

A Good Sign

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BOBBIE WANTS TO MARRY ME AGAIN. Fourteen months now I've been pointing out the kids, our wedding pictures, our marriage certificate. Gosh, I even show him the mail—"Mr. and Mrs. Robert Franklin," right there on the envelopes.

Doesn't do any good. He just looks at me like I'm the Deceiver in this movie they only show at the Mormon Temple, which is where Bobbie and I were married four years ago. Funny how you grow up assuming a thing like marriage takes up the whole brain. Then your husband gets run over in a crosswalk, and the whole cake unbakes. He gets out of the hospital and takes up on the living room couch. And not because there's anything wrong with the sex part of him. Believe me. I know what he does in the bathroom. I wash his clothes, and his sheets, too. Still, until last week, if I so much as nursed the baby without covering myself, he'd nearly die of embarrassment. He's a gentleman—modest, very modest, honorable as they come. He hasn't touched me like a husband since the accident.

Granted, that's not the main thing to me, but it is a thing. A big thing, and don't think my mind's in the wrong place for saying so. I'm young. Twenty-three. Heading toward my prime. It's not like that mangled patch of gray matter took away the rest of him. He's a doll and he still turns me on. It's been hard, real hard.

Take this, for an instance. One time a while back, he comes home from this burger-flipping job rehab lined up for him, and what's he got? A girl. A date! Some teenage thing he's been working with. I'm not saying it was anyone's fault, though I can tell you the girl had more to do with it than Bobbie. Sure, she was just a kid and Bobbie's sweet and charming, too cute to resist, I suppose. That was the end of Bobbie's burger-flipping days, I'll tell you. He's working at the Deseret Industries now, putting price tags on all the used clothes. They keep an eye on him there, and I feel much better.

So, about two months ago he starts talking about marriage. He'd been watching me real close, too, and not in his usual "Gee, What's-

Your-Name, you sure are nice to me" sort of way. No, sir. I'd seen him look at me that way plenty before the accident. Call me crazy, but I knew then my old Bobbie was behind those puzzled, lovesick eyes. He had the hots for me, full blown Bobbie-loves-Cindy hots. There it was, love, bobbing on his face like a baby in the ocean, safe and floating on the wreckage of a plane crash. I didn't even care he couldn't remember he already loved me. After you've spent fourteen months pining after your husband, aching for your fatherless children, missing stuff as ordinary as your sweet man's toes on yours while you drift off to sleep, well, then you'll know how terrifying hope can be.

Which is why I didn't rush right in, not even when he started bringing me those horrible rings he'd pick up at the D.I. Let's just say I was cautious. I just wasn't up to having my heart broken again. I didn't lead him on or encourage him in any way. But when he came home with that last ring, and the letter, I just couldn't help myself. I knew it was true.

It happened a little with the first baby, but when the second came along, I was always peeing my pants. The doctor gave me these exercises, which I'd been working on. Bobbie didn't really understand, and him being so modest, I never went into much detail. But he'd help, all the same, count for me, encourage me, tell me I was doing real good. Which I was when he came home that day. Squeeze-two-three-four, rest-two-three-four, squeeze-two-three-four, rest-two-three-four. Do those enough you can't hardly walk the next day.

Anyhow, Bobbie'd been at work all morning, or so I thought. He walks in early, all nervous and grinning and, well, it wasn't hard to figure out.

"Count for me," I said, hoping to slow him down a bit. I wanted to help him get it right.

"Sure," he said. "But if you intend to squeeze past ten, you might have to help me count." It was a joke. Bobbie's sense of humor since the accident has actually been quite excellent. We joke a lot like that, kind of laughing at the whole rotten thing. He even seems to like it when I tease him a little.

"This is my punishment for having your babies," I told him.

He smiles like a kid when I say things like that because he's sweet and doesn't want to hurt my feelings by saying what he thinks. This time he surprised me, though.

"It's your punishment for defying God's institution of holy matrimony," he said.

Mind you, we still go to church and all. We have pictures of Jesus and the temple and the prophet on the wall, little quotes from the Book of Mormon magnetized to our fridge. But Bobbie hasn't been much into it. That's one thing that's been real different. He doesn't seem to care much one way or the other about the church, mostly because he doesn't remember, I think. I'm not sure he even believes in God anymore.

When I'd recovered some, I said, "God's a male chauvinist pig. If he'd ever had a baby, I guarantee I wouldn't be doing these dumb exercises right now."

"It's the money, isn't it?" he said. "You not marrying me."

Granted, things have been a bit tight. The old man who ran over Bobbie in that crosswalk didn't have the greatest insurance and the settlement's been slow in coming. The church has helped out some with food, and we're getting a little from the government to hold us over. But the money's coming, that's for sure—that's what our lawyer tells us, anyway. All the same, until Bobbie brought it up, I had no idea he even thought about money.

"Count, Bobbie." I was holding the baby and squeezing down below. It already ached, but I needed a second to form my thoughts.

"Squeeze-two-three-four," he counted. "Because if you not marrying me is all about money, I think you can pretty much start picking out our wedding colors. Rest-two-three-four."

"Oh, Bobbie," I said. "We're *already* married. And besides, you never hear me complaining about money."

Bobbie frowned, and I knew he was done hearing about us already being married. That's when he called me that name he hadn't used since before the accident.

"Baby doll," he said. "I didn't mean it like that. I'm just trying to give you a surprise, here." He dug into his pocket and pulled out what looked like one of those crystals everyone hangs off the rear-view mirror of their car. See, this is it right here. Awful, I know, but I love it.

"It's beautiful, Bobbie," I lied. "But I just don't know. This is all kind of fast, don't you think?" I didn't dare let on how much I wanted to take it.

"It's not plastic," he went on. He was practically begging. "This is 100 percent 24 karat gold." He was talking real fast. "And the real diamond's coming. They had to order it, but it's coming, and that's not even the best part."

My blood pressure was on it's way up, but something about the way this was going wouldn't let me disappoint him. I just wanted to bawl. "It's a good surprise, sweetheart," I said. "I just need to think about it for a while. This is a big decision."

"But, baby doll," he went on. "This is a *real* surprise. I mean this is big-league."

"What did you do, Bobbie?" I asked. I tried not to sound worried.

"Nothing," he said. "Well, except—" and he smiled at me with all his teeth—"except put our winning sweepstakes number on an order for *Sunset Magazine* because I know how much you love it."

I couldn't do anything but stare at him. "You bought me *Sunset*?" I was barely breathing. "Oh, gosh, Bobbie, you sweet thing! You bought me *Sunset*?"

"And that's not even the best part." Bobbie walked over and pulled this big, brown, official looking envelope from the cupboard. I was half-way across the room but could still see the expensive-looking gold star shining through the envelope's huge plastic window. My name and his name were written across the top in fat, black, one-or-so-inch letters, and near the bottom it read, "\$\$\$5,000,000.00."

"It came yesterday," Bobbie yelled, and jumped into the air and high-fived the decorative ceiling beam he thinks makes our trailer look like it's from France or somewhere.

Of course I knew what it was, but you've got to consider everything else that was happening right then. I wasn't about to cut Bobbie off, not when he was showing so much promise. This was the best I'd seen him since the accident.

Anyway, about then, Rusty, our two-year-old, wakes up from his nap. That's the way it is with trailers, the walls are so thin you can't ever be quiet enough to get a kid through a nap. So I handed Bobbie the baby, who he loves like the father he is, and headed down the hall for the kids' room. I studied the writing in the envelope's window, which read something like, "This hereby certifies that Cynthia Elizabeth Franklin and Robert Young Franklin will receive \$\$\$5,000,000.00, plus a bonus \$\$\$1,000,000.00 for timely receipt of the enclosed registration, to be dispersed in 30 annual payments of \$200,000.00." Oh, crap, I thought, and that was really my biggest moment of doubt, me standing there, fanning myself with that big gaudy thing. Rusty was screaming, though, so I put off doubting for the time being and went in to grab him.

Back in the living room, I found Bobbie sitting on the edge of the couch grinning. He had the baby across his knees, just like a good dad. The little porker's still at that stage, you know, head and legs up, rocking back and forth on his fat tummy like a beached whale.

I put Rusty down, opened up the envelope—which weighed about ten pounds—and unpacked a tree's worth of loose papers. To humor Bobbie, I quickly perused all those glossy pictures of encyclopedias and cars and little magazine covers made up like sticker stamps, plus of course, that silly letter of congratulations they always have—the one, you know, with the small print on back. Then I zeroed in on the certificate. They really do a bang-up job with those, using paper that feels like money, except a lot thicker and a little softer. You're supposed to think the gold sticker is just that, gold. Close up, the lettering even looked like it was done by hand using a feather pen or something. No wonder Bobbie thought we were rich.

I was thrilled, seeing him happy and sure of himself for the first time since forever. "Bobbie," I said. "Please tell me this is what I think it is. Don't kid me if you're not serious."

"Baby doll," he said real calm. He got up with the baby and strutted

over to get my reaction up close. He held out the ring. "This is what you think. Mail in that paperwork, and we're six-millionaires."

No, I didn't take the ring then either. And it wasn't like you're probably thinking, that I had a brain fark or something. The truth was I had my second thoughts. I even tried to break the bad news.

"Bobbie," I said real gentle. "Sometimes these things don't go like they make you think." But then, looking at his pretty face, I just couldn't finish. I took a deep breath and hung a right: "What if our certificate gets lost in the mail? What if somebody steals it and the people with our money never know we're the ones?"

I looked at the certificate, then up at him again. He was rocking the baby and smiling at me, and Jeez, what a smile. It was so confident and handsome and perfect I got the tingles, which are good but very bad for someone in my condition. Like electricity, they wriggle through my body, straight to my breasts, where my milk's just waiting for something of the sort. I dropped the papers on the counter and grabbed myself cross-your-heart style, which usually embarrasses Bobbie, but not this time. There I stood, mashing my breasts because I wasn't quite ready to stop looking at his face. The palms of my hands were getting wet, right through my blouse.

Bobbie backed away from me, his smiling face on mine because, well, he could see what he was doing and he liked it. Without so much as a blink, he pulled another envelope from the cupboard, this one red, white, and blue with an eagle on it. "Express Mail," it said.

"We send it like this," Bobbie explained. "Certified, guaranteed, overnight mail, insured. Hand delivered by an official US agent of the best postal service on the face of the planet. Six million bucks, baby doll. We can afford Express Mail."

I just started to giggle, though I knew I was in big trouble the minute I did, and I'm not just talking about the big trouble that came later. It starts tickly but goes to the burns real fast. With Bobbie standing there like that, thinking he'd just won six million bucks, and me holding my boobs realizing what I was about to do—well, I just couldn't control myself. I dropped one hand to give my pucker a little back-up and squeezed my thighs together, but that wasn't going to do it, either. So I ran. It wasn't a moment of modesty, let me tell you. I was laughing and knocking into walls trying to get my jumper up and my underpants off without letting go my hold and without unsqueezing my thighs. And somehow I actually got myself unclothed and to the toilet before I had to give it up entirely. What happened next was my fault, too, I suppose, as I'm the one who retrained Bobbie to put the lid down.

"You're buying me new carpet." I was still laughing, still sitting on the toilet, still peeing on the lid if you must know.

"Baby doll," Bobbie called back. "Forget the carpet. I'm buying you a whole new trailer!"

It just kind of happened then. Bobbie said we had to rush because he had another surprise for me and it was being delivered in less than an hour.

"Bobbie Boy, it sounds to me like you've thought of everything," I called from the bedroom, where I'd just nursed the baby and was slipping on some naughty underwear, which as a Mormon you're not supposed to wear, especially if you're leaving the bedroom in them. I admit, I was feeling pretty hopeful.

We met back in the kitchen where I'd left the documentation. We stood breathing for a minute, each of us holding a kid and looking down at the stack of papers.

"Do you want to do it, or should I?" Bobbie asked.

I thought about this. "I guess maybe you better do it," I said.

So he put Rusty down and started digging through the most informative looking papers. He started to read out loud.

"Dear Multi-Million-Dollar Sweepstakes Participant. Only one last stamp stands between you and \$\$\$5,000,000.00. What's more, your quick response secures your eligibility for an additional \$\$\$1,000,000.00 bonus prize! We are pleased to announce that you may also be eligible for one of ten brand new Cadillac Seviles to be awarded to ten participants who select a second magazine subscription from the enclosed list. As always, we offer our subscriptions at rock-bottom prices, guaranteeing you as much as 90% off the newsstand price!"

Bobbie shook the letter at me. "That's true," he said. "We're getting one hell of a deal on your *Sunset*."

"A Cadillac Seville," I said. "That's a classy car!"

Bobbie went back to the letter, skimming to find where he'd left off. He's still a little slow, but a great reader all the same. I'd already beat him to the important information.

"Look at this, Bobbie," I said. So as not to embarrass him, I acted real pleased to have discovered a short cut when we were in something of a hurry. "They've got all the instructions right here on the return envelope."

Bobbie took the envelope and studied out loud what I'd read once to myself already.

Have you:

*Signed and enclosed the \$\$\$5,000,000.00 participant's certificate?

*Acted quickly to secure eligibility for your \$1,000,000.00 bonus prize?

*Completed and enclosed your order for bargain subscriptions of your choice?

*Selected a color preference for one of ten available Cadillac Seviles?

*Enclosed a signed check or money order for your exciting new subscription(s)?

*Mailed this envelope?

"If I'm reading you," Bobbie told the envelope, "I probably haven't mailed you yet." Which was just the kind of cute thing he'd have never said before the accident.

He dug into the return envelope, where he'd already slipped our personally addressed magazine order form, the one with the *Sunset* sticker licked on. Then he looked closely at the page of sticker stamps on the counter until he found the one he wanted. He tore it out, licked it and stuck it to the order form. "Now, baby doll," he said, handing me the form. He slipped the checkbook from his back pocket. "You pick a color while I write the check."

It's significant to note, here, that until this moment, I didn't think Bobbie remembered how to write a check. Frankly, I was pretty surprised to find he had the checkbook on his person. This was a big deal, and when I looked at the check before I put it in the envelope, it was all done correctly. He'd even signed his name in his old scribbly way, something he hadn't been able to do for the doctors just a few months earlier.

One edge of the sticker was curling up on the order form, so I pressed it back down. Bobbie had selected *Fortune Magazine*.

"I don't know," I said, giggling again, though this time without the tingles. I checked the appropriate box. "Twenty bucks is a heck of a good price for a shiny red Cadillac."

This is how we enacted our post office strategy:

It was my job to distract the other postal agents and the customers that weren't being helped while Bobbie performed his job, which was to discreetly mail the Express Mail envelope without giving away any clues to its priceless contents. You know, in case some dishonest person was waiting for just such an opportunity to get rich at our expense.

Before Bobbie got in line, we held a quick pow-wow and decided that the older woman agent looked the most honest, and besides, Bobbie reasoned, being closer to death than the other agents, she would have less time to spend \$\$\$6,000,000.00, a fact that significantly decreased her probable degree of temptation. Bobbie also suggested that he take Rusty as his own distractionary device, thinking the woman, who looked like a grandmother, might be more honest when there was a little kid involved. In fact, Bobbie said, he might even tell the grandmother the envelope was Rusty's, that we were just helping him mail it. I told Bobbie I thought he had excellent ideas, and besides, my job required only the baby, meaning Rusty might be too much for me to handle considering what I intended to do. Bobbie picked up Rusty, then gave me a quick, nervous kiss. I just about conked over, Bobbie's lips on me again after so long.

Bobbie'd made it to the single file line, so I took my place to the side, but also toward the front, positioned where both the customers and the

agents could see me clearly, then I waited and watched. There were still a few people in front of Bobbie, and I was a little worried our timing might be all wrong and we might not get Grandma, as everyone stood in the same line and took the next available agent. But Bobbie had that one figured out, too. It was quite a pleasure, watching him work. When his turn came up and the next available agent was not the old lady, he let the man behind him go ahead. I was so proud—Bobbie didn't panic, didn't even look worried. He just stood there, patiently waiting for Grandma.

That's when I remembered I had a job to do, too. The baby was asleep in my arms, so I slipped a hand inside the blanket and started rubbing his little foot. He hates having his feet rubbed, and I know it wasn't the nicest thing to do, especially considering he was asleep and comfortable. But, well, we were on a mission, and it didn't really hurt him any. Instantaneously, he was awake and screaming, hopping mad, so I told him loudly, but very soothingly, that I was preparing him a snack even as I spoke. From the corner of my eye, I could see the customers eyeing the lady with the screaming baby. I hoped all of them had turned, but I never did check for sure, as a girl only has so much nerve. I moved the baby into another position, kind of hanging under and over one arm, and started unbuttoning my top. When you're a nursing mother, you learn what kinds of clothes give you the best access. This particular top opened up real well, very easy to get into. What I'd forgotten was the naughty underwear, which is see-through, and harder than heck to maneuver out of. At least it was a front clasp, so I did the one handed thing, which Bobbie had once been an expert at himself. Wah-lah, there I was. I figured if everyone wasn't looking before, they certainly were now. Bobbie and Rusty had made it to the grandmother's window. I peeked up and found Rusty sitting on the counter, holding out the back of his hand. Grandma was rubber-stamping something on it. Bobbie was writing out another check. I decided it was safe to give the baby his snack now, so I plugged him on and, like that, he started in with a loud, satisfied sucking.

Within seconds, Bobby emerged from behind the velvet rope carrying Rusty, who was holding out his hand to show me the stamp, which read, "Do Not Bend." Bobbie was flushed and, well, a bit turned on, I think. He was looking right through my open top. By now, my breasts were mostly covered, of course, but he couldn't take his eyes off where they'd been.

"What about the envelope?" I whispered, pretending to be interested in something other than what I was getting right that minute. "Do you think anybody got a good look at it?"

"Look at what?" he said.

Bobbie wasn't about to give me a hint. He pushed the old Buick about as fast as it'll go, not all that fast, but fast enough.

"Bobbie, honey," I said. "This must be some surprise if you're willing to risk a ticket. Especially as you're not really supposed to be driving and all."

"I'm sorry, baby doll," he said, and he slowed down a bit. "I just had to pull some big strings to get our surprise delivered on such short notice. I'd feel real awful if we weren't there to meet it." Bobbie set his jaw and looked at me like maybe he was getting ready to voluntarily die on my behalf. Let me tell you, a girl can go soft on a look like that.

"Well, okay," I said. We were almost there anyway. "Six million bucks will buy a bunch of speeding tickets, I suppose."

"Yes, it will," Bobbie agreed, and he pushed the old Buick back up to speed.

When we pulled into the trailer park, I realized Bobbie was once again ahead of me. A large semi-like-truck was slowly making its way out of the park, right over the speed bumps the management put in to protect life and property from speeding vehicles. Bobbie started honking the horn and flashing the lights and when he was pretty sure he had the driver's attention, he swerved in front of the truck and stopped. The truck driver opened the door and got half-way out, the way truck drivers do. Bobbie hopped out and the two held a quick rendezvous, which gave me the chance to study the truck for clues. It belonged to a large furniture store, the largest in town. I was doing my level best not to worry.

Bobbie was all grins when he climbed back in the car.

"I don't think I can wait, Bobbie," I said. "I think you better tell me about my surprise right now!"

"Just hold on, now," he laughed, cranking the old boat's gears. "We're almost there."

We parked in the driveway, and I got the kids out of their seats and into the trailer. Bobbie waited outside for the truck to back all the way to our trailer, as the street was too narrow for it to turn around.

"How did they get out of here in the first place?" I asked Bobbie on my second trip. But Bobbie was too excited to answer. He was waving his arms and trying to give the truck backing instructions, though I could see the driver wasn't paying any attention to Bobbie. Finally, the truck stopped in front of our place and the driver and his assistant got out. I watched from the porch, where I was barricading the open front door with my butt so Rusty, who was howling to push through, wouldn't escape and get in the way.

Bobbie and the two men wandered up to the front door. The driver and his assistant did not look happy.

"I don't know," the driver was saying. He took out a tape measure and spread it across the doorway. "I'm absolutely positive it's not going through this door."

"What's not going through this door?" I tried.

Bobbie threw up his hands. "Don't tell her," he cried. "It's a huge surprise!"

I could tell the driver and his assistant weren't the least bit excited about my surprise. "It's huge, all right," the driver mumbled.

"Look," Bobbie said, and I must say he seemed very in control, not at all perturbed or confused. "I've already solved the door problem. Out back we've got a sliding glass door over a redwood deck I'm planning to build. It'll absolutely fit through that door. It *has* to fit." He appraised the delivery guys sternly. "Do you understand?"

The two no-necks looked at each other. "Let's see it," the assistant said. I knew they weren't convinced, but it seemed Bobbie'd gotten through. I led everyone through the living room to the sliding glass door. The driver opened up his measurer and checked it out. He looked down the skinny steps, considering the two-plus foot drop into our back yard.

"We'll have to take it from the box first," the driver grumbled.

"And carry it across the yard," the assistant added.

"And heft it up by hand." This time the driver.

"It'll be close," the assistant observed. "He'll have to sign a damage release."

"I'll sign anything," Bobbie informed them. "I'll even help you carry it in."

Bobbie was feeling pretty good right then, but I couldn't let him get too carried away. "No, sweetheart," I said. "You shouldn't be carrying heavy stuff. You know what the doctors said."

Bobbie went blank, but just for a second. Then he smiled. "Tell you what," he told the guys. "You get it all in here, and I'll give you each a ten buck tip."

The bozos looked at each other again. Then they looked at Bobbie. Grunting, they pulled gloves from their hip pockets and headed for the truck.

"Oh my gosh, Bobbie," I yelled. They were the biggest speakers I'd ever seen, but the delivery guys managed to get them through the front door anyway. Standing up, the boxes were almost as tall as me. After the speakers, they brought a fancy glass stand—one at a time, they unpacked the audio/visual components and set them on it.

"You mean this isn't all?" I gasped as the guys trudged back out for another load. "You mean something still has to go through the back door?"

"Not just something, baby doll," Bobbie said. He was too pleased now to keep his mouth shut. "A big screen TV's coming through that door! The biggest screen TV you've ever seen!"

Sure enough, here came the delivery guys grunting and cussing around to the back door, which Bobbie had opened wide in anticipation. One of them was creeping backwards and one was creeping forwards and they had the TV between them. It was huge.

"Don't you help, Bobbie," I warned, grabbing Rusty and the baby both. I'd just had a glimpse of bad imagination.

Bobbie hopped down the back steps and grabbed a front corner of the TV anyway. The dullard walking backward worked to the other front corner, leaving Bobbie holding more than he should. The driver on the other side was all alone, and there I stood pretty much frantic.

"Okay," the front corner guy said, working around the steps. "Rest this end in the doorway first."

Carefully, Bobbie and the delivery guy worked the bottom edge of the TV onto the ledge outside the open doorway. The trailer creaked. The front delivery guy moved around back to help his buddy hold up the airborne side.

"Now. . ." the driver told Bobbie, ". . .you get up in the trailer. . .," everyone was breathing hard, including me, ". . .and guide us through."

"Wait just one minute," I said. I was more than a little upset now. "I told you he's not supposed to lift." Bobbie'd taken off around the house for the front door. The delivery guys just gave me this pained look. I couldn't have cared less. I hated them, and besides, I'd already seen what they apparently had not. That TV was too damned big. There was no way it was going through that door. Jeez, can you believe the things guys'll do!

"Okay," Bobbie told them, coming in behind me. "You're about straight on. Just lift her up over the guide and push."

"Bobbie," I whispered as the delivery guys lifted the TV over the guide and pushed. The TV came at us for about one foot before it caught up on the sides, which were actually the TV's front and back.

"One more good push and she's through," Bobbie encouraged.

Nobody did anything for a minute, but I could hear the delivery guys mumbling on the other side of the window. Bobbie started rubbing his hands through his hair, a bad sign. The assistant took the full weight of the TV while the driver examined both sides of the predicament. He looked up at me through the window. I was standing behind Bobbie, still holding the kids. Bobbie couldn't see me, so I started shaking my head at the driver.

"I don't know about this," the driver grunted. "Maybe we should just lift it on out of here."

"No, no!" Bobbie yelled back. "We're almost there. From this angle it looks real good. Just one more push. Ten bucks. I signed the paper!"

The driver shrugged at me, and kind of sneered, too, if you want to know the truth. Then he went back to help his buddy push.

And Bobbie was right—the second push definitely took care of the obstruction. Starting with the aluminum piece around the doorway, the TV cut a new trail. The aluminum strip peeled right back, taking with it a good deal of frame and wafer board and paneling. This allowed the TV

to turn slightly, inflicting that huge gouge in the TV's cabinet the people at the furniture store have been so rude about. The real opening came a minute later, however, when the backside of the now-turned TV bent the frame that holds all the glass in place. If you've ever seen a sliding glass door glass break, you'll know what I'm talking about. First everything turns cobwebby, then it turns to frosted ice. And if you're able to keep enough pressure on the frame, as Bobbie and the delivery guys were, the frosted ice eventually melts to something like crystallized water and rolls, in mostly one piece, right out of the frame. It's particularly spectacular when both pieces of glass turn to crystallized water at exactly the same time. Which both pieces of our landlord's sliding glass door did.

Still, the TV was in the house, and despite my own homicidal fantasies, I considered it a real victory for Bobbie. You should have seen him beam. And I must admit, the TV was a beauty, even with that ugly gouge in the cabinet.

About then the driver had the nerve to say, "Christ, Buddy, sure hope you have homeowner's insurance."

"Oh, I think we're just renting," Bobbie said. Which was true enough.

"Uh-oh," the driver said. He looked a little worried, and he should have. "Hope you have renter's insurance, then."

"Renter's insurance?" I said. Like when did they invent renter's insurance?

Bobbie laughed and flicked his hand like he was tossing the driver's absurd hope right out the window. "We don't need renter's insurance," he said. "We're multi-millionaire-sweepstakes-winners!"

The blockheads looked at each other, then the assistant said, "You just won the sweepstakes and you're only giving us poor losers ten bucks each for practically killing ourselves?"

Oh, *man*, was I pissed! Bobbie's generous, you know, and very fair. He looked like the delivery guy'd slapped him up the side of the head. I mean, if there's one thing that really tears poor Bobbie to pieces it's reprimands of any kind. The only thing worse is if he thinks he's hurt your feelings. I could have killed the jerk.

"Who says he's only giving you ten bucks?" I snapped. "And what is this shit, anyway? What happened to *service*? What happened to *doing the job you're already being paid to do*? Crap, you two are turds! I'll pay you fifty bucks just to get you out of my sight!"

As you might imagine, everyone but me was shocked. All three men looked at the ground. The delivery guys both took a step back.

"Come on, lady," the driver said. "We didn't mean anything." He glanced nervously at the broken sliding glass everything. He'd smelled danger, and he'd smelled right.

"Just shut up," I said, reaching for Bobbie's back pocket. I fished out

his wallet and the checkbook both. I knew they'd cash the check, and when they did they were mine.

Bobbie was much more upset than I'd realized, and it was partly my fault because I'd been so mean to turd one and turd two.

"I broke your house," he said, miserably. He looked close to tears, a fact that surprised me.

"It's our house," I told him. "And I can take care of it. It'll be good as new when I get done with those retards. Now, why don't you go lie down on my bed for a while. You could use a nap after all that exercise." Everything I said was true, and besides, he'd missed his afternoon nap. He really needs those.

"Ah, baby doll," he said. "Everything's spoiled now. I just wanted to make you happy."

"Nothing's spoiled," I promised. "You go on now. After I take care of a few things, I'll come in and check on you."

I put him down, then called Connie Taylor, our bishop's wife, and asked if she'd come get the kids for a while, which she agreed to do. She's the nicest person I've ever met, always willing to drop anything to help. Especially since Bobbie's accident. Like that very day he got run over. I was just two months pregnant, sick as all get-out, and when the phone rang with that horrible news, I'd just finished throwing up for the umpteenth time. Pile of barf on the floor next to the fridge and me too freaked to clean it up. Somehow, I had the wherewithal to call Connie, though, and boy did she come running. I didn't put two and two together for a few days, but while I was at the hospital waiting to see if Bobbie was going to live or die, she cleaned our place, including that throw-up I'd left there on the linoleum. If that's not nice, I don't know what is.

I was still pretty frosted about the way those jerks had treated Bobbie, though mostly I had a nasty case of after-Christmas blues. I'd looked through Bobbie's wallet, see—something I'd been trying to avoid doing. There they were, all those Visa slips, and there was the card itself, tucked in the little plastic sleeve. At some point, he'd snuck it from my wallet, where I store it, though it's in his name. Even in the aftermath of Bobbie's accident, I've never let myself use it. All the same, Visa must think we're great customers, because they keep raising our limit. I could have slapped myself for not canceling the damned thing. I just stared at the receipts, too sick to swallow. I'm not talking any small sum, here. Not unless you think \$10,000 is pocket change.

You should have seen the look on Connie's face when she walked through our front door. "Oh, Cindy," she said, squeezing around the big screen so she could get a good look at the new hole in our trailer. "Do you think it can be fixed?"

"Oh, it'll get fixed all right," I told her. "I wish the rest of my problems were that simple." I handed her the Visa receipts.

She sat down next to me on the couch and studied the slips. Her chin kept creasing and uncreasing, her lips mashed thin.

"Four thousand to Zales?" she asked.

I nodded. "He bought me an engagement ring."

Her head popped up at that one. We'd talked plenty about Bobbie—she knew just about everything there was to know. Quick-like, she blinked at the ring, her face a bit horrified.

"I haven't accepted it yet," I explained, twisting my old wedding ring on my finger.

"Four thousand," she sighed. She thumbed through the receipts one more time.

I decided not to mention all the checks we'd written.

"Now listen, Cindy," she said, putting her arms around me. "This can all be taken care of. As soon as I get the kids to my place, I'm going to call the bishop on the phone." She always called her husband *the bishop*. "He's good at this type of thing. He works with banks all the time, and he works with businesses, too. He'll get it all figured out and let us know what we need to do. This can all be solved, I just know it."

I already felt better. Connie has this way with people, and besides, she's real smart, and so is her husband. Things get done when they take charge, and right then I was just too tired and worried about Bobbie to face it all alone.

"We need to think about Bobbie, though," she said, quietly. She knows how protective I am, and she's real careful that way. "Maybe you should take him in for a quick once-over." She glanced at the receipts. "He's been pretty busy, and my goodness, what promising new abilities he's showing, too. It's all a good sign, honey. And the engagement ring, gosh, that's especially great news. Still, the doctors probably ought to know, don't you think?"

I nodded. I'd planned on making an appointment anyway. "He asked me to marry him, Connie," I said. "He's in love with me again."

Connie stood. She tucked the receipts in her pocket, then gave me a hand up. "Cindy, sweetheart," she said, hugging me again. "You're a good girl and I love you very much. Things like this are bound to happen every once in a while. Try not to worry, especially about the kids. We'll keep them as long as you need. I've got my girls to help. We'll have a good time. Right now, I'd say you and that fiancé of yours need a little quiet time."

After Connie left with the kids, I cleaned up the glass and otherwise puttered around for a while, trying to collect my thoughts. Then I went in and checked on Bobbie.

He wasn't asleep, and I knew he hadn't been. He was just lying there, curled up in a ball looking at the wall. He blinked when he heard me, batted his eyes, really, like he was still fighting off tears.

"Hi," I said. I sat down on the bed beside him and petted his face. Neither of us said anything more for a long time. I didn't know how he felt about me being there, touching him, but eventually he rolled over and looked at me. Then he put his hand on my face and petted me for a while. It was wonderful.

"You're going to take me in, aren't you," he finally said. "Back to the hospital." I figured he'd overheard Connie and me, which made me feel terrible.

"Just for a checkup," I said. "And I'll be right there with you."

He sighed, touching my neck. I think he already knew it wasn't going to be that easy. "I guess I wouldn't make a very good husband." Not once since the accident had I seen him so sad. Not even when he had those horrible headaches the doctors couldn't do anything about.

"You are a wonderful husband, Bobbie," I said. "Nothing's changed about that."

Bobbie smiled, and I knew he was as sad for me as he was for himself. "I wish I could remember marrying you," he said. "I would love to remember that." Then he started to cry.

It was the first time I'd seen Bobbie cry. Before the accident, he never even came close, but sometimes in the months since, he'd looked like he might. Even with everything he'd been through, though, it'd never come to actual tears. Now, he just lay there, crying like the end of the world.

"Bobbie," I said. "Where's that ring you bought me, huh?"

I could tell the crying embarrassed him. By now, he was moaning and hitching and wiping his face. I took his hands in both of mine and uncovered his eyes.

"Bobbie," I said. "I really want that ring. I've made up my mind. I'm going to marry you."

Bobbie laughed a little but didn't stop crying. He just shook his head and sobbed harder.

"Oh, Bobbie," I said. "Stop, now, baby. I'm serious. I'm not just saying it to make you feel better." I started patting his pockets. It wasn't hard to find, big as a knuckle in his front jeans' pocket. I slipped my hand in, careful of his modesty, and tweezed the thing into daylight. I held it out to him. "Come on," I said. "Ask me again."

For a minute, Bobbie looked at my face. He was still crying but not so hard as he had before. Finally he took the ring.

"Ah, baby doll," he said, sadly. "You know it wouldn't be right, you marrying a mush-brain like me. I'd be real wrong to do that to you. Your life's hard enough as it is."

"Listen to me, Bobbie," I started. But he just curled his fist around that ring and clenched it tight. "Please, sweetheart," I said, and I took his clenched fist and put it here, against my breasts. "I'm a big girl. I love you."

Bobbie didn't unclench his fist, but he looked me in the eyes, and for that half minute or so, his eyes were as clear and pure and wise as I'd ever seen them. They were better than the old Bobbie's eyes, smarter and more tender, but so full of grief I just started to bawl.

"Don't cry, baby doll," he said. "Please don't cry." Slowly, he turned that clenched fist until the heel of his hand was against my sternum. Then, using just his pointer finger and thumb, he unbuttoned my top all the way to my belt. Smooth as skin, he moved around and put his head in my lap, then he just lay there and looked at my breasts in their see-through bra. He still had that ring clenched tight in three fingers, but he touched me anyway. Right here on the sides of my breasts, almost too soft to feel.

He stroked my face again, all the way back down my neck, to where he'd just been. He didn't smile, didn't push, didn't forget how we were. One-handed, he delicately unclasped my bra. I'd long since started to leak, but he caressed me for a while, anyway. He painted designs on my breasts and stomach with the milk. He was still crying, and so was I, but eventually he drew me in and began to nurse. We rocked that way for a long time, until he fell asleep.

I took the ring then, Bobbie asleep and drawing me in like breath. I moved my wedding ring to the other hand and slid the engagement ring on where the wedding ring had been. I propped up pillows and got comfortable, then played with Bobbie's hair and studied my rings for a long, long time, until a stream of milk had sopped my skin. Gently, I wiped Bobbie's face and the corners of his mouth with an old burp cloth I'd left on the night-stand, then I reached under and wiped my belly, where the milk and sweat, Bobbie's and mine both, had pooled in my navel.

It was a good night, that first one. Bobbie didn't wake 'til morning.