I place my palms on the window ledge of the huge double window in my mom and dad’s bedroom, and hoist myself up until I am kneeling on the sill, my nose to the window.

Beyond, and three feet below, is my backyard.

It’s not fair. I cleaned my room, I swear I did.

I made my bed, picked up the stuff on the floor, and put all my books in the bookshelf.

But did my mom thank me? Of course not.

Just because I shoved the Monopoly pieces under the bed, along with a couple of nightgowns and maybe two or three CDs that lost their cases, she got mad.
Picky, picky, picky.
First she told me, "I want your room cleaned in an hour," and then when I tried a
time-saving plan, like storing stuff under the
bed, she didn't appreciate it.
A little bad luck made things even worse.
When she came in to check on me, she
stepped barefoot on a little metal Monopoly
token.
Wow. Does she scream loud.
I apologized and everything.
But did she forgive me? Of course not.
I'm going to jump out this window, then
sneak around the alley and crawl on my
stomach past the big kitchen window. My
mom's in the kitchen right now, with my aunt
Rhea, getting the Thanksgiving dinner ready,
and I don't want them to see me make my
escape.

My aunt is why my mom's in such a bad
mood, I know it.
She and my uncle Ted, and their one perfect
kid, Andrea (my age, ten and a half) arrived
from Chicago this morning.
We're all supposed to break turkey together
in about half an hour.
I plan to be in Polynesia. Or at least New
Jersey, by then.
Our family is not too fond of their family,
but they come every Thanksgiving anyway.
My mom especially dislikes my aunt Rhea. She’s rich and snobby and makes my mom and dad and my older brother, Jason, and me feel terrible.

She speaks with an English accent, even though I know she was born right here, where we live, in Massapequa, Long Island, New York.

Whenever Jason or I turn on the TV, Aunt Rhea always asks, oh so sweetly, “My, my, don’t you two watch a dreadfully large quantity of television?”

That’s the Rhea technique: questions that kill.

Like this morning, she asked Jason, when he was grabbing a cookie from the cookie jar: “Wouldn’t you prefer a carrot?”

Who’d prefer a carrot to one of mom’s chocolate-chip cookies, anyway?

Or later, as my mom was setting the big table, Rhea came over with the napkins and said: “My, my, Sara, but don’t you make Missy or Jason do anything around here?”

Jason calls her Aunt Dia-Rhea.

Unfortunately, my mom brought her into my room to show her how I’d cleaned up before they all arrived, and that’s when my mom stepped on the Monopoly top hat. And called me a slob. In front of Aunt Rhea. And told me not to come out until my room was spotless.

My first plan was not to come out of my room until I’m eighteen.

But that didn’t seem possible. So I snuck in here, to my parents’ bedroom, in the back of the house, and I’m going to climb out this window.

I’d have snuck out of mine, but I left some candies on my window ledge and they melted onto the metal window and now it won’t open so easily.

More bad luck.

Personally, I’ve had enough. I’m going to Polynesia. Don’t worry about the sharks there. I’ll be fine.

Besides, I don’t want to play with my cousin Andrea anymore.

She is what my grandmother calls “a lovel child.”

Andrea offered to set the table.

She always picks up her dishes after a meal and puts them in the sink.

She does the laundry every Saturday.

She compliments everybody on everything.

She doesn’t even have to be reminded to do that stuff.

Personally, I think that’s sick.

And when we started to play a game of jacks, she slaughtered me. And apologized every move she made.

I press my nose to the window. In the distance, I can see Annie MacElvane’s house.

My best friend.

She is probably sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner right now with her warm, friendly family.

I could run away there.

It’s not Polynesia, but as my dad would say I’d make good time. I’d be there in a sec.

The problem is—I can’t run anywhere until I get the summer screen out of this window.

I’d rather run away to Polynesia, because it’s a great place for kids.

We just studied it in Mrs. Schwartz’s Cultures of the World unit.
There's no such word in Polynesia as my or our. Those are called possessive pronouns. The reason they don't have possessive pronouns is that nobody owns anything, including their own children. Children belong to God and the land and the universe. They have total freedom.

According to my map, Polynesia is about six inches from America. Which can't be that far.

I wonder what the kids in Polynesia are like.

I wonder if when they're in school, they have a unit called "The Peoples of Massapequa."

As a token of my friendliness, I'm bringing my jacks along. Mrs. Schwartz says that when you visit other peoples, you should bring a symbol of your own peoples. Jacks should do it. Plus, they'll give me something to do until I make a friend.

Well, the sooner I leave, the sooner I'll be playing tenses in paradise.

Maybe I'll just shove this screen right out the window.

Scrunching down, I kick at it.

Uh oh. A hole. The screen's still attached, but now there's this big hole in it that's the shape of my foot.

If I weren't running away already, I'd seriously consider it now, because when they discover this little disaster I'll be grounded until college.

I'll have to make the hole just a little bigger. Girl size.

Perfect. I'm set.

When my mom and dad realize I'm gone, their hearts will break.

In fact, I think I should write a note to make them feel a little worse. Something like:

Dear Mom and Dad: This home is not working out. If you miss me, call Polynesia 2-4000.

Or:

Personally, I've had enough. I'm going to Polynesia. Don't worry about the sharks there. I'll be fine.

If a shark eats me, that'll really kill them.

My body is easing into the scratchy screen when suddenly I hear a thud.

A thump.

A clump.

And then the rattle and vibration of furniture in the hall.

Heavy footsteps are coming toward the bedroom.

My body stiffens. My heart pounds.

What could that be? I have to get out of here. Fast.

Ow. The torn screen is so scratchy.


Bounce. Bounce.

It's my brother, Jason. Bouncing a basketball in the hall.

When my mom yells at him about indoor basketball bouncing, she has a point. The whole house vibrates.

Is that the doorknob turning? This doorknob? I try to ease my body further through the screen.

I can't get out.

There's only one thing I can do.

Backing my butt out of the screen, I jump down from the ledge and look around my mom's room for a place to hide.

The closet.

I'll never make it in time.

Diving onto the floor, I roll under the huge queen-size bed just as the door opens.

In a second, I'm peeking out from under the bedspread, inches from Jason's big clohopper feet, which are now standing in front of my mom's bureau.

I bet he's looking in the mirror, as usual.

Wait. Those clohoppers of his are moving. Is he leaving?
No. He’s moving toward the window.
I peek out a little further just in time to see
him climb onto the ledge, open the window,
and kick the screen right out into the
backyard.
“What does she want,” he’s muttering. “I
went to the store. I meant to buy regular milk.
So I didn’t see the label that said buttermilk.
Personally, I’ve had enough.”
His leg is out the window.
My gosh.
He’s running away too!
Gee. I’m going to miss him.
What am I talking about—I’m going to miss
him? I’m running away too!
Thud. Thud.
It’s footsteps again.
What is this? A convention?
You can’t even have a little privacy in your
own parents’ bedroom when you want it.
Jason’s heard something too. His head is
turned, perked at attention.
The doorknob. It’s turning again.
Jason’s eyes widen in panic and then he
jumps backward off the window ledge.
The next thing I know, I have company
under the bed.
“Happy Thanksgiving . . .” I whisper.
“Abhh?” he almost screams in fright, but I
cover his mouth as I swallow a giggle, because
we can both hear the soft clip clap of my
mom’s loose slippers.
She’s clip clapping around the room.
The bureau drawer squeaks open,
there’s the soft whoosh of something
being removed, the drawer squeaks
shut again, and then the springs of the
mattress hit my nose as she plops down on
the bed.
She’s sighing. Which lowers the springs even
more.
Then she mutters, “Personally I’ve had
enough . . .” and leans backward. “On the
other hand, you’re a grown woman, Sara.
Now, go out there and handle it.”
The springs lower, hitting me in the nose,
and then lift.
She’s gotten up.
In a second, we hear the door open and
softly shut.
She’s gone.
Wait a second. It’s opening again.
“Sara? Are you in here?”
It’s my dad, coming in.
But where’s my mom, if my dad didn’t see
her going out?
I know I heard the door shutting.
Oh no. It couldn’t be.
But it is.
The door that shut wasn’t the bedroom door.
It was the closet door.
My mom, my thirty-five-year-old mom, is
hiding in the closet at this very moment.
“Sara? Jason? Missy?” my dad whispers
again in a voice that sounds a little lonely.
Gee. Poor Daddy.
He’s been stuck out there all alone with
Aunt Rhea and Uncle Ted.
Uncle Ted probably just finished showing off
his newest gold charge cards to my dad.
I peek out from underneath the bottom of
the bedspread.
Everything that’s going on is reflected in the full-length mirror on the closet door. I can see a dress caught in the doorjamb of my mom’s closet.

She’s in there all right.
“What is everybody?” my dad says.
Silence.
My dad takes one last look around the room, and then moves to the bedroom door again.

But just as he’s backing out, the closet door opens and my mom pops out

“Hi . . .” she says.

“Sara! What are you doing in the closet?”

“I was . . . I was looking for a better tablecloth.” She swallows and then continues.

“Actually, I was also looking for a whole new house. And a whole new me. But . . . it’s not in there . . .” Her face starts to pucker, like she’s going to cry.

My dad puts his arm around her.

“Is Rhea getting to you, honey?”

My mom shakes her head. “Nooo. What makes you think that?”

My dad grins.

“And I took it out on the kids. . . .”

“They’ll live . . . .” my dad says.

Sure we’ll live, I think. But where?

“What’s the matter with me?” my mom sobs. “I’m a grown woman. Why does that phony get to me? Why can’t I handle it? I have no character. No courage. No strength. You want me to make it all nice. And I try, but she’s getting to me. Even your brother Ted is getting to me. All his mutual funds are going up. Did you know that?”

My dad nods. “Sure did.”

“Plus, I’ve been yelling at the kids. For nothing. Well, no nothing . . . .”

Nothing, Mom. Nothing.

“And they’re fed up with me. And I don’t blame them.” She starts to cry again. “The
turkey is probably dry, I have an ugly tablecloth, and I’m a terrible mother.” She’s bawling.

I have to admit that the sound of my mom’s sobs is getting to me. I can’t help it.

“You’re not such a terrible mother . . .” I mumble.

The sobbing stops.

“Who’s that? Where’s that? What’s that?” my mom asks.

“Stevie Baldwin’s mom is worse,” Jason talks right into the mattress. “She’s not as mean as you are today, but she treats him like a baby. Last week, four guys were playing pool in his room, and she walks in, and with this high, squeaky voice, says ‘Would any of you boys like a Twinkie . . .’? You’d never do that!”

Just as Jason’s finishing his speech the bedspread, like a curtain, rises, and my mom’s wide eyes stare at us.

“Happy Thanksgiving,” I say to her. Then, I can’t help adding, “But for next Thanksgiving, you ought to dust under here, Mom . . . .”

She blushes. Then her thumb jerks backward, like a hitchhiker.


Jason rolls one way. I roll the other.

In a second we’re all standing around my mom and dad’s bed.

My mom’s fingertips are against her cheeks. I think she’s in shock. My dad’s eyes have already taken in the open window.
Just as I say, "Jason was running away," Jason says, "Missy was running away."
And then we both say, "We can't take it anymore either."
My dad and mom give each other looks. I feel lectures and meaningless sayings coming on.
"Aunt Rhea means well..." my mom begins.
But now that we know how she really feels about Aunt Rhea, all we have to do is give her a "yeah, sure" look, and she stops.
"On the other hand, kids..." Now my dad is going into speech mode. "You can't run away from a problem..."
But then he looks at my mom, who is standing inches from her former hideaway closet.

And he stops. And sighs. "What are we going to do?" he says. "They are unbearable. I've tried to talk to them, hint, be diplomatic, but it's like talking to Martians..."
Everyone's looking dumb, so I jump right in there. "Could we... all run away?" I ask softly.
All our eyes shift to the open window. Then we look at each other.
I can see the open sea. Polynesia. Palm trees.
Then my dad sighs. "My mother, your grandmother, would have a heart attack in heaven... I can't..."
My mom agrees. "Look, it's a Thanksgiving from hell... but otherwise it's not so terrible. What we have to do is what we do every year. Get through it, and give thanks on Sunday—when it's over."
Everybody nods at practically the same time. Which makes us all giggle.
"Are we ready?" my dad asks. "We have to get out there or they're going to start to get suspicious. Plus, the turkey is done..."

My mother turns white. "Oh my God... my turkey... my turkey." She lunges for the door. Then she stops, pauses, looks back at us, puts a big smile on her face, stands up straight, and with dignity, walks out her bedroom door. My father follows. My brother goes next.
Before I leave, I take one last peek at the window.
I guess that's what people mean by a window of opportunity.
Polynesia would have been swell.
But it's not to be.
Of course, Christmas is coming up and there are rumors that my mother's second cousins are coming up from Florida.
I can feel the wind wafting through my hair already.
But in the meanwhile, I close the door behind me, take a deep breath, and gather up the courage that the Peoples of Massapequa are known for. ♦

Susan Haven

Susan Haven is an American comedy writer whose career began in the early 1970s. She has written for magazines and movies and television programs. She has published two novels for young adults.

Haven writes, "Being funny gets my characters through whatever crisis they need to get through, and it's helped me as well. I'm grateful that I live with a son and a husband who can easily make me laugh, no matter what. I am also a social worker, working as a therapist with families. Besides my family, nothing gives me more pleasure than being around or working with kids."

**OTHER WORKS** Maybe I'll Move to the Lost and Found