road did not leave much room on the shoulder for big trucks like ours to get out of the way. What was that pickup doing? The stock trailer behind it swung crazily, and my “normal” ceased breathing.

Later Daddy told me what happened. Later he explained how the pickup truck lost control and almost hit us head-on, though Daddy tried to gently steer the semi as far onto the shoulder of the road as he dared. Later he told me how the pickup truck barely missed us, but the stock trailer...
swung broadside, hitting our truck on the driver’s front corner. He told me there was nothing he could do to control our momentum, because, unknown to him, the stock trailer had broken our steering. My daddy’s hands could do nothing with the wheel even though he desperately tried. Later Mommy told me how our semi slid helplessly across the opposite lane and up a steep bank. There, when it seemed like everything would finally be still, my world tipped sideways as our full trailer wrenched the truck over on its side.

I do not remember those details. I do not even remember comprehending what was really happening. But I knew that something had gone terribly, terribly wrong. As my daddy wrestled with the wheel and uttered some choice, frustrated words about the situation, I clearly recall bracing myself behind him and screaming. Why I screamed what I did, I do not know, but the words were an honest plea. “Jesus, help us! Jesus, help us!” shrieked from my throat.

The next moments jumbled together in a rush of confusion. Blankets and containers that had just a second ago been in the cupboards came crashing down around me. I had no control over where my body flew as I somersaulted around. I did not go unconscious, but it almost felt like it as everything became quiet again. I was awaking to a new reality. One that was not normal. And I had no idea what to do. It was dark. I wondered why; I wondered where I was.

I found out when I clawed at the covers around me and surfaced to daylight again. Blankets had been covering me, and the whole inside of the truck was strange. Nothing was in its normal place, and I tried desperately to orient myself. Mommy had been shelling walnuts, and they were strewn all over the place. My brother next in age, Laban, had been thrown around like me. Lance, the youngest, was just a baby, and was lying on the bed when the truck tipped over. When it stilled, Lance was underneath my mommy, and she was busy bracing herself, trying not to put her full weight on him.

Daddy kicked out the front windshield of the truck and handed us kids to people waiting out in the cold. My feet were bare, and someone hurriedly stood me in the icy snow. The next thing I remember is sitting in some stranger’s vehicle. A friendly lady sat with us, while her husband helped investigate the wreck. Their dog was in the backseat, and kept sniffing us. I feared and hated dogs, and wanted nothing more than to be away from there. But there was no place to go.

Finally the ambulance came. Mommy and we kids got in and left for the hospital. A nice lady wrapped me up in a big blanket and set me on her lap on the ride. Mom sat
across from me in the ambulance, holding Laban on her lap. He had a cut on his head that was bleeding freely, and I was scared. I did not know that even minor head wounds like that usually look worse than they are. I watched as he leaned forward and vomited repeatedly into a cup that Mommy was holding for him. Questions raced through my head. No one had died—but did that mean that my family was going to be all right? I wanted everything to stop. To be still. And for someone to tell me that every-
thing was going to be just fine. But no one did. Even Daddy and Mommy were too busy to hold me and say those comforting words that mommies and daddies do.

Someone on the ambulance gave my brothers and me each a little stuffed panda bear with a bright red ribbon tied in a bow around his neck. I admired his black fur, stark against a white belly, and snuggled him close. The lady held me the whole time, telling me about her own little girl who was my age. She took me to the bathroom when we got to the hospital and got me cleaned up, all the while chatting sweetly, adding some sort of stability to the uncertain moments.

They let me look into the room where Laban was. A doctor bent over Laban, who was lying on a table with his upper body and head covered in a blanket. A small area on the top of his head was left bared, and the doctor worked methodically as he stitched the lacerated skin back together. There was nothing really wrong, they said—he was a fortunate boy, and the small cut gave him a scar that boys love showing off. I faintly remember peering into another room, this time seeing two nurses who were examining my baby brother Lance. He acted the way all normal babies do, and seemed blissfully oblivious to the confusion around him.

After we were all checked, we waited in a small room for Daddy to come and get us. He was not hurt, Mommy said, and was busy taking care of getting all of his freight from the trailer moved somewhere else. He had a daddy’s business to do, which involved taking care of the wreckage and making plans for his family. That is what he always did for us. And it did not surprise me that he was doing what he always did. Daddy never got sick or hurt—and if he ever was, he never complained, but kept right on doing his daddy’s job anyway.

So we waited for Daddy to come. When he finally did, I was relieved. We were all back together again, and everything just had to be right then. But as happy as I was to see Daddy, something was strange and wrong. He tried to be cheerful and he had plans for where to take us. That was normal. But his gray jacket had splotches of dried red blood over it from carrying Laban. I did not understand. Daddy’s jacket never had blood on it. Why did it now? Was he hurt? It was foreign on him, and I recoiled inside at yet another thing that was not normal.

Police officers gave us transportation that night to a dingy little motel room. I did not care anymore where we were, I just wanted something to be still. I remember what a relief it was to finally have a place for the entire crazy jumble in my head to settle. My little family was back together again.

The world gradually came to a rest, as a soft bed and warm covers surrounded me. Daddy’s and Mommy’s soft voices fell gently on the quiet. Strange how contentment settled so easily when they tucked me in bed and when I heard them say, “I love you.” And that was enough, even though it had not been a normal day.

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