

Restoration of Lost Love

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By A Random Act of Fate, Michael Webb Discovers
the Unrequited Lost Love That Has Been Lost For Years.

Formatted for easy reading

Second Edition

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This has been one great day for Michael Webb. Today is his twenty-first birthday. This morning, he signed a deal to become the managing partner of Never Lost Restorations.

The former owner, Bruno Rubik wanted to sell his remodeling business to his former son-in-law Randy Nash. He declined because financing to buy the business could not be arranged.

Michael Webb (who is also an employee of Never Lost Restorations) told his mother Linda about Bruno wanting to sell the business and retire to Florida with his lady friend Christine. Michael's mom is the assistant manager at the Parkway Restaurant. She told her son to ask Uncle Bill if he could help him buy Bruno's business.

Bill really isn't anyone's uncle. William Jefferson Cann owns the Parkway Theater Building and several businesses within the building, including the restaurant. Michael has called William; 'Uncle Bill' since he was about six or seven years old.

Michael approached Uncle Bill about helping him purchase Bruno's construction company. Bill had other ideas in mind. He would buy Bruno's company. Michael would run the company and split the profits with him.

He agreed and William purchased the construction company from his longtime business acquaintance Bruno Rubik. The day the deal was closed for cash, Bruno and his live in Christine moved to Florida.

Minutes ago, Michael was handed a check for \$250,000 for working capital along with the keys to his new store front in the Parkway Theater Building on Walnut Street. He turned the key and opened the door to what would be the new home of his business.

It used to be a gift and card shop up to a few years ago. The business folded and Bill never rented out the storefront again because in his words; “It’s a pain in the ass finding tenants that won’t stiff you on the rent. It’s not worth the aggravation.”

First order of business for Michael is call his employees (the three others who work for Never Lost Restorations) and let them know the sale of the business is complete. William Cann is the new owner and he is now the managing partner. Also to let them know the new headquarters is a storefront in the Parkway Theater Building on Walnut Street.

The second order of business, call all the sub-contractors and vendors to let them know of the business ownership and location change. The old headquarters was Bruno’s kitchen table in his home. The storage areas were his garage and basement.

Michael had started working for Bruno right after his first and only year in college. That was three years ago. Michael has a good handle on the business. Alas he is not a good carpenter, but he is a fantastic salesman.

That night, he celebrated his partnership with William by taking his mother out to dinner. They went across the street to the BYOB Thai food restaurant.

“Mom, if only Marcy's mom Christine could have stayed around to see me now; she would be so proud. She always told me to keep my ass out of trouble, don’t get some girl pregnant and I would be a success someday. So what do you think?”

“College didn’t work for you; then again college isn’t for everybody. Heck, I never made it through the door of a college. You need to remember not only your destiny is in your hands, but three other peoples futures rely on you also. You’re an employer now. You’re not selling for Bruno anymore; you’re selling for your own business.”

“I know mom. Uncle Bill made that clear to me. He also made it clear not to come whining to him about anything. He told me if I can’t make the business work, he will find someone that will. I asked him what would happen to you if I failed to make the business work.”

Linda acted coy; “What did he say when you asked him?”

Michael responded lightly; “Uncle Bill laughed and said he would be forced to getting around to that rent increase you ask him about every month. Has he ever raised the rent?”

Smiling; “You were six or seven when we moved into the apartment. Christine was living there rent free at the time. We needed a place to live real bad. Christine being William’s mother-in-law asked him if we could move in with her. Bill asked how much was I paying for rent at the time. I told him fourteen hundred dollars a month.

He told me my share of the rent was half what I was paying for rent in the old place. Every month for the last fifteen years, I ask him when is the rent going up. Every month he says the same thing; ‘I forgot; lets talk about it next month.’ The only thing you need to know about Uncle Bill as you call him is he is very loyal to everyone around him.”

“He never blinked when I told him about my idea to buyout Bruno. Within a second, he decided to buy Never Lost Restorations and make me the managing partner. He is a very impulsive man.”

“You’re getting an idea of how he is. I deposit the rent into an account at the bank across the street. It’s in his name and mine. He has never withdrawn anything from the account.

Every year he pays the income tax on the interest. Then he moves the maximum amount he can into a Roth IRA in my name. The balance of the money he transfers into a mutual fund he also put in

my name. Before Christine left with Bruno, she told me those are my retirement accounts. That's the type of man you're in partnership with. I don't think he has a greedy bone in his body."

"Is that why you stay working at the restaurant; because you get great apartment rent that is really your retirement account?"

"Bill told me before we ever moved in; renting the apartment has nothing to do with me working in his restaurant. I stay there because it's a great place to work, we live around the corner in the same building and the pay is good.

Besides; if Jill ever quits, I'll be the new managing partner. Come on and finish up. Weekend mornings at the restaurant are too busy for me to come in late."

"I'm finished. Besides, we're getting stares from people thinking you're a cougar."

"The hell with them. I'm your mother and I'm not going to make excuses for going out to dinner with my son. Speaking of that, I haven't seen you with a girl in some time now. If you need the apartment some evening, I'm sure Marcy and Bill would put me up for the night.

While you were off at school and before Christine moved in with Bruno, they used to put her up for the night on the occasion I needed privacy."

"No mom. There is no woman in my life right now. It's been kind of dry out there. Most of the women I meet are party girls or they're looking for a guy to support them and their illegitimate children. I wouldn't be sure if a relationship was based on love or my finances. Speaking of women; that year in college, the girls were party animals or lugs."

"I think I know what party girls are; but what are lugs?"

“With the party girls, you better use heavy duty extra thick condoms. Otherwise you will be biologically connected to countless other males at school. We called the other girls lugs. That’s short for Lesbian Until Graduation.”

“I’m sorry I asked. That is way more information I never wanted to know. Now that I think of it, you kissed my cheek with that mouth.”

“Sorry Mom, the beer seems to have loosened my tongue a little.”

After dinner, they went to their apartment and watched a little TV. Then retired to their respective bedrooms and slept through the night. 4 AM rolls around too quickly for Linda to stay up late.

This is a working weekend for Michael. He called Randy (his design architect and Jill the restaurant managers’ husband) along with his two best friends who also happen to be his coworkers; Malakai Johnson and Carlos Salazar Senior. Malakai is one of the best construction carpenters anywhere and Carlos is one of the finest finish carpenters around.

Michael needed ideas to make the vacant storefront attractive to lure in potential customers. Also to show off their skills as designers and craftsmen. They came up with ideas Saturday morning. The plans included an employee break room with a cooking range, refrigerator, table, chairs, and a TV. Being they are a remodeling company, the bathroom must have a shower.

Monday morning it was demolition down to the wall studs. Then reconstruct the place from front to back. A restoration company must look good. Three of the men were inside destructing the place to make way for the new business. Michael was out front watching the dumpster being placed on the street when he seen a woman he had not seen in years.

She was walking towards him when Randy called him inside about

something. He looked at his watch and seen it is 8:10AM. For the rest of the day he hoped the same woman would walk this way again. He was preoccupied with looking out the window for her. This did not go unnoticed by the others.

Malakai asked; “Hey Mike; are you going to look out the dam window all day or are you going to work with us? What the hell did you see that has you so fascinated you can’t be bothered with building your business?”

“I recognized a woman I haven’t seen in years. Her name is Amanda and she used to work for Marcy’s Cook’s Dream Emporium when I was a kid. I used to empty the garbage cans just so I could be close to her. That has to be at least ten years ago.”

“Hey Randy, Carlos, I think wonder boy has a ten year old crush on some lady who was walking down the street. Come on lover boy. You may be the boss, but the garbage still needs to get put in the dumpster.”

The rest of the day was spent with the deconstruction and cleanup. Michael’s thoughts were intertwined with getting the construction materials ordered and hoping to see Amanda again. Then fear struck him. What if she seen him covered from head to toe in construction dirt? He stopped looking for her and stayed inside the storefront unless he was taking out a load of trash.

The following morning, he was waiting outside at eight sharp for Amanda to walk by on her way to work. The other three men were inside half working and half watching Michael. Carlos was the first to see Michael fix his clothes and make sure his appearance is perfect.

Michael popped his head in the door; “Mal, Randy, Carlos come here quick. She’s coming down the street!”

The three men exited the store, gathered at the rear of the dumpster

and watched. What they didn't bargain for was seeing a crime being committed in front of them. Amanda is walking on the sidewalk past the restaurant when an attacker came up behind her. He punched her in the face, grabbed her purse and is running down the sidewalk.

She fell and took quite a tumble. The attacker is laughing and running towards the four men. The problem for him was, while he was looking backwards at his victim, he was not looking where he is going. Malakai and Carlos stuck their legs into the path of the attacker and tripped him. He went face first onto the sidewalk and slid several feet.

Carlos bent over and looked at the attacker; "I think that is going to leave an ugly mark!"

Randy suggested; "Get me a two by four and the nailer please."

He returned with the lumber and the nailer. Randy proceeded to nail the attacker's arms to the lumber via his shirt sleeves.

"There. I'd like to see him run down the street with his arms stretched out over an eight foot two by four across his back."

They walked over to where the victim is on the ground. Michael was offering aid and trying comfort Amanda. She is trying to convince him she's alright; "No I don't need an ambulance. I only need a little help to get up. Where's my purse? Do you have it? Did the guy who hit me get away with it?"

Michael was holding the woman he dreamed of holding in his arms for most of his life. He spoke in the most friendly voice he could muster; "Hello Amanda. We caught the mugger and we have your purse. You're safe now. Let me help you up. I have a first aid kit in my truck."

"I don't need your first aid kit. How do you know my name? Did

you people look through my purse? Did you get my address and take my keys too?"

"Wow; such an attitude from a pretty woman. You need some first aid and no we didn't go through your purse. Although these guys can be jerks from time to time; but not while trying to rescue you. I remember when you worked for Marcy at her Cooks Dream Emporium."

Turning to face Randy; "Open the passenger side of my truck so Amanda has a place to sit. Carlos, the first aid kit is in the job box in the back of the truck. Mal, give me a hand. You take her left side and I'll take her right."

"Both of you get your filthy hands off me. I don't want or need your help. ... Ow, dam that hurts!"

It's clear Amanda could not put any weight on her damaged leg; "I told you we only want to help you. Now don't worry. Malakai's color won't rub off. He looks scary, but he really is a very nice man once you get to know him."

They lifted Amanda up and set her on the passenger seat of the pickup truck.

Malakai commented; "Won't rub off? Just for that crack, you're buying lunch today."

"Oh you know I'm jealous of you because I'm in love with you're pretty wife. She makes the best sweet potato pie in the world!"

"Are you two morons done badgering each other? Just give me a bandage so I can get to work."

"Amanda, it's me Michael. I was the kid who adored you when you were working in Marcy's Cooks Dream Emporium. I used to empty the garbage cans just to be near you. You're even more

beautiful than I remember. Even though you have a bloody nose, a black eye and a cut knee from that punk.”

The attacker had wiggled out his shirt and ran off while everyone was attending to Amanda. Carlos handed Mike the first aid kit. He called everyone inside to leave the couple alone. Michael treated Amanda like she was a glass goddess while administering first aid.

He gave her gauze for her nose while he treated the scratches on her head. He's in his glory brushing back her hair from the injury. Then he held her leg while cleaning the cut to her knee. He applied a bandage over the cut, but he never let go of her calf.

“You can let go of my leg now. You have this look on your face like you're going to start massaging it.”

“Oh, I'm so sorry. It's just seeing you again after all these years is almost surreal to me.”

“I'm sure for you it is, but there is a policeman who wishes to speak with us. He's holding a board with a shirt on it. Go ahead and talk to him. My leg is too sore to go anywhere right now.”

Michael told the officer what happened to Amanda and gave him a description of the offender; “I only felt his fist. After he hit me, the only thing I seen was the sidewalk.”

“That's a very vague description you two are giving me. An African-American male in his early twenty's, wearing a tee shirt. You know that description is almost worthless. It covers a fair portion of the African-American males in the city.

“He's missing some flesh on the side of his face where he slid across the sidewalk; that should help. He was running and we tripped him in flight. His face landed very hard on my sidewalk.”

Michael's dream woman actually broke a little smile. The officer

made out the report and left. Amanda tried to exit the truck and could not put pressure on her leg without limping.

Now being totally aggravated, she snipped; “This is fringing great! It's eight thirty; I'll never make it to my nine o'clock meeting with my boss. I have a black eye, scratches on my forehead, a swollen nose and a gash on my knee. What's next, a plane crash?”

“I'll take you to work because you're in no condition to walk very far. Here is my card; call me after work. I'll pick you up and bring you home if you would like.”

Her response is not at all what Michael expected. She threw his business card back at him and loudly; “Oh I get it now. You give the babe some first aid. She calls you at the end of the day for a ride home. You're thinking the whole time, you can get a quick ride in the sack; out of gratitude of course. Give me a break.”

Michael is holding the first aid box in his hands. The second she finished talking he snapped the box closed and returned it to the rear of his truck. He had a genuine look of emotional hurt mixed with bitter disappointment.

“I'll have one of my happily married employees bring you to work so you're not late. That just might make you feel a little better. I'm sorry for you're feeling of rejection towards me when I have done nothing except show you kindness.”

He turned and yelled; “Carlos, please take Miss Amanda to work for me. Call Randy when you're done. You can pick up any supplies we may have forgot to order on your way back.”

Michael tossed the keys to Carlos, turned without saying another word and walked inside. Malakai took one look at him; “People change my young friend. You're not old enough to know that yet, but let this be your first lesson. Sometime people change over the years. They're not the same people you knew before.”

“I’ve known you for three years now. Our friendship keeps getting stronger all the time.”

“That’s my point; you haven’t seen her for ten years. You’re looking at her the way she was ten years ago. Heaven only knows what experiences have passed under her bridge of life.”

“It really hurts. While I was hoping to get to know her, she stuck a knife through my heart. While I was down, she kicked me in the head a couple times with a steel boot for good measure.”

Randy walked over and joined in the conversation; “When my first wife died, it was like my soul was ripped out of me and thrown down the abyss; never to be seen again. I went down to just over a hundred pounds and didn’t care about anything. It was Bruno who told me to quit feeling sorry for myself and get on with my life.

His daughter, my wife would have wanted it that way. Move along kid, you’ll find another someday.”

Michael stood there in a mental cloud of funk.

“Listen, I know you’re shattered. I’ve been down that road before. You think the love of your life walked in and she crushes your heart under her foot. Sometimes you have to realize the feeling isn’t mutual. There are plenty of other fish in the sea.”

“Thanks guys. I’m at a loss for words. I’ve never been put down so hard by anyone who I felt so strongly about her. She really shook me down to my core.”

Malakai added; “A woman can make you turn yourself inside out. This one will never know what she missed out on. Come on my young friend, you have a business to build. All of us are relying on you for our paychecks.”

The men spent the rest of the day on the construction of their new

headquarters. They all broke for lunch and walked the few paces to the Parkway restaurant. For Michael, the unwelcome topic of Amanda came up.

Carlos brought her up first; “I dropped your girl off downtown this morning. She wouldn’t tell me where she works. I dropped her off at McGee and Twenty-sixth. She told me she would walk the rest of the way.”

“I thought you were a pal; here’s the salt shaker. Pour some on the open wounds while you’re at it.”

“I also had a talk with your girl on the way to her work. I asked her how could she be so rude to someone who was offering her help. Her reply was not very nice. She said you are just another construction worker who drinks, smokes and most likely beats up women. That’s when she got out of the truck at the stop light.”

“Someone crab your fork and stick it in me; I’m done!”

The men chatted about women in general. They agreed Amanda has some serious baggage to deal with. After lunch they returned to work, but Michael’s head and heart were just not there. He kept glancing out the window looking for Amanda to walk by. That day, she did not past that way again.

The following morning, he was leaning over a makeshift table going over the plans Randy came up with for the office and studio when a guest appeared at the front door; “Hello? Michael; may I speak with you please?”

He had to hold himself back not to show his excitement; “Good morning Amanda. I see the swelling has gone down; although the black eye is going to take some time to heal. Anyway, what may I do for you this morning?”

“I wanted to apologize for being such a rude bitch yesterday. You

and everyone were trying to help me during a bad situation while I acted like a brat. I wanted everyone to know it wasn't anything personal; I was pissed off at the world."

Michael was doing everything to hold back his excitement; "Thank you for taking the time to stop by and putting everyone's mind at ease. If you have a moment, I would like to tell you something."

She broke an ever so slight grin; "Sure; I guess owe you at least that much."

"I remember when I was around ten or eleven years old and you worked for Marcy in her cooking supply store. I thought you were the most beautiful woman on the planet. In my eyes, you were a goddess. By an act of fate yesterday, I actually touched your face and talked to you after all these years. I look into your eyes now and I see you are in great pain."

"I took some aspirin this morning, I'll be fine."

"No, I'm sorry. You're not going to be fine. You're in great emotional pain caused by selfish and bad men who have been in your life. I can see it in your eyes as clearly as if I were reading a book. I do not wish you any harm. I don't want to abuse or take advantage of you in any way. I would cherish the opportunity to try and make the pain in your life go away; if you would only let me."

"Now you turn on the charm to try and get me in the sack; is that it? Is this the younger man's approach to a somewhat older woman who's tarnished and damaged? I don't buy your act kid."

"Please listen to me. I'm a fully grown adult man who would love to get you in the sack. You are a very attractive and desirable woman. I'm not going to lie to you. Perhaps down the road someday after we have developed a really strong relationship, we will see what happens or doesn't happen. I only want the opportunity to be your friend. I don't see any rings on your left

hand. Please give me at least a chance.”

She looked him square in the eyes; “You probably drink and smoke. My father beat the crap out of my mother when he drank. It cost him his construction job. Then he beat the crap out of her even more.”

“I talked with Carlos yesterday during lunch. I used to drink only beer. I quit drinking and I don’t smoke. I’ve never beat up anybody in my life. I only hope that you would give me a second chance to at least be your friend.”

Her eyes and facial expression seemed to be softening, so Michael cranked up the sincerity; “I can’t compare myself to the men you’ve known in the past. I’m no superhero with superpowers. I’m only a mere mortal man who is incredibly attracted to you.”

“I don’t know. You’re so much younger than I am. I just don’t see this working out between us.”

“Please give me the opportunity to prove who I am. Let’s try this; you are completely in charge of our relationship, if you decide we are to have one. You already know my feelings. I would like to meet you for coffee or some other beverage after work. If you prefer an adult beverage, I will have a soft drink. How about it? I gave you first aid and I didn’t get fresh when I attended to your very attractive and smooth leg, I mean knee.”

With sympathy in her voice; “I’ll see you between five-fifteen and five-thirty this afternoon at the coffee shop across the street.”

“Could I interest you in dinner also? There’s a great Thai food place a few doors down from the coffee shop.”

“Michael, you’re really pushing your luck and you’re starting to piss me off.”

He's quick to back pedal; "I'm sorry. I was thinking having coffee at five-thirty would push your dinner back to six-thirty or seven. I'm sorry for offending you by being so foreword. It was very careless of me."

She looked at him with an evil eye; "We'll have dinner only, then we both go to our own homes. No taking me home, no wanting to come up for a drink of water, no goodnight kiss antics; right?"

"Absolutely. If that's the way you want it; that's the way it's going to be. I'll even play for your cab ride home."

"Now what if I say after dinner tonight; I don't want to see you anymore. What are you going to do?"

He relaxed his stance; "I would say; I'm deeply saddened to hear that. The bad part is you will have to find a different way to work in the morning to avoid seeing me because I'm only the managing partner of this business. You remember Marcy's husband William don't you?"

"I remember William. Nicest man in the world with the big the huge scar running down the left side of his face."

"William owns this business. I know he would not allow me to move. Therefore every morning I will be watching for you and thinking of what may have been if things were different between us. You would never know how a real honest man would treat you as an equal."

Her look towards him softened; "I'm not sure about this, but I'll give it a try. Can I ask you for a favor please?"

"Name it! My wallet, my blood, my truck; you already have my heart. What may I possibly do for you?"

"We have been talking for so long; I've missed my bus. I need a

ride to work so I won't be late. Could you ask Carlos to give me a ride to work please; if it's not too much trouble?"

"Carlos! This beautiful woman likes the way you drive and she needs a ride to work please."

She extended her hand to Michael. He knelt down and gently grasped it and with a huge smile; "I'm the luckiest man in the world. I was able to touch the hand of a goddess two days in a row!"

"Carlos, let's go before Michael has a heart attack. Then I'll miss having dinner with him tonight."

Into the truck and off they went. While in route to her employer; "Michael reminds me a little of my son-in-law Roger. He seen my Isabella waiting for a bus to come home. When he started a conversation with her. She was very rude to him. She told him she did not date outside her species."

"That was rude! I take it with a name like Roger, he's not Hispanic."

"Oh no, he's as Caucasian as one can get; but that did not slow him down. He went so far to ask our Isabella for her permission to meet with my wife and myself first. That was before they ever went out together."

"I don't get it. Why would he ask your daughters permission to meet with you and your wife first?"

"Roger wanted our permission to ask our daughter out on an ice cream date. He was not taking any chances for rejection by her family. We now have three grandchildren who we spoil terribly whenever we get the chance."

"What else can you tell me about Michael?"

“I have worked with Michael for three years now. I have never seen him act this way around a woman, except his mother. He pays half of his mothers rent because he still lives with her most of the time.”

“What do you mean most of the time?”

“When his mothers male companion comes over to their apartment; he stays overnight at my place or Malakai’s. My wife loves him because whenever he stays over, he sleeps in Isabella’s old room. He always leaves a hundred dollars on the dresser with a note telling her to buy herself something her cheap husband won’t.

He does the same thing at Malakai’s home. Sometimes he writes funny messages. He wrote a note once that said something like: If I were thirty years older, you were single, blind in one eye and couldn’t see out of the other, think of our possibilities!”

“Michael sounds like a funnyman at times. You’ve seen him around other women. How was he around your daughter and the servers at the restaurant?”

“Please understand before the other day; I have never set foot in the Parkway Restaurant. I can only tell you what my daughter told me about him. Years ago when Isabella worked in the restaurant, he used to come in and ask her to sneak him a bowl of chocolate ice cream when his mom wasn’t working. She told me, he used to apologize when he didn’t have any allowance money to leave her a tip.”

“Being a construction worker, he must watch the women walk by, make cat calls and whistle.”

“Malakai, Randy and I never did that type of nonsense. Michael did it once and Bruno told him never to disrespect any woman like that. Bruno made him go and apologize to the lady.”

“What happened? Did he go and apologize?”

Carlos started laughing; “Yes he did and three other women came over and slapped him for being rude. He apologized to each one after they slapped him. I never again have seen him be rude to a woman. That day was also kind of funny. After he apologized to the women; a very pretty older woman came up to him and congratulated him for being a real man. She asked him if he was seeing anyone and invited him to dinner that night.”

“Did Michael go out with her?”

“They went to dinner that night; he paid the dinner tab and her cab fare home. He told me she was a married woman looking for a sexual relationship; no romance, strictly physical.”

“So how long did the relationship last between Michael and the married woman?”

“It lasted through dinner. Michael told her he lived in the basement of mommy's house and mama would not like a strange woman in his room. Besides, he needed to get to the ‘Manly Men’s Club’; a gay bar on the southwest side of town. Michael said the woman couldn’t get into the cab fast enough. He was laughing so hard, his side hurt. When his mother asked him how his date went, he told her. She scolded him for being dishonest.”

They pulled up to the intersection and Amanda was about to exit when Carlos added; “Miss Amanda. I want to let you know my Isabella already has the perfect man, her husband. I want you to think about Michael. He's almost as perfect as my Isabella’s Roger. Good day Miss Amanda.”

“Thank you for the information and your opinion Carlos, good day.”

Later that evening, Michael was sitting in a folding chair outside

his store front waiting and watching. Amanda seen him from the other side of the street. He kept getting up from the chair, pacing back and forth, looking up and down the street, looking at his watch, then sitting down. He repeated this twice before she decided he has been through enough torture.

From across the street; “Michael. I’m over here!” She’s waving and when he seen her. He tried getting up from the chair, turn towards the door and put the chair inside all at the same time. Down everything went; the chair folded and collapsed first. Then he tripped on the chair, fell and hit his head on the door. She walked across the street to see if he was alright.

While trying to get up and not looking too embarrassed; “I’m fine, only a few dents and bruises. I think my pride suffered the greatest damage. Hello and thank you for allowing me to buy you dinner.”

“I prefer men closer to my own age. I almost feel like I’m going out with my little brother if I had one.”

“I don’t mean to sound rude, but I’m over twenty-one. I’ve been shaving for several years now.”

The look on Michael’s face suddenly changed to one of embarrassment; “I’m sorry. That sounded self-serving and patronizing. Let’s have some dinner like two adults.”

The Thai restaurant is a BYOB so Michael had dropped off a bottle of good Zinfandel wine a few hours earlier. He was drinking tea while Amanda is drinking wine.

Her lips became very loose; “My mother was a waitress at this small breakfast and lunch place. She was serving a new customer who was only going to be in town for a few days. He struck up an acquaintanceship with my mother. His name was John Doe. One morning at the restaurant, my father had a confrontation mom and threw John’s cup of coffee on my mother.”

“His name was John Doe? Really?”

“That is his real name. That night, my father beat my mother so badly, when she showed up for work the following day, the owner told her she could not work because she would scare the customers. John took her to his apartment for her own safety. Keep in mind she only knew him casually for a few days because he come in for breakfast.”

“Dam, he sounds like he was one nice guy to do that for a server he hardly knew.”

“You don’t know the half of it. The next day, my father is found murdered on the sidewalk in front of our apartment by some guy walking his dog. My father was shot three times in the chest and twice in the head. The police said he was assassinated by a professional hit man.”

“What happened to the investigation? I watch those TV shows and they always get fingerprints off of something.”

“I heard there were no fingerprints on the bullet casings and no forensic evidence of any type. Remember several years ago when the storefront on the other side of town blew up? There were parts of bodies, pill bottles and pills all over the street?”

“I remember. There were several bodies recovered from the building that exploded. They were all murdered before the explosion. There was also some guy gunned down while sitting in his car at the park. The murdered mall security guard was your father?”

“That was my father. John leaves town as suddenly as he arrived. A few weeks later, he has some lawyers contact my mom with a note. She quits her job and runs off to live with this guy. They were married few months later.”

“That’s an incredible story. How’s your mom doing now?”

“John and my mom live in the mountains of northern New Mexico. They go hiking every weekend when the weather permits and take their three dogs with them. They are so in love, they watch the sunrise together almost every morning. He’s almost twenty years older than her!”

“Sometimes June-September relationships work out very well. If you allow us to have a relationship, maybe ours would rival theirs.”

Amanda poured herself some more wine.

“I remember my first marriage. Gerald and I met in college. I helped pay for his post graduate schooling. I worked while he went to school. I became pregnant twice and lost both of them. I was beginning to think I was cursed. I was in love and believed in that bastard, so we went on. The day he graduated, he introduced me to his pregnant mistress and handed me divorce papers. That was my first marriage.”

Michael reached over the table and tried to hold her hands.

She snapped; “I didn’t give you permission to touch me.”

“I’m sorry. I only wanted to hold your hands so I could try and remove some of your pain. May I please hold at least one of your hands?”

In a snippy voice; “If you really feel the need to, go ahead.”

Michael held her free hand as she continued; “My second marriage was wonderful. I was in heaven. Bruce made good money and he treated me great. He was a wonderful cook too! Sex was infrequent, lousy and boring.

I wasn't feeling well for several mornings, so I left work early one afternoon to see the doctor. I found out I was pregnant again. Needless to say, I went home early and was going to surprise him. I was the one that was surprised."

"Don't tell me you found Hubby in bed with another woman. I can't believe in my wildest dreams two men in a row would be stupid enough to cheat on you."

"I quietly walked into my apartment and I hear gurgling sounds and male voices moaning in rhythm. I followed the sounds to our bedroom; the door was open. Bruce was on all fours servicing two men on our bed!"

Michael is at a total loss. His face was showing the emotions that he could not speak.

"I left and called the police. I filed for divorce using the police report as cause. For the next six months, I was tested for aids every month. And for a year, I was taking the anti aids drugs. Because of the medications, I lost the baby."

Amanda tried to fill her wine glass but the bottle was empty.

"The bottle says it's time to leave. Before we leave, I need to go. I'll be right back."

She went to the ladies room and returned more sober than when she went in.

"I had to freshen up a little. I'm glad you purchased the small bottle of a lighter wine."

Michael reached deep down inside; "Could we walk around the park for a while? I would like very much to hold your hand and listen to you talk."

She looked at him for a moment; “My history with men really bothers you. I can see it in your face.”

“I have no way to measure the sadness I feel inside for you. I'm at a total loss for any words which could give you any comfort.”

They left the restaurant; “Oh it isn't that bad; come on let's walk. Let me tell you about Brad. He moved in with me and things were going pretty good. He asked me to see the OBGYN to see why I wasn't getting pregnant.

The bottom line, too many miscarriages left me very unlikely to carry a fetus full term. Once he found out what the OBGYN told me. Brad interpreted it as not being able to get pregnant. He came up with something totally disgusting which caused our relationship to end abruptly.”

“What on Earth could he want you to do? Get a second job?”

“Brad told me since I can't have children, it would be alright for me to have sex with the people he owes gambling debts to. He was going to prostitute me for his debts. When I asked him if he was nuts, he told me it would only be a few men a day and it would be over in a few weeks.”

Michael gasped and almost choked by the surprise story.

“I told him I'm going to work and be moved out of my apartment by the time I get back. When I came home that evening; the bastard moved out and took everything. He even took my clothes!

There was not one stick of furniture in the apartment. He even took the light bulbs, toilet paper and my toothbrush when he left. The worst part, it wasn't my furniture. It's a rented furnished apartment!

Thankfully we each had our own credit cards. The moron maxed out his credit cards with cash advances thinking he was going to

stick me with the debt. I think the banks are still looking for him. I hope they find the prick.”

“No wonder you’re suspicious of men. If that happened to me, I would be too. So what did you do that night; other than cry?”

“I called the landlord and told him what happened. The police came by and a report was filed. The landlord was nice enough to bring me to the store where I bought a sleeping bag, toiletries and light bulbs. The next morning his wife and I went furniture shopping to replace everything that was stolen.

She paid for everything and told me don’t worry about it. Insurance would cover most of it and they were going to write it off on their taxes. Brad stole everything three years ago and I haven’t been with a man since.”

Amanda belched; “Oh; The wine is talking.”

They reached the entrance to the park where their walk started several minutes earlier. They stopped and Michael turned to face her; “Thank you for a wonderful evening. I hope I was able to remove some of the pain I seen hiding behind your beautiful eyes.”

She gave him a coy look while shuffling her feet and looking down; “Much to my surprise, I feel much better. Thank you for letting me vent. Where do we go from here? Is it going to be my place or yours?”

“I’m so emotionally wrapped up right now, I would not be very good company. Besides, I promised you a cab ride home. I would like your permission to see you again, soon I hope.”

“You passed the test by not taking me up on my offer. Seeing you again? Let me think about it. Pencil us in for next Saturday dinner and a movie. I’ll let you know for sure tomorrow morning on my way to work.”

“Thank you. That will be wonderful.”

He flagged down a taxi for Amanda. He asked her if \$20 would cover the fair and a tip; “More than enough.”

He opened the door, grasped her hand; “May I be so bold to ask permission to kiss the hand of such a beautiful woman?”

She frowned for a moment and then it turned into a smile; “Yes you may; but only if you promise to go home right now.”

He kissed her hand ever so gently; “If I were to perish tonight, I would know I had kissed the hand of an angel. Driver, take this lady safely wherever she wants to go.”

Michael handed the driver \$20 and blew her a kiss as the taxi drove off. He walked home in a state of bliss. Once there, he told his mother about the older woman who he is head over heels in love with.

His mother immediately asked; “How much older is this woman you’re seeing? Does she have children you’ll have to support? Does she have a job or are you supposed to support her too?”

“Remember Amanda who used to work in Marcy’s cooking store; it’s her. She’s in her late twenties, no children and she has a job downtown.”

Linda had the concerned mother look on her face; “Late twenties and single? What’s wrong with her? How much baggage is she carrying? She has to have a mountain of issues that will crush you. My strong advice is don’t get involved with her. That gold digger will bury you.”

“I’m involved already. I love her.”

Now over the top hyper; “You slept with her already! Oh Michael.

Can't you keep it in your pants? What if she gets pregnant? She's going to take your business and ruin you! Do you have any idea how angry William will be with you?"

"Calm down mom. I don't own the business, Uncle Bill does. So far we had dinner, walked around the park and I kissed her hand."

"Oh. I guess I may have over reacted a little. But I'm only looking out for what's best for you."

"Mom, I'm mentally exhausted. I'm going to bed. Can I tell you something?"

"Sure honey, what do you want to tell me?"

"I hope this put's your mind at ease. I presume you and Clifford have a good weekly relationship. Mine have been very far and few between."

"I understand dear. Things work out for all young men sooner or later; trust me. I'm your mother and mothers know such things."

The following morning, Amanda stopped by the under construction showroom. She said good morning to everyone except Michael. He is standing like a lost rejected puppy pouting; "Hello Michael. Remember this; Saturday afternoon at three-thirty, a movie and then dinner. That's if you're still interested in an older woman with baggage."

"Oh heck yes I'm interested. Saturday at three-thirty; the Parkway Theater and then dinner."

She smiled; "Good day everyone."

As she walked out the door; all eyes are on Michael to see his response. He howled and yelled; "Yahoo!"

Everyone congratulated him and gave basically the same advice; “Don’t screw this up.”

The new company headquarters is moving along at a good pace. Every sub-contractor donated labor and vendors donated materials.

For Michael, it seemed to take eternity forever for Saturday to come around. He and his date went to the movie. Afterwards they went to dinner at the Parkway Restaurant where Amanda took control of the conversation.

“You supplied me with a bottle of wine which really loosened my lips at our first dinner. I poured my heart and soul out to you. In all fairness, I feel much better. Now I want to hear about you and your conquests. Do you have any children running around out there?”

He was taken aback by her question; “Dam, don’t hold back. Tell me what you really want to know.”

Her reply is quick; “I told you my deepest and darkest secrets about my personal life. It’s only fair you share yours with me.”

“You’re right; my conquests as you put it are very limited. This is really guy’s locker room talk. Are you sure you want to hear this?”

“You better start telling me the truth or I’m going home right now.”

“There are no children anywhere. I’ve had sexual relations with a few women. I always wore protection. No glove, no love was my motto to live by. I was too scared of an unwanted pregnancy. The last thing I wanted is to be paying child support for the next eighteen years or getting some sexually transmitted disease. How would I ever explain either of those to my mother?”

“So I take it you’ve never had your heart broken by some sweet young thing?”

“Oh I never said that. During my only year in college, I knew several young ladies. I met this very special girl named Wendy. I thought I was in love with her. Near the end of my first year, I went to my dorm room for something. I found my girlfriend riding my roommate. I kind of gave up on serious relationships after that.”

“So what did she say when you walked in?”

“With a huge smile on her face; Hi Mickey. I still love you and all, but Johnny is convenient when you’re not available. Don’t worry; I don’t love him. It’s only a physical thing; nothing emotional.”

“Oh my god; so what did you do?”

“I quit school that day and came home. I asked Uncle Bill, William if he could help me find a real job that pays good money. He called Bruno Rubik; the former owner of Never Lost Restorations. Bruno hired me the same day. That was three years ago.

A week ago, Bruno wanted to sell his company and retire. He offered the business to his former son-in-law Randy. But he didn’t have the money, nor could he secure a loan. I went to Uncle Bill to borrow the money and buy the business. He bought the company instead. Then he gave me two-hundred and fifty thousand dollars as startup working capital. Now I’m the managing partner of Never Lost Restorations.”

“You sure are living a gifted life. So what hot spots do you hang out at for picking up women?”

“I don’t want to disappoint you, but I don’t like those places. Those people are looking for Mister or Miss right now. I was looking for Miss Right, not Miss Right now.”

“Someday you’re going to make a woman very happy. Thank you for the movie and dinner. For me, it’s time to go home.”

She looked at the disappointed look on his face; “Don’t pout and look at me with those sad begging puppy dog eyes.”

“I’m sorry. I thought I seen a spark of interest towards me in those beautiful eyes of yours. I thought maybe there was a chance you could be Miss Right.”

“Give a woman a chance to think will you? I’m thinking I enjoyed this evening so much; we should do it again tomorrow. Since we both have to work Monday, let’s do the one-thirty matinee and then an early dinner. I’ll paying since you paid for today.”

His face started making weird expressions; “Are you okay? I’m not sure if you’re having a stroke, crying or about to start screaming. Michael, please start breathing for me.”

“I think all of the above! I’m so excited, I need to go to the bathroom before I wet myself.”

She blushed, giggled and told him to go to the restroom before he has to explain to his mother why his pants are wet. After he returned, he kissed her hand before she entered the taxi to go home. He gave the driver twenty dollars for her fare.

Sunday was almost a repeat of Saturday. The only exception was they walked around the park with each having an arm around each other the entire time.

During the next week, she stopped and bought coffee for the construction crew. She also purchased one pastry every morning and shared it with Michael before she continued on her way to work.

Friday evening, the pair had dinner at the Parkway restaurant. After dinner, Michael opened the door of a taxi for Amanda’s usual ride home; wherever that was.

He was surprised when he heard; “I don’t need a taxi if you walk me home.”

He looked at her with shock and surprise; “I guess not.”

Amanda only lived three blocks away and he never knew it. They chatted about her job and his future. The moment of anticipation happened; they arrived at her door.

Both of them knew what they wanted and neither of them is willing to make the first move. Michael reached out his hand to shake hers.

She grabbed his hand; “Now put both hands on my waist; good. Are your feet firmly on the ground?”

Michael's heart was pounding like a drum. While holding his breath he nervously squeaked; “Yes.”

She grabbed the sides of his head and planted a kiss that almost made his legs fold from under him.

He had stars in his eyes, with a quivering voice; “Please forgive me.”

He raised his arms up to her back, hugged her and returned the passionate kiss with one of his own. She had one leg wrapped around him and she almost fell backward when his knees went limp. They had their arms tightly around each other. Both were breathing very heavy and starring into each others eyes.

In his best masculine voice; “I can’t hold it back any longer. I love you and I’m not going to hold it inside anymore.”

He started to release her when she lowered her hands only so she could wrap her arms around his neck; “And where the heck do you think you’re going?”

She pulled him close; they kissed long and hard. When their mouths separated, both of them were gasping for air.

Breathing very heavily, she declared; “I think we smashed through that barrier. What do we do now?”

Still holding onto each other with Amanda rubbing her fingers through his hair and her right leg rubbing his left leg, he replied; “You’re going to tell me how much you love me.”

“I love you so much it hurts and I’m scared. Come upstairs with me tonight.”

“I would if I could, but I cannot. We will have our time soon enough. Please don’t ask me again because I won’t have the courage or the strength to do what’s right for both of us.”

He kissed her again and this time he had one hand caressing the back of her neck. Her left leg was bent at the knee and off the ground. When he pulled himself away, she noticed tears on his face and she started crying.

“I know those are tears of joy on your beautiful face. Because I love you so much, I must leave before I become a lesser man than you deserve; good night my love.”

She cries out; “No!” as she clenched both hands into fists and held them to her mouth as she watched Michael walk away into the distance until she could no longer see him. Upstairs she went and cried herself to sleep thinking of how she had abused him.

Monday morning arrived and the four coworkers had entered the company headquarters to find the owner William Cann sitting on a folding chair in the center of the main room. He came by to check on the progress and see what's going on.

After saying hello to everyone; “You're making good progress

here. It looks like we should be open for business soon. Then we can concentrate on doing great work and making some money.”

Bill left to meet his wife Marcy for breakfast.

The men were standing around talking about their weekend activities when Randy noticed Michael isn't talking. He was about to say something when Amanda entered with a breakfast sandwich and two cups of coffee.

Everyone stopped talking to each other. In unison; “Good morning Amanda.”

She never took her eyes off Michael for a second; “Good morning everyone.”

She had a smile on her face that is like a billboard flashing; “I'm in love.”

“Good morning Michael. I thought you would like to share breakfast. You proved how wrong I could be about you. I realized you are more of a man than I ever knew existed. I cried myself to sleep last night because of you.”

The three other men stood motionless with smiles on their faces and silently listened.

“I didn't mean to cause you any pain; but if I didn't leave, I would be a lesser man than you deserve.”

“You are so much more of a man than I ever dreamed existed. Thank you for showing me who you really are.”

Carlos broke the love tension; “I think you two need to take this outside so the rest of us can get some work done. Go on; get out of here before we all start to cry.”

The lovers went outside and used the pickup truck hood as a table for their coffees.

“I'm so sorry I made you cry. It took every ounce of will power I had to walk away last night. If we would have slept together, I could never prove to you what type of man I am. Did I pass your test.”

“You didn't make me cry. I did that to myself. You passed the test and I'm so ashamed for treating you so badly. I want to make it up to you. Let's have dinner tonight at my place. I'll stop here and pick you up on my way home.”

“I would like that very much, only one condition please.”

“Oh Michael; name it and it's yours.”

“You must allow me to treat you with the honor and respect you deserve. At the risk of being old fashioned, please allow me to court you as a gentleman should. You deserve a relationship built on the love I have for you; not on animal passion.”

“Alright. If you insist, it'll be one step at a time. You know what I was planning for us to do after dinner tonight don't you? Yeah, by the look on your face, I think you do.”

He smiled; “For our relationships sake; let me demonstrate I'm a man who has the upmost respect for you. I don't want doubt about me in your mind.”

“You're going to kill me with this but alright, one step at a time. I need to get to the bus stop and get to work. Eat your sandwich before it gets cold.”

They kissed each other goodbye with everyone looking on. A blind man could have seen the love flowing between those two.

Amanda took a couple of steps, turned and loudly; “I agreed we’re going to take this one step at a time. You wouldn’t mind if we walk fast would you?”

The smile on her face spoke volumes. Michael replied; “I love you!”

She smiled, turned and kept walking. His coworkers were standing in the door grinning from ear to ear.

Carlos is the first to speak; “You have the exact same look on your face as my Isabella did when her future husband came by to meet my wife and me. What would you like as a wedding gift?”

The men badgered Michael for a few minutes before going back to work. That night Amanda made spaghetti and has a bottle of wine for the occasion. Michael settled for grape juice. She was somewhat miffed he did not drink the wine.

“You told Carlos I drink and most likely beat up women. I’ve never beat up anybody in my life. Well I did push Tony Nansen once into some dog poop. I don’t smoke and I quit drinking to prove to you I’m a man of my word. Now if you insist I have a glass with you, I cannot refuse your request.”

She poured him a glass and they toasted each others good fortune. After they had completed the bottle, Michael became bold; “Should we retire to the sofa and get to know each other a little better?”

They wasted no time in getting to the living room and locking lips. Their hands were exploring each other until Michael broke off one of the buttons on her blouse and heard it hit the floor.

“I tore your blouse. I should stop now and leave.”

“Why do you want to leave? You barley made it past first base.

Lets see now. I'm sure they will feel much better in the open than they do in this bra."

"I'm so fearful of offending you, it borders on being paralyzed. I know what I want to do, but I..."

Amanda put her finger on his lips to stop him from saying another word. She pulled her blouse over her head and cast it to the floor. She removed her bra and cast that aside.

She gazed at his saucer sized eyes; "You were telling me you know what you wanted to do; show me."

Later that evening, Michael was helping Amanda button her blouse when he noticed her bra was still on the floor. He reached and swooped down to retrieve it; "Look what I found, let me help you get this blouse off so we can put this on first."

A few moments later; "Honey, there a little tender from all your attention. You wouldn't mind if we continue tomorrow would you?"

He almost snapped to attention; "I'm sorry my love. I got carried away with your charm; both of them."

She has a warm smile on her face while she's putting her blouse back on again; "It was your wish that we take this relationship one step at a time and I'm going to hold you to that commitment. Is your mom working tomorrow evening? If she is, we can have dinner at your place."

"My mom is working the next few evenings because Joseph, the evening manager is on vacation. We can eat at the Parkway, or somewhere else or we can do carryout to my apartment. Whatever you want is fine with me."

"Let's do carryout from the Parkway and go to your place. Since

your mom is working and we thoroughly covered second base here, let's see what second base feels like in your place. I don't believe I just said that."

"I like that idea. We can be a little naughty worrying about a parent catching us; hahaha."

"You're naughty Michael. I'll pick you up tomorrow after work."

They kissed and he walked home in a state of bliss.

The following morning, Amanda brought Michael his breakfast and coffee. While the two were exchanging words of love, Malakai started singing; "Love is in the air; love is all around you. Love's got Michael by the butt."

Carlo started singing; "Ay, yai, yai, yai; our boss is in love with a very pretty senorita."

The newly established couple blushed before Amanda had to leave for work. She was about to depart when Randy asked; "Amanda, how was everything last evening?"

"We had a wonderful evening other than my lips are sore. By the way, dinner was good too! Bye guys, see you later."

She left for work leaving the men wide eyed and snickering.

Malakai looked at Michael; "I thought you had stretch marks on your lips. She looks very healthy on top."

Michael is getting aggravated; "Alright you guys. Amanda and I are in love and we are grown adults. Now cut it out already."

Mal continued; "Your fast buddy boy. Did you use protection or did you go commando and risk a little Michael or Amanda being on the way?"

“No I didn’t use protection because we didn’t do it. When we do, I’ll use two at a time to make all of you happy.”

They continued poking at Michael for a couple of moments before they went back to work. Late that afternoon, Amanda arrived to meet Michael for dinner. They walked the couple of doors over to the Parkway and ordered carryout. Linda is working as host and manager that night. Michael went to the bathroom leaving the two women alone.

“Hello Amanda. I haven’t seen you for quite a few years. You sure have grown up to be a very mature woman. I see you’re getting carryout for dinner. Are you heading to your place for a cozy evening with a much younger man?”

“I’m not sure cozy would be the word I would use. I’m thinking more of role playing tonight. It’s going to be like two teenagers on a sofa while the parents are out for the evening; like last night.”

Linda relaxed her stance and crossed her arms; “I’m only looking out for my son. He recently turned twenty one and has a lot of things going on in his life. I wouldn’t want to see him taken advantage of by an older more experienced woman on the prowl.”

“You know your son as a mother should. What you need to know is he aggressively pursued me. Your boy is a fully grown man who makes his own decisions. I won’t hurt your boy Linda. Don’t you worry.”

“Then we have nothing further to talk about.”

Michael returned from the restroom; “This is a wonderful surprise. The two loves of my life having a friendly talk.”

“I was telling your mother, I haven’t proposed to you yet because you have too much on your plate right now.”

Linda and Michael looked like the floor opened up and swallowed them. He was all smiles while Linda looked like she had just been shot. Amanda seen the look on their faces and decided damage control is in order.

“Oh I’m being facetious. Michael insists we have a very serious relationship taken one step at a time before we even consider more serious matters.”

“Michael, I won’t wait up for you tonight. But I’ll leave a night light on.”

“That’s okay mom, were going upstairs to have dinner and watch TV. We’ll be finished; I mean gone before you come home after work. Bye mom.”

Linda had this stupefied look on her face. Amanda smiled and waved goodbye. She was momentarily tempted to stick her tongue out. But decided that is too juvenile.

That evening, they ate dinner at the kitchen table and talked about his future plans with the business. They eventually made it to the living room sofa. There conversation was more about what if his mom pays a surprise visit.

“Let’s be like real teenagers with our parents in the next room and behave ourselves tonight. Besides, there still sore from last evenings attention.”

“I don’t mind at all my love. I hope we will have many decades of being together.”

“Michael, are you proposing to me?”

“It was a Freudian slip from a man who is deeply in love with you. Maybe it was a proposal after a fashion.”

“Lie down and put your head on my lap. I’d like to talk to you.”

He did as he was told and she started running her fingers through his hair; “The last thing I want to do is hurt you. We need some more history between us before we can consider matrimony. I would do almost anything for you without question or reservation. Marriage would be the only exception. I’m still a battered woman inside and I need some more time to heal.”

“Amanda my love, I will do anything for you. If you want me to wait for you, I will wait for as long as it takes. When I said you’re in charge of our relationship, I meant it with all my heart. Thank you for allowing me to be with you.”

“My love, I believe we are well on our way to being together for a long long time.”

She was sitting on the sofa with Michael on his back and his head in her lap. Later, his mother arrived in the apartment in complete silence. When she seen the couple, she has the look of surprise on her face. Michael is sound asleep with the look of satisfaction on his face. Amanda’s left hand was on his chest and her right hand was cupping the right side of his face.

Linda vocalized her thoughts with disgust; “Oh, you’re still here.” Turned and walked into the kitchen.

Amanda started running her fingers through his hair; “Michael, it’s time to wake up and take me home.”

He stirred, sat up on the sofa and announced; “I need to pee.”

Off to the bathroom he went, Amanda arose and walked towards the front door. Linda was shooting her dirty looks of dissatisfaction from the kitchen.

“I’m not a tramp, vixen or gold digger. I’m in love with your son.

He proposed to me tonight; after a fashion. I declined because I'm not ready to go down that path again. I don't know if I ever will be. I'll tell you this; if I had a son like him, I would be the proudest mother in the world."

"Thank you. I'm very proud to be his mother."

Michael exited the bathroom and walked Amanda home. The conversation during the walk was about his mother; "I take it my mother does not approve of us."

"I think she just might be starting to warm up to me a little. She didn't push me down the stairs. Answer me this please. How much does it matter what your mother thinks of me? After all she is your mother."

"I'll be completely honest. I'm not going to ask her approval to spend the rest of my life with you. It will be my choice and mine alone."

She wrapped her arm around his; "This is going to be a wonderful relationship."

He seen the love of his life enter her front door. Michael left only after Amanda was upstairs, in her apartment and waving goodbye through the window. He returned to the apartment he shares with his mother. She was waiting for his return.

She called him into the kitchen; "You're old enough to know what you're doing. So tell me about her."

They had quite a talk that evening. Mom is convinced this is only a case of puppy love and it will pass in the fullness of time; about two weeks. The week proceeded where every morning, Amanda came to the job site early to have breakfast with Michael. They had dinner together every evening. Friday at dinner, he told her there would be no dinner Saturday night.

“Why can’t we be together tomorrow night? I don’t understand. Are you getting cold feet? Are you having second thoughts about me?”

“No, I’m not getting cold feet. I need a place to sleep tomorrow night because my mothers companion is coming over. The sofa bed for the employee break room hasn’t been delivered yet. Carlos has his three grandchildren this weekend so I can’t sleep there. Malakai and his wife are going out of town, so I can’t crash there.”

She looked at him like she's about to scold him for being foolish; “Listen you silly man; there is a very comfortable sofa in my living room. You are welcome to sleep there tomorrow night.”

Michael’s emotions almost gave him away by the thoughts of sleeping in the same apartment with the love of his life. Amanda continued; “I insist you sleep in my apartment tomorrow night. I promise I won’t drag you into my bed.”

Now he’s acting coy to the point of over acting; “Okay, if you insist. I’ll pack a change of clothes tomorrow morning. I will be by your place around noon and drop them off. We can do lunch and spend the afternoon seeing some of the things Kansas City has to offer.”

She's watching him like a hawk when she noticed his body language and facial expressions change while he talked. She has to exercise extreme control to keep from busting out laughing at his silliness. She walked over and placed her hand on his chest.

After a moment she smiled; “Your heart is telling me a different story.”

They laughed and walked to her apartment. He declined her offer to come up to her place tonight because he wanted to get some work done in the new business headquarters early tomorrow morning.

They kissed and went to their respective apartments. Michael noticed the 'Furnished Apartment for Rent' sign on Amanda's building as he was leaving.

When he arrived home, his mother confronted him; "Did you wear a condom tonight? I sure hope you did. If you get her knocked up, your future just went down the toilet. William won't stand for anyone trying to extort their way into one of his his businesses."

"Why would I wear a condom during dinner? That would be awfully uncomfortable. Besides, I don't have any. I haven't needed one for quite some time now."

In a over the top motherly concerned voice; "You must protect yourself from her. I know you think you love her, but this puppy love thing will pass. I have to look out for you even if you won't. She's going to try and take your company. I'm sure William will do whatever it takes to protect his business from some woman you got knocked up."

Calmly; "I have two very serious questions to ask you mother. What do you think I should do about Amanda and why should I do anything?"

"Oh Michael honey, you have your whole life ahead of you. That woman is several years older than you. She's at the age where she needs to find a man before her looks give out. She's looking for a Sugar Daddy to support her for the rest of her life. I've seen her type plenty of times."

"What exactly is that type mom?"

"Do I have to spell it out to you? Sex for security; she gives you sex and you supply the security. She gets on the pill and has her boy toy on the side. She gives you sex every now and then while you support her. You're in partnership with a very wealthy and connected man. You're on your way to being a very successful

partner. Don't you think for a minute she doesn't see it. William invested almost a million dollars because he knows how good you are. Don't think for a moment she doesn't see that too."

Michael paused for a moment; "Thank you for letting me know what you think of her. I'm going to sleep on this tonight and I'll take the appropriate action to get this resolved tomorrow morning. It will be settled long before your widow Clifford comes over."

Linda went to her room thinking she straightened out her son from making a huge mistake. Michael went to bed thinking he should rent the vacant apartment in the building where Amanda lives. He could move there to be near her and have a place to sleep without his mothers interference.

Saturday morning Linda went to work as normal in the restaurant. The real money is made on weekend mornings. Michael waited for her to leave. He showered, shaved and dressed somewhat nicely to make an impression on his possible new landlord. He walked to Amanda's building and called the landlord. They lived down the street and agreed to meet him in a couple of minutes.

They arrived and showed him the furnished apartment, second floor rear. He was elated because it was right behind Amanda's. He agreed to the price, paid the security deposit and the first months' rent. Then the real challenge, move in and then confront mother.

Michael cleaned out the company pickup truck and loaded everything he owned, which isn't much other than his clothes and a toy box Uncle Bill bought many years ago when he was a child. It's an emotional time for him. The cutting of the invisible umbilical cord is harder than he imagined. He drove the three blocks to his new apartment and nervously started moving in. During his last trip upstairs, Amanda arrived.

"Hi babe; are you in the moving business too? I wanted to see who my new neighbors are, where are they?"

“Hi honey; we need to talk.”

He explained the situation with his mother. He's moving into his own apartment. He's her new neighbor. Amanda had this neutral look on her face for a few moments.

“Since you don't own a car, it's a good thing William lets you use the company truck. We need to go shopping. You'll need bed linens, towels, toothpaste and toilet paper. Soap too, unless you want to shower with me; I mean use my shower. You can come to my apartment for your meals and watch TV. Come on, let's go shopping.”

They went shopping and eventually stopped for lunch. During the meal; “When are you going to tell your mother?”

“Mom gets off work at two thirty. I'll tell her then.”

“Do you want me there for moral support?”

“Thank you for the offer but no. If my mother sees you, something may be said that can never be unsaid. I don't want to risk you two becoming toxic to each other for the rest of our lives.”

Afterwards, they returned to Michael's new apartment. Amanda started setting the place up for him. His mind is preoccupied with thoughts about confronting his mother. It's two thirty; time to visit his old home one last time. He said goodbye to Amanda and drove back to the Theater Building apartment he called home for the last fifteen years.

Upstairs to the apartment and mom was sitting at the table drinking a cup of tea; “Hi Michael, what's going on today? You have this strange look on your face. Did you come to your senses and tell that woman goodbye?”

He reached into his pocket, retrieved two keys and set them on the

table in front of his mother; “I’ve made a choice between the woman who gave birth to me and the woman I love. I won’t need these anymore. Here’s my keys to your apartment.”

“Don’t tell me you’re moving in with her! Michael my baby; please say it isn’t true!”

“Yes it's true. I rented my own apartment; it’s next to Amanda's. I'm at a crossroads in my life now and I have to do what’s right. I cannot live in your home and court the woman I love. I’m sorry. This is the way it has to be.”

Linda looked like a deer in the headlights. She arose from the table and silently walked to the sink. She poured out the tea, reached into the cabinet, pulled out a bottle of whiskey and two small glasses.

She held two fingers of her left hand against the the base of each glass.

While pouring the whiskey; “This is how they measured whiskey in the old west when men were men. Here's two fingers. I know I need this and I think you need it too!”

They both downed what had to be good double shots of fine blended whiskey.

“Thanks mom, I needed that. I’m going to my new apartment and contemplate the meaning of my life.”

“Let me get my shoes back on so you can show me your new bachelor pad, love den or whatever you young people call it now.”

“It’s a furnished four room apartment that's a place to live; nothing more.”

Linda put her shoes back on and scooped up the keys Michael had

set on the table; “Put these in your pocket. You moved on with your life, but I’m still your mother. It’s not like we’re divorced.”

They drove over to the new apartment talking all the way. Linda was inspecting the apartment when Amanda walked in unannounced.

“Hi Michael, how did it go with your mother?”

Her voice tapered off when the two women’s eyes met. The tension in the room was so thick; you could have sliced it with a knife.

Linda made the first move; “Amanda, may I speak with you privately please?”

“Sure, my place is across the hall.”

Linda turned to face her son; “Stay here; this is between Amanda and me.”

Both women walked into the other apartment and closed the door. He was torn between staying put like he was told or listening at Amanda’s door. He sat at the kitchen table and pouted. A couple of minutes later, the door opened and both women entered his apartment.

Linda looked at him and sternly announced; “I’ll walk home alone since it’s only three blocks. Remember you’re still my son. Since your business is a couple of doors down from the restaurant, and my apartment, don’t forget to say hello to your mother.”

She turned to Amanda and hugged her; “I would say please take care of my son, but that would be foolish for me to say because I know you’re going to take very good care of him.”

“Thank you. I most certainly will. He’s important to both of us.”

Linda went to leave and Michael insisted on walking her home. When he returned, the two young lovers continued with their Saturday plans which also included a movie and dinner.

When they finally returned to Amanda's apartment; "You are sleeping on my sofa tonight aren't you?"

"Considering the day I've had, I need the security of knowing you're as close to me as the next room."

They watched a little TV and didn't talk very much. The events of the day are weighing heavy on his mind. Amanda grabbed a bed sheet, pillow and blanket. She made the sofa into a make shift bed and wished Michael a pleasant night's sleep.

Sometime later, Michael was looking at the ceiling. His mind is racing about the day's events. He decided to go to the bathroom and wash his face. On his way back, he found Amanda topless and sitting on the sofa with her arms folded.

She spoke with sympathy in her voice; "I see you can't sleep either. Come on, get back on the sofa. I'll make you feel better."

She removed the blanket and Michael lied down. He thought she was going to tuck him in like his mother did when he was a child. Amanda threw the blanket on the floor; told him to relax because she had different ideas.

A moment later; "I don't have any condoms!"

"Shush! I'll take care of everything. Just lay back and enjoy."

It's Sunday morning. Amanda is lying face down cross ways on her bed; only partly covered by a sheet. Michael is on the living room floor wrapped up in the sheet from the sofa. On the floor is his pillow, the blanket, two pair of underwear and a small kitchen towel. The overwhelming urge to use the bathroom woke him up.

He's on the floor thinking about last night.

After the bathroom break, he returned to the living room, picked up the blanket and went to Amanda's room. After watching Amanda for a few moments, he gently covered her with the blanket from the living room floor. She moved; he knelt down on the floor and leaned on the bed so his face is on level with hers.

When her eyes opened, she smiled; "Good morning sweetheart; how do you feel this morning? Are you as satisfied as I am?"

"My lips and jaw are a little sore but other than that, I feel great."

"I told you I wouldn't drag you into my bed. I also said you wouldn't need protection you silly man."

The two exchanged words of gratification of last night's activities. Michael decided to return to his apartment to shower and change clothes. They had previously exchanged each other's apartment keys. He walked out of her apartment completely naked, took the few steps to his apartment and entered.

When Amanda got off the bed, she noticed his clothes and her underwear are still piled on the floor by the sofa. She gathered up his clothes and walked them across the hall to his apartment. She hears the shower running. The clothes hit the kitchen floor with a slight thump.

As she entered the shower; "Oh hell! You scared the living crap out of me!"

"Since you're new here, I don't remember you buying razors or shaving cream yesterday. Oh silly me; I forgot to bring them over. Since I'm here, can you wash my back?"

A while later Michael asked; "Where did you put the towels my love?"

She left with a smile and returned with a single towel. Oh darn, I only grabbed one towel. We're going to have to share it. You dry me first and then I'll dry you."

They eventually dried off, brushed their teeth and went to breakfast. It is the same restaurant where her mother met John Doe. Amanda said hello to the staff and introduced Michael to everyone.

When breakfast was over, they spent the rest of the day sightseeing, exchanging looks and words of love. That afternoon was a movie and a romantic dinner at a little Mexican cantina. The house mariachi band played Mexican love songs and sang to them. Even though they could not understand a single word the band was singing, the melody of a love song came through very clear. They walked to the park hand in hand. Once there, they circled the lagoon arm in arm.

While sitting on a park bench Michael asked; "I'm so embarrassed, I don't know how to ask this."

"After last night sweetheart, what could you possibly ask me that would be embarrassing? Not a dam thing I can think of. Now ask me your question and I promise I won't get mad or embarrassed."

He sat on the bench starring into her eyes and saying nothing. His breathing was fast and shallow. He was turning pale; "Let me help you out here. Form the question in your mind. Now say it in your mind. Now verbalize the question."

The look on his face was somewhere between fear and bursting into tears. He burst out with; "Should I buy condoms before we go home?"

She placed her hands on his face and calmly; "I don't feel condoms are appropriate at this time. Let's go home and watch some TV. I still have to make the bed in your apartment with your new

sheets.”

They started walking to their apartments when Michael uttered; “I’m so sorry for being so forward. I’m ashamed of myself for asking you. It was totally wrong on my part.”

“Don’t worry about it. We should not be apologizing for asking each other honest questions.”

They arrived at Michael’s apartment. After Amanda made the bed, they went across the hall to her place. She opened a bottle of wine, poured two glasses and gave one to him. They sat on the sofa kind of watching TV. Within minutes, they drank the wine and their clothes were on the floor.

She had him by the hand leading him to her room; “I told you condoms are not appropriate at this time.”

“But I never without ...”

Her hand went over his mouth and softly; “I don’t want to hear it. Just lay back on the bed and enjoy.”

Later that night, she covered him with a sheet while he slept like a child in the arms of the dragon. Leaned over, kissed him and whispered; “Welcome to the real world my love.”

They arose the next morning and he could not stop starrng and grinning at her; “Michael, what’s wrong with you this morning? You’re grinning like a Cheshire cat!”

“I’m not sure if I should sing for joy or get on my knees and thank you for the most wonderful experience of my life. I never knew what I was missing. Thanking you seems so inadequate.”

“Get off your knees and let go of my hand. Let’s get some breakfast and go to work. You have a business to build and I need

to get to work.”

The couple went next door to Spiro’s restaurant for breakfast. They sat in the very booth where her mothers relationship with John Doe started all those years ago. During breakfast, she was feeding him sausages and French toast. The staff behind the counter is watching and giggling at the couple’s actions.

With breakfast finished, they walked outside. She told Michael; “Wait a minute. I want to tell Helen, our server something before we go. I’ll be right back.”

Helen has been a server at Spiro's for over 20 years. Amanda came back in; “Helen, he’s the one! I’m so excited I can’t stand it!”

“You’re getting them a little young aren’t you Miss Cougar?”

“The last three were losers. I finally found Mister Right. I'm so in love, it almost hurts!”

“By the way he's looking, you found Mister Right last night. Good for you dear. I'm glad for you. I have never seen a woman with so much bad luck when it comes to men as you dear; good luck.”

“Thanks; you’re the best. How do I look this morning?”

“You look like a woman who has cupid’s arrow sticking out of her heart. I know your mother found Mister Right. Now get out of here and take that young man with you before he gets away.”

Over the next few days, the restoration company office and showroom are nearing completion. William stopped by every morning to remind Michael he needs office furniture, a computer system, telephone system and business cards. He also reminded Michael if he needs more money to let him know. He doesn’t want the business to fail because it was under capitalized.

Upon completion of the business headquarters, William told Michael to get fliers made up for the business. Then place his business cards with every store in the building; including the concession stand in the theater. Also to give his daughter Nancy and her business partner Vanessa business cards for their consulting and recovery business.

The day after completing the headquarters renovation, the telephone started to ring with customers wanting estimates for renovations. The calls were from well to do business leaders, politicians, to the connected people we call movers and shakers.

Over the next few months, business was fantastic. Never Lost Renovations is a boutique company which only performs high end work with experienced craftsmen and professional subcontractors. It seemed like in no time at all, the waiting list was 6 months out and people were willing to wait.

Life for Amanda and Michael was wonderful. Amanda is working at the Mega Conglomerate Corporation LLC and making a good wage. Michael has since moved in with Amanda. They kept the rear apartment so they wouldn't have neighbors behind them.

Every morning Michael would ask Amanda to marry him. Every morning her response was the same; "I love you more than anything in the world; but I'm just not ready for the band of gold yet."

One Monday morning, Michael is sitting on the toilet reading the newspaper when an advertising insert fell out and hit his foot. It slid and landed next to a bag of tampons that were on the floor in the corner in front of him. He reached over to get the insert and noticed there is dust on the bag.

He finished his business, went into the kitchen and sat down at the table for breakfast; "Honey, I've noticed you've been acting kind of distant lately. Is there something is on your mind. Are you

feeling alright?”

“I’m fine and I’m thirty. Work is been very busy. Your business is booming and I’ve got a few things on my mind.”

“Thirty, beautiful and absolutely fabulous. By the way, I noticed the tampons in the bathroom have a layer of dust on them.”

Before he could say another word, she snapped at him; “So I’m a lousy housekeeper; so what?”

“Whoa sweetheart, that's not what I meant at all. Is there something going on that we should see a doctor about? If somethings wrong, let’s get it treated before it becomes serious.”

She arose from the table and walked to the sink. With her back to him she shrugged her shoulders like shaking off a huge weight; “I have to tell you something that might change our relationship forever. I'm so scared to tell you because of what you might say or want me to do. I’m frightened.”

He went to the sink and held her close for comfort; “You are the love of my life. Please never fear to tell me anything. Whatever it is; I’m sure we can work it out. Now what is troubling you?”

“I went to the doctor Friday. He told me I’m three months pregnant.”

“Oh my god! That is the most wonderful news ever! You need to call your mom and tell her right away. You need to call Monica at the beauty shop and set up an appointment to get your hair done before Friday. You’re going to need a nice outfit before Friday too.

Oh my god, I need to call my mom and tell her. Let’s see, I’ll call Carlos and tell him to take over this morning while we're out. You need to call your boss and tell him you’re going to be coming in late today. What am I forgetting?”

She is all smiles; “What the hell are you rambling about? You’re talking about having my hair done before Friday, getting a nice outfit and going into work late today.”

He's almost hyperventilating; “I’m so sorry for getting ahead of myself. We can apply for the marriage license this morning. You can buy a nice outfit and get your hair done before Friday.

We can get married Friday morning at City Hall because you’re having my baby. Oh, tell your boss you’re going to be off on Friday also.”

“Michael, aren’t you forgetting something very important?”

He has this wide-eyed look of confusion on his face. The eyes were going back and forth searching for the answer that could not be found; “Honey, I have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about. Should I be feeling your stomach for the baby to kick? Should I put my ear there and listen for the heart beat? What am I supposed to do?”

“A proposal would be in order right about now.”

“Oh crap. I’ll be right back.”

He grabbed his keys and ran to the other apartment. Moments later he returned with a little box in his hand. He lowered himself to one knee and held Amanda’s left hand.

“Amanda Jones, you are my Earth, Moon and Stars. Without exaggeration, you are the center of my universe. Will you marry me?”

With tears flowing; “Yes I will.”

He put the engagement ring on her finger and said he purchased

them the day after they had their first relations together. They talked about how wonderful this was going to be for the both of them. They went to breakfast at Spiro's next door. She showed everyone her engagement ring. Spiro, the cheapest restaurant owner on the planet even bought them breakfast. Afterwards; they to the apartment to get their identifications for the marriage licenses.

He called his mother for his birth certificate; "Hi mom. I need my birth certificate. Can I come over and get it right away? ... I need it for my marriage license. ... Yes we are, this Friday morning at nine. ... Amanda is three months pregnant with your grandchild. ... Okay. I'll wait here. ... Mom's on her way over right now."

Amanda called her mother; "Hi John, it's Amanda. Can I speak to my mother please? ... Never mind, she can stay outside with the dogs. May I tell you why I called? ... I'm getting married this Friday and I'm three months pregnant. ... Thank you John, thank you very much. ... I completely understand. ... We will come and visit you instead of you coming here. ... Please don't apologize; I understand completely. ... Please tell my mom why I called. ... Thank you ... Bye.

That's my mothers husband; he won't be coming to the wedding. He's doesn't travel anymore and I understand why. Someday I'll tell you the whole story about him; but not today."

Michael made the next call to the office. Malakai answered and Michael told him he is in charge for a few hours. Amanda's mother called back and the two women chatted about love and life. Michael thought his future wife has a glow about her because she's carrying his child.

Linda showed up at the apartment. Any observer would have thought Amanda and Linda were lifelong friends. Michael went to the kitchen to get something to drink. After what seemed to be forever, Amanda called him into the living room to be included in

the conversation.

“Honey, I wanted you to hear this when I tell your mom. I went to the OBGYN Friday. She explained I have a very high risk pregnancy. Because of the previous miscarriages, it was very unlikely I would become pregnant. The doctors called it a hostel womb. Now that I'm pregnant, I might be able to carry a fetus full term.

The OB wanted me on bed rest until delivery. She told me not to lift up anything heavier than a cup of coffee. She also told me not to do anything stressful that would put any strain on my womb. This is my last chance at having a baby. She told me my chances of carrying the baby full term are fifty-fifty under optimum conditions at best. The doctor also told me she was being generous because it's really much less.”

Michael is stunned at the news. The two women chatted while he listened.

Linda finished the visit by giving Michael his Birth Certificate and saying to Amanda; “Here's the only advice I can give you. Prenatal care is very important to any woman. It's paramount in your condition. Please don't take any chances. I want a healthy grandchild.”

Linda left for home while Amanda and Michael went downtown to apply for their marriage license. Being downtown already, they shopped for Amanda's dress for her wedding and a suit for Michael. He drove her to work before returning to his office and telling everyone what's going on with his marriage and baby on the way. Amanda did pretty much the same thing at her work. She told her boss and coworkers she's pregnant and needs Friday off because she's getting married.

The coworkers quickly arranged to have a mini wedding shower in the cafeteria at lunchtime on Thursday. Amanda told everyone to

save their money, no gifts please. Cake, coffee and well wishes would be fine. She also told those who she thought were her best friends about her ultra-high risk pregnancy and her concerns about carrying the baby full term. They sympathized with her and it became the buzz around the office. Michael went to see Uncle Bill and inform him about the recent events and plans. Bill wished him good luck.

Then William being William instructed; “Hire more talented subcontractors to expand the business. Do it slowly to be sure they're the quality we want. Don't hire people driving around in junk vehicles or looking like something the cat dragged in. Never Lost Restorations has an image to maintain. Both by the quality of work performed and the people who perform the work. I know you won't let us down. Good luck with your wedding.”

Thursday afternoon, Tiffany from Sal's restaurant called and wanted to know how many for the wedding brunch tomorrow and if 11:30 AM is a good time.

Michael told her five people at 11:30 is fine. He asked who set this up and more importantly, who's paying? Tiffany answered; “Your Uncle Bill; William Cann. See all of you at eleven-thirty tomorrow.”

Early that evening, Amanda's mother Sarah arrived from New Mexico without her husband. They went out to dinner and she stayed in the rear apartment. Friday morning was a very light breakfast. The wedding couple and their parents were at city hall by 9:30 in the morning. After waiting for the judge, by 11:00, Amanda Smith became Amanda Webb. The judge who married them joked by saying that Amanda would have to replace all of her monogrammed clothes. Everyone laughed and left City Hall.

They took a taxi to Sal's Restaurant. The luncheon went great with the wedding couple and the parents having a great time. Following the luncheon, the parents went their separate ways. Linda is going

home to change and go back to work.

Amanda's mother Sarah was going to visit her friends who she hasn't seen in several years. The newlyweds went sightseeing for the rest of the day before they returned home. When they arrived home, the downstairs tenant stopped them as they entered the door. The old woman said she signed for a special delivery envelope for Amanda. She took the envelope from the old woman and the couple went upstairs. The letter was from the Mega Conglomerate Corporation LLC.

“Dear Mrs. Amanda Smith-Webb. We are informing you effective this date; your employment with the Mega Conglomerate Corporation LLC is terminated effective immediately. Your former position has been outsourced. Being Missouri is a Work At Will state, your employment is no longer required. Your personal belongings will be shipped to you via local messenger. Should you try to enter any Mega Conglomerate Corporation LLC properties, you will be arrested for trespassing and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

She sat at the kitchen table in shock. “Honey, I’ve been fired. They said my job has been eliminated.”

The couple discussed the horrible timing involved and after much discussion; “I’ll call Uncle Bill to see if he can help.”

“What could Uncle Bill possibly do for me?”

“I have no idea; but Uncle Bill seems to always come up with ways to help people in their darkest hour. When my mom and I needed a place to live, it was Marcy's mother Christine and Uncle Bill who came to the rescue. I’ll call him right now.”

It only rang once. Bill must have been sitting next to the phone; “Hello Uncle Bill; it’s Michael. ... Thank you very much for the wedding luncheon. ... I’m calling to see if you can help. Amanda

was fired today. ... We came home to a letter that said her job was outsourced. ... Amanda worked for the Mega Conglomerate Corporation LLC, Accounts Payable department. ... That's all you need to know? ... Last week she received an award for outstanding performance. ... No that's it. ... Anything else going on? ... No, I haven't been in the office today. ... You fired Claire because of what? ... (very long pause) Okay. We'll be there tomorrow morning. ... I'll let her know right now. ... Thanks Uncle Bill. ... Bye."

"What did he say?"

"He wants to see both of us in my office tomorrow morning; no later than eight o'clock because he meets a couple of detective buddies at the police firing range at eight thirty. Uncle Bill said he will see what he can get arranged by then."

She looked at her husband with a look of question and doubt; "Uncle Bill fired Claire, my office clerk for stealing. She wrote a company check for five thousand dollars and tried to cash it at Patel's Convenience store. Udo, the store owner told her he had to go in the back to get the cash from the safe. He called Uncle Bill and told him what was happening.

Bill came downstairs and that was the end of Claire. He made her an offer she couldn't refuse. Return to the office, write a letter of resignation for stealing and he won't call the police. Don't write the letter and leave in handcuffs. Either way she don't get unemployment. He has the letter in his pocket."

"How do you think William will be able to help me? I don't want to go back to the place that fired me; that's for dam sure."

Michael developed this smirk on his face; "How would you like to work for Never Lost Restorations? Since Uncle Bill fired Clare, I need a reliable office manager and coordinator. I'll pay you ten percent more than you made at your last job. Plus you get to sleep

with the boss; what a deal!”

“Let’s take my mom out to dinner this evening. When we come home, I’ll start sleeping with my new boss.”

“May I take that as a yes?”

She smiled; “I’m pregnant, not dead. After tonight, there will be no doubt in your mind!”

The following morning they arrived at Michael’s office about 7:45. William is already there sitting in Michael’s chair. They exchanged greetings and the meeting went fast. William told the couple many of his former employees are now working for the Mega Conglomerate Corporation LLC based in Kansas City. A couple of them work in the IT department. By law, all interoffice email must be archived. Being able to send so many employees through an Arab sponsored college scholarship fund has its rewards. He called in a few favors.

William was able to acquire a copy of the emails and the distribution chain of everyone who signed off on Amanda being fired. The letter stated Amanda Smith-Webb needed to be terminated because of her high risk pregnancy. It was NOT a job performance issue. It was a possible liability issue. They felt if she were to lose the baby; she would sue the company. Terminate Amanda Smith Webb and prevent a potential lawsuit. William gave her a copy of the inter-office company email. He also informed Amanda he's already contacted the law firm he's been using. They will be contacting her sometime next week about the details of the lawsuit.

“Anderson and Anderson has been my law firm for years. Do not speak of this to anyone. Let the lawyers do all the talking. Regardless of what your former employer offers you, do not except any package. Any and all communications must go through the Anderson law firm. Your former employer is going to offer you six

months pay first. Then they'll offer you a years pay to make everything go away. If either of you open your mouths, you could fu** everything up. Don't settle for pocket change when you can get serious folding money that could change your future.”

Bill advised Amanda, she should get an out-of-court settlement in the mid six figures. He also suggested Michael show his wife her new work place. He asked how the business expansion is going. They chatted for a few moments before he left for the shooting range.

Michael showed Amanda around the office. He came up with the idea of where the crib could be and modifying the employee break room for the needs of a nursing mother. That is if she wanted to work after giving birth. They returned to the apartment and brought her mother Sarah to the airport for her trip home.

Michael insisted he goes with his wife to every doctor appointment. Because the business was growing and Amanda is pregnant, Michael hired another person for the office.

He hired Amie Asher; who happens to be a rather large middle aged divorcee as an office assistant. She covers for Amanda whenever she has to go to the doctor or when she doesn't feel well. The closer Amanda comes to her due date, the more Amie assumes Amanda's job duties; which also included unloading materials and supplies for the business. Amie is going to take over Amanda's job completely while she's on maternity leave.

What Amanda doesn't know is Michael gave his mother the keys to the rear apartment. With her pregnancy being so high risk; Linda was secretly putting the nursery gifts from Amanda's friends and the baby furniture in there.

One morning while the couple were sitting down to have their normal breakfast at home, Michael heard water splashing on the kitchen floor. He looked at Amanda and asked if she spilled

something.

“My water broke and I’m scared. Call the doctor.”

He called the doctor and the first question the doctor asked; “Is there any blood?”

“No. Nothing red what so ever; it looks like water.”

“Is she in any pain?”

“The doctor wants to know if you are in any pain.”
She shook her head ‘No’.

“She is not in any pain. Just scarred.”

“Good. Keep Amanda and yourself calm. Now carefully and safely bring her to the hospital. Don’t rush. There’s plenty of time. You have several hours left.”

They went to the hospital and Michael stayed with her the entire time.

The moment of truth came in the delivery room. The doctor said; “Push!” Michael seen the head emerge and down he went.

The next thing he knew was someone was holding smelling salts under his nose. He heard the baby crying; then the nightmarish horror in the delivery room.

“Take the baby, she’s hemorrhaging. Her BP is crashing. We’re losing her. Call a code blue. Get the trauma surgical team in here stat! Page doctors Barr and Stevens; there both working today in the E-R.”

“CODE BLUE NOW!” someone yelled.

They virtually dragged Michael out of the delivery room to the waiting area. There was a small army of people running into the room with carts full of supplies and instruments. He asked everyone what was going on with his wife and child. Everyone gazed at him with the look of despair and said nothing.

He was mentally bouncing off the walls when an older nurse approached him; "I'm Nurse Tucker; are you Michael Webb?"

"Yes I am. What's going on with my wife and baby? They took my baby and won't tell me anything."

"Mister Webb, you have a healthy seven pound eleven ounce baby boy. I'm not supposed to tell you this; the surgical trauma team is working on your wife. After giving birth; several of her reproductive organs ruptured and started hemorrhaging. "

There is a change of tone in her voice; "The doctors are doing their best to save your wife."

"What did you mean; doing their best to save my wife?"

"The surgeons will notify you when they are none. Be glad you have your healthy baby boy. Be strong Mister Webb. Good luck."

Sometime later the chief surgeon found him in the waiting room and explained what happened; "Mister Webb, I'm Doctor Leslie Barr-Stevens. Because of the condition of Amanda's reproductive system, giving birth was too much stress. Several reproductive organs ruptured while giving birth to your son. To save her life, I had to perform an emergency radical hysterectomy. She's alive and awake; but she will never be able to have any more children."

Michael felt cold and numb at the news. The surgeon escorted him to see his wife. They had told her she could never have another child and is devastated. She couldn't stop apologizing to Michael for letting him down. He could not comfort her no matter what he

said. Finally they brought in the baby.

Amanda looked; “Who's is that?”

“Meet your son. All seven pounds and eleven ounces of him.”

“They never told me the baby lived! I thought the baby died and I was dying without you here!”

The couple with their new son went from despair to a state of bliss. Because of the surgery, Amanda had to stay in the hospital for a few of days. While she was in the hospital, Michael's construction crew turned the primary apartment's back bedroom into the nursery. Linda was the decorating manager while Carlos and Malakai did all the heavy work and painting. Amanda came home with Michael junior to be happily surprised with the new bedroom nursery in their apartment.

About ten weeks after the baby's birth, Williams wife Marcy insisted Michael and Amanda go out for a night on the town. She would watch the baby for them. Amanda was fearful to leave her child for the first time.

Marcy wants to put Amanda's mind at ease; “William's adopted daughter has three children. We have baby sat and changed the diapers of all three of his grandchildren. I think we can handle one little baby boy overnight. Any evening you to want to get away and Linda is not available, just let me know. I'll be the backup grandma whenever you need me.”

The lawsuit against the Mega Conglomerate Corporation LLC was minutes away from going before a judge and jury when they settled in the courthouse hallway.

Amanda received the equivalent of seven years pay with benefits. Mega also had to pay the attorney's fees for both sides. The settlement almost paid for their new house.

Through the passage of time, it became clear that Michael Junior is like his father. He became a natural at the business. He took a fancy to Williams' youngest granddaughter Charity who just happened to be almost ten years older than him. She didn't fancy him, but that's another story.

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