

Restoraion Of Lost Love

A Novel By: Ralph C Johnson

Edited by: Jacalyn A Johnson

Because of a random act of fate, he discovers the unrequited lost love that has been lost for so many years.



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

The KCM Chronicles: Book Four

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Restoration of Lost Love

This has been one hell of a great day for Michael Webb. Today is his twenty-first birthday and he signed a deal to be the managing partner of Never Lost Restorations. The former owner Bruno Rubik wanted to sell the business to his former son-in-law Randy Nash, he declined because he didn't have the money to buy the business.

Michael told his mother about Bruno wanting to sell the business and retire to Florida with his live in Christine. Michael's mom Linda is the assistant manager at the Parkway Restaurant. She told her son to ask Uncle Bill if he could help him buy out Bruno.

Uncle Bill really isn't anyone's uncle. William J. Cann owns the Parkway Theater Building and several businesses within the building, including the restaurant. Michael called William; Uncle Bill since he was about seven years old. The nickname stuck from that day forward.

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

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

Minutes ago, Michael was handed a check for 250 thousand dollars for working capital along with the keys to his new store front space in the Theater Building on Walnut Street. He turned the key and opened the door to what would be his new business. It used to be a gift and card shop up to a few years ago. The business folded and Uncle Bill never rented out the storefront because in his words; "It's a pain in the ass finding good tenants that won't stiff you on the rent."

First order of business, call his employees (the other three employees of Never Lost Restorations) to let them know the sale of the business is complete and he is now the managing partner. Also to tell them 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 changes. The old office was Bruno's kitchen in his home. The storeroom was his garage and basement. He started working for Bruno right after his first year in college. That was three years ago. Now Michael has a good handle on the business. He's not a great carpenter, but he is a fantastic salesman.

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

"Mom, if only Christine 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 woman 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 front door of a college. ... Now you need to remember not only your own destiny is in your hands, but three other people 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 quite clear to me. He also made it quite clear not to come whining to him about anything. 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 that?”

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

Linda smiled and replied; “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 badly; so Christine being William’s mother-in-law, she asked Bill if we could move in with her. Bill asked how much was I paying for rent at the time; I told him.

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, let’s talk about it next month. ... The one thing you need to know about Uncle Bill as you call him, he has a very strange sense of loyalty.”

“Mom, Uncle Bill never blinked when I told him about my idea to buyout Bruno. Within a second, he decided to buy him out and make me the managing partner. He is a very strange man, but I’ve always liked him.”

“You’re getting an idea of how he is. I deposit the rent into an account at the bank across the street. The account is in my name and his. He has never withdrawn anything from the account. Every year he pays the income tax on the interest. Before Christine left with Bruno, she told me that is my retirement account. That is the type of man you’re in partnership with.”

“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 working at the restaurant. I stay because it’s a great place to work, we live around the corner and the pay is very 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 are 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

on a Friday night 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. 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 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."

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

"Oh Mom, 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 was way more information than I ever 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 bit too much."

They went to their apartment and watched a little TV. They retired to their respective bedrooms and slept through the night.

That weekend was a working weekend for Michael. He called Randy (his design architect and Jill the restaurant managers' husband) along with his two best friends that 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.

He 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 and plans that Saturday morning. The plans they came up with included a full employee break room; including a cooking stove, refrigerator, table, chairs, sofa bed and a TV. The bathroom must have a full shower.

The following week; it was demolition down to the wall studs; remodel the place from front to back. A restoration company must look really good, not like some dump.

Monday morning, three of the men were inside destructing the place to make way for the new showroom, office and break room. Michael was out front watching the dumpster being placed on the street when he seen a woman that he thought he knew.

She was walking towards him when Randy called him inside about something. He looked at his watch and saw it was 8:10 AM. For the rest of the day he hoped this woman would walk this way again. He was preoccupied with looking out the front window for her. This did not go un-

noticed by the others.

Malakai spoke up; “Hey Mike; are you going to look out the dam window all day or are you going to work like the rest of us? ... What the hell did you see that has you so fascinated?”

“I recognized a woman that I haven’t seen in years. She used to work in the Cook’s Dream Emporium when I was a kid. I used to empty the garbage cans so I could see her. That has to be close to ten years ago.”

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

The rest of the day was spent with the deconstruction and cleanup. His 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 store 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 is 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 was walking down the sidewalk past the restaurant when an attacker came up behind her. He punched her in the face, grabbed her purse and ran down the sidewalk.

She fell and took quite a tumble. The attacker was laughing and running towards the four men. The problem for him was he was looking backwards at his victim, not where he was 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 looked at the attacker and said to Randy; “I think that is going to leave an ugly mark!”

Randy suggested they do something to keep the attacker for the police; “Mal, get me a two by four and the nailer.”

Mal 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 nailed to a two by four across his back.”

They walked over to where Amanda was on the ground. Michael was offering aid and comfort to Amanda. She was trying to convince Michael that she was 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?”

Michael was holding the woman he had dreamed of holding in his arms 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 from harm. ... Let me help you up; I have a first aid kit in my truck.”

“I don’t need your god dam first aid and 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 such 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 you from when you worked for Marcy at the Cooks Dream Emporium.

Randy, open my truck please 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.”

“Get your hands off me, I don’t want or need your help. ... Ow, dam that hurts!”

It was clear Amanda could not put any weight on her damaged leg.

“I told you we would help you. Now don’t worry, Malakai’s color won’t rub off on you. He looks scary, but he really is a very nice black man once you get to know him.”

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

While they were walking, Malakai said; “My color won’t rub off? Just for that crack, you’re buying lunch today.”

“Oh Mal, 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 fools done badgering each other? Just give me a bandage so I can get to work.”

“Amanda, it’s me Michael. I was the kid that adored you when you were working in Marcy’s store. I used to empty the garbage 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 run off while everyone was attending to Amanda. Carlos handed Mike the first aid kit. He called everyone inside to leave Michael and Amanda 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 was in his glory brushing back her hair from the injury. He held her leg while he cleaned the cut on her knee. He applied a bandage over the cut but he never let go of her calf.

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

“Oh my, I am so sorry. It’s just seeing you again after all these years; it’s so surreal to me.”

“I’m sure it is, but there is a police man that wishes to speak with us. He’s holding a piece of your lumber with a shirt on it. Go ahead and talk to the officer; 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.

Amanda offered her description; “Officer, I only seen his fist. After he hit me, I only seen the sidewalk which was very close.”

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

Mike added; “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 a couple of feet on my sidewalk.”

Amanda 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 that leg without limping.

Now being totally aggravated, she snipped; “This is fringing great! I have a 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 shape to walk there. Here is my card, call me, I’ll pick you up from work if you would like and bring you home.”

Amanda response was 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 you to pick her up for a ride home. You’re thinking the whole time while you’re there, you can get a quick jump in the sack; out of gratitude of course.”

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

“I’m sorry you feel that way; I’ll have one of my happily married employees bring you to work

so you're not late. That should make you feel a little better. I am so sorry for you feeling that way."

He turned and yelled; "Carlos, please take Amanda to work for me. ... Call Randy when you're done. That way you can pick up any supplies we need that we forgot to order on your way back."

He tossed the keys to Carlos, turned without saying another word and walked inside. Mal took a look at him; "People change my young friend. You're not old enough to know this yet, this is your first lesson. Sometime people change over the years; they are not the same people that you knew before."

"Mal, 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 almost ten years. You're looking at her the way she was ten years ago. Heaven only knows what kinds of experiences have passed under her bridge of life my young friend."

"Mal, 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; "Mike, 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 I didn't care about anything. ... It was Bruno that 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. ... 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 Randy, I'm at a loss for words. I've never been put down so hard by anyone that I felt so strongly about before; it really shook me down to my core."

Mal added; "A woman can make you turn yourself inside out for her. This one will never know what she missed out on. ... Come on my young friend, you have a business to build."

The men spent the rest of the day on the construction of their new headquarters. They all broke for lunch and went to the Parkway restaurant. For Michael, the unwelcome topic of Amanda came up again.

Carlos brought it 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 26th; she said she would walk the rest of the way."

Michael responded; "I thought you were a pal, here's the salt shaker. Pour some on the open wounds while you're at it; prick."

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

“Carlos, grab your fork and stick it in me; I’m done!”

The men chatted about women in general. They agreed that Amanda has some serious baggage to deal with. After lunch they returned to work, Michael’s heart was not into it. He kept glancing out the window looking for Amanda to walk by; she never pasted that way again that day.

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

He had to hold himself back so not to show his excitement.

“Good morning Ms. Amanda. I see the swelling has gone down nicely; although the black eye is going to take some time to heal. Anyway, what can I do for you this morning?”

“I wanted to apologize for being such a rude bitch yesterday. I wanted you 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 very much for taking the time to stop by and start putting my mind at ease. ... If you have a moment, I really would like to tell you something.”

Amanda broke an ever so slight grin; “Sure, I owe you at least that much.”

“I remember when I was much younger and you worked for Marcy. I thought you were the most beautiful and wonderful woman on the planet. By an act of fate yesterday, I actually touched your face and talked to you after all these years. Amanda, I look into your eyes now and I see you are in great pain.”

Amanda replies; “I took some aspirin this morning, I’ll be fine.”

“No I’m sorry; you’re not going to be fine. You are in great emotional pain caused by selfish and bad men in your life. I can see it in your eyes as clearly as if I were reading a book. I don’t wish you any harm at all. I don’t want to abuse or take advantage of you. ... I would cherish the opportunity to make that pain in your life go away; if you would only let me.”

“Now you turn on the charm to get me in the sack; is that it? Is this the younger man’s approach to a somewhat older woman that’s damaged? ... I don’t buy your act kid.”

“Please listen to me; I’m a fully grown adult man that would love to get you in the sack. I’m not going to lie to you; you’re a very attractive and desirable woman. 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; please give me at least that much of a chance."

She looked him square in the eyes; "You 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 at lunch; I quit drinking and smoking. I have never beat up anybody in my life. I only have the hope that you would give me a second chance. ... I can't compare myself to the men you have known in the past. ... I'm no superhero with super powers. I'm only a mere mortal man that is attracted to you. Please give me the opportunity to prove to who I am.

If you agree, let's try this; you are completely in charge of our relationship, if you decide we are to have one. ... You know my feelings; I would like to meet you for coffee or some other beverage after work. If you prefer an adult beverage, I'll have a soft drink. ... How about it? ... I gave you first aid and I didn't get fresh when I attended to your very smooth leg, I mean knee."

With sympathy in her voice; "I'll see you between 5:15 and 5:30 at the coffee shop across the street."

"Could I interest you in dinner also? There's a Thai food place two doors down."

"Michael, you're really pushing your luck and you're starting to incredibly piss me off."

Michael was quick to back pedal; "I'm sorry, I was thinking having coffee at 5:30 would push your dinner back to 6:30 or 7:00. I'm sorry for offending you by being so foreword. That was very carless of me."

Amanda looked at him with an evil eye; "We will 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 stuff; right?"

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

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

Mike relaxed his stance; "I would say; I am deeply sadden to hear that Amanda. The bad part of that is you will have to find a different way to work in the morning to avoid me because I can't move my business. Every morning I will be watching for you and thinking what may have been if things were different between us. You would never know how a real man would treat you as an equal partner."

Amanda's look towards him softened when she replied; "I'm not sure about this, 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 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."

Amanda extended her hand to Michael. He gently grasped it and with a huge smile; "I am the luckiest man in the world. I was able to touch your hand two days in a row!"

"Carlos, let's go before Michael has a stroke or 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, Carlos started talking.

"Michael reminds me a little of my son-in-law Roger. He seen my Isabella waiting for a bus to come home and started a conversation with her. She was very rude to him; she told him that she did not date outside her species."

Amanda replied; "Dam that was rude! I take it with a name like Roger, he is not Hispanic."

"Oh no, he's as Caucasian as one can get; that didn't slow him down. He went so far to ask our Isabella for her permission to meet with my wife and me 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?"

"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 have three grandchildren that we spoil terribly whenever we get the chance.

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 his mothers rent because he still lives there most of the time."

"What do you mean most of the time?"

"When his mother has a male companion over at 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 \$50 on the dresser with a note telling her to buy herself something that her cheap husband won't. He does the same thing at Mal'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 the possibilities!"

"Michael sounds like a funnyman at times. Carlos, you've seen him around women. How was he around your daughter and the other servers at the restaurant?"

"Understand that before the other day; I have never set foot in the restaurant. I can only tell you what my daughter had told me about him. ... He used to come in and ask Isabella 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 a woman like that again. Bruno made him go and apologize to the lady."

"What happened? Did he go and apologize to the woman?"

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 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."

"So did Michael go out with her that night?"

"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 that relationship last between Michael and the woman?"

"It lasted through dinner. Michael told her he lived with mommy and she 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 that my Isabella already has the perfect man, her husband. I want you to think about Michael; he is almost as perfect as my Isabella's Roger. Good day Miss Amanda."

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

Later that evening, Michael was sitting in a folding chair outside the store front waiting and watching. Amanda seen him and was watching from the other side of the street. Michael kept getting up from the chair; looking up and down the street, looking at his watch, sitting down, pacing back and forth. Amanda decided she had put him through enough torture.

From across the street she yelled; “Michael, over here!” She was waving, Michael 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; chair folded and collapsed first. Then he tripped on the chair and fell on top of that and hit his head on the door.

Amanda walked across the street to see if he was alright.

“I’m fine, only a few dents and bruises. I think my pride suffered the greatest damage. ... Hello Amanda and thank you for allowing me to buy you dinner.”

“Listen, I prefer men closer to my own age. If you were any younger, it would be like taking out my little brother if I had one.”

“Amanda, I don’t mean to sound rude, I’m over twenty-one now. I’ve been shaving for several years now. ... I’m sorry, that almost sounded self-serving and patronizing. ... Let’s have some dinner like two adults would.”

The Thai restaurant is a BYOB so Michael had dropped off a bottle of good Zinfandel wine for dinner. He was drinking iced tea while Amanda was drinking the wine.

Amanda’s lips became very loose; “My mother was a waitress at this dive breakfast and lunch place. My father threw a customer’s cup of coffee on my mother. The next day he beat my mother so badly, she couldn’t work. This customer named John took her to his apartment for her own safety. She barely knew him for a week.”

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

“You don’t know the half of it. The next day, my father is found murdered in front of where we lived. The police said he was assassinated by a professional hit man. ... John leaves town and contacts my mom a few weeks later. She quits her job and runs off to live with this guy. My mom and John were married few months later.”

“That is an incredible story; how’s your mom doing now?”

“They go hiking in the mountains of New Mexico every weekend when the weather permits and they 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 those June-September relationships work out very well. Maybe if you allow us to have a relationship, maybe ours would rival theirs.”

Amanda poured herself some more wine.

“I remember my first marriage; we 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. A couple of years into the marriage; I told him on a Monday I was pregnant and I would have to take maternity leave from work for a few months.

That bastard convinced me to have an abortion because he said ‘it’s not time for us to have a family yet’. So I had it done. I lost the first two; I was devastated by what I had done to this one. I believed in that rat fink bastard and we went on. The day he graduated, he introduced me to his pregnant mistress and gave me divorce papers. That was my first marriage.”

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

Amanda 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 your hand?”

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

Michael held her free hand and she continued.

“My second marriage was wonderful. I was in heaven! Bruce made good money, treated me great. He was a wonderful cook too! ... Sex was very infrequent, lousy and boring. I wasn’t feeling well, so I left work early to see the doctor. I found out I was pregnant again, wow! Needless to say, I went home to surprise Bruce. I was the one that was surprised that day.”

“Don’t tell me you found Hubby in bed with another woman. I can’t believe in my wildest dreams two men 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 the bedroom; the door was open. Bruce was on all fours servicing two men on our bed!”

Michael was 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. During the process, I had another abortion. I could not carry that gay bastard’s child to term.”

Amanda tried to pour more wine, but the bottle was empty.

“Mike, the bottle is empty; it’s time to leave. Before we leave, I need to go; I’ll be right back.”

Amanda 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; “Amanda, could we walk around the park for a while? I would like very much to hold your hand and listen to you talk, please.”

She looked at him for a moment; “My history with men really bothers you, I 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 that would give you any comfort.”

“Oh Michael, it isn’t that bad; come on let’s walk. Let me tell you about Brad. He moved in with me and things were doing pretty good. He asked me to see the OBGYN to see why I wasn’t getting pregnant. The bottom line was too many abortions, too many medical procedures performed after the miscarriages left me unable to carry a fetus full term.

Once he found out what the OBGYN said; he interpreted it as not being able to get pregnant. He came up with something totally disgusting that caused that relationship to end abruptly.”

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

“He 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 couple of men a day and it would be over in a couple of weeks or so.

I told him I’m going to work and be moved out of my apartment by the time I get back. I came home from work that evening; the bastard moved out and took everything. He took my clothes, shoes, pots, pans and everything. There was not one stick of furniture in the apartment. He even took the light bulbs and toilet paper when he left. The worst part, it wasn’t my furniture, it was a furnished apartment!

Thank god we each had our own credit cards. The moron maxed out his credit cards with cash advances thinking they were mine. 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 bought a sleeping bag, toiletries and light bulbs. I called the landlord the next day and told him what happened. The police came by with the landlord and a police report was filed. 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. 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."

They reached the entrance to the park where their walk started earlier. Michael stopped walking and turned to face Amanda.

"Thank you for a wonderful evening. I was able to hold your hand. I hope that I was able to remove some of that pain I seen hiding behind those 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 wrapped up with what you told me, I would not be very good company tonight. Besides, I promised you a cab ride home. I would like permission to see you again soon I hope."

She responded; "You passed the test by not taking me up on my offer. Seeing you again? Let me think it over. ... 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 would be absolutely wonderful."

He flagged down a taxi for Amanda. He asked her if \$20 would cover the fair and a tip. She said 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 the frown 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 where 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 at home, he told his mother that he is head over heels in love with an older woman.

Linda immediately asked; "How much older is this older woman you're seeing? Does she have children that you will need to support? Does she have a job or are you supposed to support her?"

"Remember Amanda that 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 that concerned mother look on her face; “Late twenties and single; what’s wrong with her? How much baggage is she carrying around? She’s has to have a mountain of baggage that will crush you. My advice is don’t get involved with her; she will bury you.”

“I’m involved already mom; I love her.”

Linda is now very hyper; “You slept with her already! Goddam it Michael; can’t you keep it in your pants? What if she gets pregnant? She’s going to take your business and ruin you!”

“Calm down mom. So far we had dinner, walked around the park and I kissed her hand.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I guess I over reacted a little. I’m only looking out for what’s best for you.”

“I’m going to shower and go to bed; I’m mentally exhausted. ... Mom, can I tell you something?”

“Sure honey, what do you want to tell me?”

“I hope this put’s your mind at ease, you and Clifford have a good weekly relationship. My relationships have been very far and few between if you know what I mean.”

“I understand dear. Things work out for all young men sooner or later. Trust me, I’m your mother and mothers know about such things.”

The following morning, Amanda stopped by the new showroom construction site. She said good morning to everyone except Michael. He was standing like a lost rejected puppy.

“Hello Michael, remember this; Saturday at 3:30; movie and then dinner. That is if you’re still interested in an older woman with baggage.”

“Oh god am I interested! It’s Saturday at 3:30 Parkway Theater and then dinner.”

Amanda smiled; “Goodbye everyone.”

She walked out the door; all eyes were on Michael to see his response. He howled and yelled; “Yahoo!”

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

The new company’s headquarters was moving along very fast. Almost every sub-contractor donated time and materials to the renovation.

Saturday finally came around; Amanda and Michael went to the movie. Afterwards they went to dinner at the Parkway Restaurant. Amanda took control of the dinner conversation.

“Michael, you supplied me with a bottle of wine that really loosened my lips at our first dinner. I spilled 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 anything; tell me what you really want to know.”

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

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

“Michael, 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. I was too scared of a pregnancy or some interesting sexually transmitted disease. How would I ever explain that to my mother?”

Amanda interrupted; “So I take it you never had your heart broken by some sweet young thing?”

“No I didn’t say that. During my only year in college, I knew several ladies during that time. I met this girl Wendy; I thought I was in love with her. Near the end of the term, I went to my 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 on her while she was riding your roommate?”

“With a huge smile on her face she said; Hi Mike, I still love you and all, but Johnny is convenient when you’re in study hall. Don’t worry; I don’t love him. It’s only a physical thing; it’s nothing emotional.”

“Oh my god; so what did you do then?”

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

A couple of weeks ago, Bruno wanted to sell the company and retire. Randy, his former son-in-law didn’t have the money. I went to Uncle Bill to borrow the money to buy out Bruno. Uncle Bill bought the company instead. Uncle Bill gave me 250k as business 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, I don’t like those places. Those people are looking for Mister or Miss right now. I’m looking for Miss Right, not Miss Right now.”

“Michael, someday you’re going to make a girl 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 look at me with those sad begging puppy dog eyes.”

Michael replied; “I’m sorry; I thought I seen a spark of interest towards me in those beautiful eyes.”

“Give a woman a chance to think will you? I was thinking I enjoyed this evening so much; we should do it again tomorrow. Let’s do the 1:30 matinee and then an early dinner. I’m paying since you paid for today.”

His face started making weird expressions and he almost started shaking.

“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 bathroom 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.

Sunday was almost a repeat of Saturday. The only exception was they walked around the park with each one having an arm around the 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 went to work.

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

Michael 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.”

She 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 front door. Both of them knew what they wanted to do, neither of them wanted 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?”

He nervously squeaked; “Yes.”

She grabbed the sides of his head and planted a kiss that almost made his legs fold out 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 he went limp. They had their arms tightly around each other. Both were breathing very heavy and staring into each other’s eyes.

“Amanda, I can’t hold it back any longer. I love you and I’m not going to hold it inside anymore.”

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

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

Breathing very heavily, she asked; “I think we smashed 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, Michael said; “You’re going to tell me how much you love me.”

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

“I would if I could, but I can’t. 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.”

He kissed her again and this time he had one hand was 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.

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

Amanda clenched both hands into fists and held them to her mouth. 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 abused him.

Monday morning came around and the four coworkers had entered the construction headquarters. William came by to see the progress; then he left to catch up with his wife Marcy for breakfast. The men were standing around comparing notes about the weekend when Randy noticed Michael wasn't talking.

Randy was about to say something when Amanda entered the site with a breakfast sandwich and two cups of coffee. Everyone stopped talking and said; "Good morning Amanda."

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

Amanda had a smile on her face that was like a billboard flashing; "I'm in love!"

"Good morning Michael; I thought you would like to share a solid breakfast with me this morning. ... You proved to me 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 over you."

The three other men stood motionless and listened.

"I didn't mean to cause you any pain; but if I didn't leave, I would be a lesser man in your beautiful eyes then 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."

Amanda and Michael went outside and continued while using the pickup hood as a table for their coffees.

"I am 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 kind of man that I am. ... I hope I passed your test."

Amanda replied with; "You didn't make me cry, I did that all 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 by here and pick you up on my way home."

He responded; "I would like that very much, only one condition please."

"Name it and it's yours."

"You must allow me to treat you with the 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 that I have for you; not on animal passion."

“Alright Michael, if you insist, one step at a time. You know what I was planning for us to do after dinner tonight don’t you? ... Yeah, I think you do.”

He smiled and said; “For our relationships sake and my sake; let me demonstrate that I am a man that has the ultimate respect for you. I never want you to have any doubt about me in your mind.”

“Michael, 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 too cold.”

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

Amanda took a couple of steps, turned and loudly stated; “I agreed we’re going to take this one step at a time. You wouldn’t mind if we walk real 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 was the first to speak; “Michael, 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 had a bottle of wine for the occasion; Michael settled for grape juice. She was somewhat miffed that he did not drink any wine.

“You told Carlos that I drink and most likely beat up women. I don’t beat up women 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 other’s good fortune of finding each other. 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 he heard it hit the floor.

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

“You want to leave? You barley made it past first base. I’m sure they will feel much better in the open than they do in a bra.”

“I am so fearful of offending you, it borders on being paralyzed. I know what I want to do, but”

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

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

A little later that evening, he was helping her button her blouse and 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.”

Several minutes later she said; “Honey, there a little tender from all the 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 charms; both of them.”

She had a warm smile on her face while she was putting her blouse back on again; “It was your wish that we take this relationship one step at a time. 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 tomorrow.”

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

“Let’s do carryout 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 said that.”

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

“You’re a naughty boy Michael; I’ll pick you up tomorrow after work.”

They kissed and Michael 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.”

The newly established couple blushed and Amanda had to get to work. She was about to leave when Randy asked; “Amanda, how was dinner yesterday?”

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

Amanda 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 like a very healthy girl on top.”

Michael was getting a little aggravated; “Alright you guys, we’re in love and grown adults. Now cut it out already.”

Mal said; “Your very fast buddy boy. Did you use protection or did you risk it?”

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

They continued poking at Michael for a couple of moments before they went back to work.

Late that afternoon, Amanda arrived and picked up Michael for dinner. They went over to the Parkway and ordered carryout dinners. Linda was working as manager that night. Michael went to the bathroom and left the two women alone.

“Hello Amanda, I haven’t seen you for quite a few years. You sure have grown up to be a 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?”

Amanda replied; “I’m not sure cozy would be the correct word I would use, Linda. 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; “Amanda dear, 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 that makes his own decisions. ... I won’t hurt your boy Linda; he’s my man.”

Linda replied; “Then we have nothing further to talk about.”

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

“I was telling your mom that 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 and Linda looked like she had been shot. Amanda saw the look on their faces and decided damage control is in order.

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

Linda responded; “I won’t wait up for you tonight. I’ll leave a night light on for you.”

“That’s okay mom, were going upstairs to eat 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.

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

Amanda said; “Let’s be like real teenagers with our parents in the next room and behave ourselves tonight. Besides; there still a little sore from last evenings adventure.”

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

“Michael, are you proposing to me?”

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

“Lie down on the sofa 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.

“Michael, the last thing I ever want to do is hurt you; we need some more history between us before we can even consider matrimony. I would do almost anything for you without question or reservation. Marriage would be the only exception. I’m still a battered little girl inside and I’m going to need some more time to heal.”

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

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

Amanda was sitting on the sofa with Michael on his back and his head in her lap. Linda arrived in the apartment in complete silence. She had the look of surprise on her face. Michael was

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 said 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 Amanda dirty looks of dissatisfaction from the kitchen.

"Linda, I'm not a tramp, vixen or a gold digger. I am deeply in love with your son. He proposed to me tonight; after a fashion. I declined because I'm not ready for that 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 am very proud to be his mother."

Michael exited the bathroom and walked Amanda home. The conversation during the walk was about Michael's mother.

"I take it my mother does not approve of us dating."

"I think she is starting to warm up to me a little. How much does it matter what she thinks of me? After all she is your mother."

"Amanda, I'll be completely honest with you. I am not going to ask for her approval to spend the rest of my life with you. It is my choice and mine alone."

"Michael, this is going to be a wonderful relationship."

He left only after she went upstairs and waved goodbye through the window. He returned to his apartment 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 this woman Amanda."

Mother and son had quite a heart to heart talk that night. Mom was convinced this was only a case of puppy love and it would 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 most evenings. Friday at dinner, he told her no Saturday night dinner.

Amanda asked; “Why can’t we be together Saturday night? I don’t understand Michael. Are you getting cold feet in our relationship? Are you having second thoughts?”

“No, I’m not getting cold feet. I need a place to sleep Saturday night because my mother’s companion is coming over. The sofa bed for the employee break room hasn’t been delivered yet. Carlos has his grandchildren this weekend so I can’t sleep there. Malakai and his wife have a nine o’clock curfew.

Amanda looked at him like she was 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 Saturday.”

Michael’s emotions almost gave him away by the thoughts of sleeping in the same apartment with the love of his life.

“Michael I insist that you sleep over tomorrow night, I promise I won’t drag you into my bed.”

Now he’s acting very coy to the point of over acting; “Okay, if you insist; I’ll pack a change of clothes tomorrow morning. I’ll pick you up around noon; we can do lunch and spend the afternoon seeing some of the things Kansas City has to offer.”

Amanda is watching him like a hawk when she noticed his body language and facial expressions change while he talked. She had everything to keep from bursting out with emotion. 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 her home as usual. He declined her offer to come up to her place tonight because he wanted to get some work done in the new showroom tomorrow morning.

They kissed and went to their respective apartments. Michael had noticed the ‘Furnished Apartment for Rent’ sign on Amanda’s building. When he arrived home, his mother confronted him.

“Did you wear a condom tonight? I sure hope so for your sake. If you get her knocked up, your future just went down the toilet.”

“Mom, why would I wear a condom during dinner? That would be awfully uncomfortable. Besides I don’t have any because I haven’t needed one for quite some time now.”

In an 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.”

“I have some very serious questions to ask you mother. What do you think I should do about Amanda and why should I do anything?”

“Oh Michael, you have your whole life ahead of you. That woman is several years older than you. She is at that age where she needs to find a man before her looks give out. She’s just looking for that Sugar Daddy to support her for the rest of her life. I’ve seen her type before 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 room and board. 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 on your way to being a successful businessman and don’t you think for a minute she doesn’t see it coming.”

Michael paused for a moment; “Thank you mom for letting me know what you think of her. I’m going to sleep on this tonight and I will take the appropriate action to get this resolved tomorrow morning long before your Clifford comes over.”

Linda went to her room thinking that she straightened out her boy from making a mistake.

Michael went to bed thinking he should rent the apartment in Amanda’s building. He could move over there to always be near Amanda and have a place to sleep without his mother’s 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 the 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. The landlords arrived and they showed him the furnished apartment, second floor rear. He was astatic because it was right behind Amanda’s.

He agreed to the rent, paid the security deposit and the first months’ rent. Then the real challenge, move and confront mother.

He cleaned out the company pickup truck and loaded everything he owned, which wasn’t much other than his clothes and a toy box Uncle Bill bought him many years ago. It was an emotional time for him. The cutting of the invisible umbilical cord was harder than he imagined.

He drove the three blocks and to his new apartment and nervously started unloading the truck and moving in. During his last trip upstairs, Amanda showed up.

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

“Hi Amanda, we need to talk.”

He explained the situation with his mother, he is moving out and into his own apartment. He is her new neighbor. Amanda had this neutral look on her face for a few moments.

“Since you have the company truck, we need to go shopping. You’ll need bed linens, toothpaste and toilet paper. Hand soap too, unless you want to shower with me; I mean use my shower. You can come to my apartment for your meals and to watch TV. Come on, let’s go shopping.”

They went shopping and had lunch. During lunch she asked; “When are you going to tell your mother?”

“Mom gets off work at two, I’ll tell her then.”

“Do you want me there as moral support?”

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

They returned to Michael’s new apartment, Amanda started setting up the place for him. His mind was preoccupied with thoughts about confronting his mother. It’s one forty five, it’s 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 almost 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? 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 her.

“I’ve made a choice between the woman that that gave birth to me, the woman I love and want to spend the rest of my life with. I won’t need these anymore. Here’s my set of keys to the apartment.”

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

“Yes it is mom; I rented my own apartment, it’s next to her’s. I’m at the crossroads of my life now and I had to do what’s right. I cannot live in your home and court the woman I love. I’m sorry mom; 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 filled each glass half way, turned and handed one to Michael.

Linda announced; “I know I sure need this and I think you need it too!”

The both downed what had to be triple shots of some really 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 on so you can show me your new bachelor pad, love den or whatever you kids call it today.”

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

Linda put her shoes back on and scooped up the keys Michael had set on the table. “Here, put these in your pocket. You moved out, I’m still your mother. It’s not like we were divorced.”

They walked 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 Linda, my place is across the hall.”

Linda turned to face Michael; “Stay here, this is between us.”

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 the women entered his apartment.

Linda looked at him and sternly announced; “I’ll walk home alone and remember you’re still my son. 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 Linda, I most certainly will. He is so important to both of us.”

Linda went to leave and Michael insisted on walking her home. When he returned, Amanda and Michael continued with their Saturday plans that also included a movie and dinner.

When they finally arrived at Amanda’s apartment, she asked Michael; “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 as the next room.”

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

A half hour later, Michael was looking at the ceiling. His mind was racing about the day's events. He decided to go to the bathroom and wash his face. On his way back to the sofa, he noticed Amanda was 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 tuck you in and make you feel better."

She removed the blanket and he lied down. Michael 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 completely different ideas.

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

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

By the Sunday morning, Amanda was lying face down crossways on her bed. Michael was on the living room floor wrapped up in the sheet. On the floor was his pillow, the blanket, two pair of underwear and a small kitchen towel.

The overwhelming urge to use the bathroom woke him up. He lay on the floor thinking about last night. He went to the bathroom, returned to the living room and picked up the blanket. He went to Amanda's room and stared at her. After what he perceived as minutes, he gently covered her with the blanket from the living room floor.

She moved; he kneeled down on the floor and leaned on the bed so his face was on the same level as hers.

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

Michael replied; "My lips are a little sore but other than that, I feel great."

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

The two exchanged words of gratification of each other's previously unknown talents. Michael decided to return to his apartment to shower and change clothes. They could go to breakfast afterwards. Amanda gave him keys for her apartment and Michael gave her keys for his. He walked out of her apartment completely naked, took the few steps to his apartment and entered.

Amanda got off the bed; she noticed most of his clothes and her underwear were still piled on the floor by the sofa. She gathered up all his clothes and walked them across the hall to his apartment. She heard the shower running. The clothes hit the kitchen floor with a slight thump.

"Oh hell! You scared the living crap out of me!"

“Since your new here, I don’t remember you buying razors or shaving cream yesterday. Oh, silly me; I forgot to bring them with me. Since I’m here, can you wash my back?”

A little bit later that morning Michael asked; “Where did you put the towels my love?”

She left and returned with a single towel. Oh dam, I only grabbed one towel. We’re gonna have to share it. You dry me first and then I’ll dry you.”

They eventually dried off, brushed their teeth and went to the restaurant next door. The very restaurant her mother used to work at. She said hello to the staff and introduced Michael to everyone.

When breakfast was over, they spent the rest of the day sightseeing and 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 word they were singing, the melody of a love song comes through very clear.

They walked to the park hand in hand. In the park, they circled the lagoon arm in arm. While sitting on a park bench Michael asked; “I am so embarrassed I don’t know how to ask this.”

She replied; “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 embarrass you.”

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 ask me 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 said; “I don’t feel condoms are appropriate at this time. Let’s go home, watch some TV and I still have to make your bed with your new sheets.”

They started walking to the apartment building when Michael said; “I’m sorry for being so forward. I’m ashamed of myself for asking you that. 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, Amanda made the bed and they went across the hall to her place. She opened a bottle of wine and poured two glasses and gave one to him. They sat on the sofa with the TV on. 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 did it without ...”

Her hand went over his mouth. Softly she said; “I don’t want to hear it; lay back and enjoy.”

Later that night, she covered him with a sheet while he slept like a child lying in arms of the dragon.

She 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 restoration business to build and I need to get to work.”

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

With breakfast finished, they walked outside. Amanda said; “Wait, I want to tell one of the server’s something before we go; I’ll be right back.”

Helen was a waitress when her mother was a server there. Amanda came back in and said; “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?” she replied.

“Helen, the last three were losers. I finally found Mister Right! Oh my god I’m in love!”

“By the looks of you two, you found Mr. Right last night! Good for you dear, I’m so glad for you. I never have seen a woman with so much bad luck with men as you dear; good luck.”

“Thanks Helen, 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. Now get out of here and take that young man with you before he gets away.”

Over the next few days, the restoration company headquarters and showroom were nearing completion. William stops by and reminds Michael that he needs office furniture, computer system, telephone system and business cards. He also reminded him that if he needs more money to let him know.

Upon completion of the business headquarters, William told him to 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 cards for their consulting business.

The day after completing the headquarters renovation, the telephone started to ring with customers wanting estimates for renovations. The calls were from the very 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 was a boutique company that only performed high end work with real experienced craftsmen and professional subcontractors. The waiting list was well over a year out and people were willing to wait for the quality.

Life for Amanda and Michael was wonderful. Amanda was working at the Mega Corporation and making a good wage. They kept the rear apartment so they wouldn't have neighbors behind them.

Every morning Michael would ask Amanda to marry him. Every morning Amanda's response would be the same.

"I love you more than anything in the world; but I'm just not ready for that band of gold yet."

One Monday morning, he was sitting on the toilet reading the newspaper when an advertising insert fell out and hit his foot, landed next to a bag of tampons that were on the floor. He reached over to get the insert when he noticed there was 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. It's like something is on your mind. Are you feeling alright?"

"I'm fine; it's work, your business and all; I've got a few things on my mind."

"Oh I see. I noticed the tampons in the bathroom have a layer of dust on them."

Before he could say another word, Amanda snapped at him.

"So I'm a lousy housekeeper; so what?"

"Whoa sweetheart, that is not what I meant at all. Is there something going on that we should see a doctor about? If something is 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 am so scared to tell you because of what you might say or want me to do. I’m very frightened Michael.”

He went over to her and held her close for comfort.

“Amanda, you’re the love of my life. Please never fear to tell me anything. Now what is troubling that pretty mind of yours?”

“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 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 for me this morning while were out. You need to call your boss and tell him you’re going to be late today. What am I forgetting?”

Amanda was all smiles when she asked; “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 was 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 be 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?”

“Michael, I think 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, 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 told her 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. Amanda showed everyone her engagement ring. Spiro, the cheapest restaurant owner on the planet even bought them breakfast! Afterwards, they went upstairs to get their identification for the marriage licenses.

He called his mother for his birth certificate. “Hi mom, I need my birth certificate. May I come over and get it right away? ... I need it for my marriage license. ... Yes we are this Friday at 9: AM ... Amanda is three months pregnant with your grandchild. ... Okay, I’ll wait. ... Mom’s on her way over right now.”

Amanda called her mother; “Hi John, its Amanda. Can I speak to my mother please? ... Never mind, she can stay out 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. ... Don’t apologize, I understand completely. ... John, please tell my mom. ... Thank you ... Bye.

That was my mother’s husband John; he won’t be coming to the wedding. He’s afraid to travel and I understand why. Someday I’ll tell you a story about John, but not today.”

Michael made the next call to Malakai and 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 Amanda had a glow about her because she is carrying his child.

Linda showed up at the apartment. Any observer would have thought Amanda and Linda were lifelong best friends. Michael went to the kitchen to grab a snack. After what seemed to be forever, Amanda called Michael into the living room to be included in the conversation.

Honey, I wanted to hear this when I tell your mom. As I said I went to the OBGYN Friday. She explained that I have a very high risk pregnancy. Because of the previous miscarriages, D&C’s and other medical procedures, it was very unlikely that I would become pregnant. The doctors called it a hostel womb.

Now that I’m pregnant, I might be able to carry the baby full term. She wanted me on bed rest until delivery. She told me not to lift up anything heavier than a cup of coffee.

The OBGYN also told me not 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 is fifty-fifty. The doctor also told me she was being generous because it’s much less than that.”

Michael was 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 from woman to woman. Prenatal care is 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 buy their marriage license. Being downtown already, they shopped for Amanda’s wedding dress and a comfortable suit for Michael.

He drove Amanda to her work place and dropped her off. He returned to his office and told everyone what was 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 is 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 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; it became the buzz around the office.

Michael went to see Uncle Bill and told him about the events and plans. Bill told him good luck and to hire more talented subcontractors to expand the business. Only do it slowly to be sure they are of the quality that they 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 that perform that work.

Thursday Night, Amanda’s mother arrived from New Mexico without her husband John. They went out to dinner and she stayed in the rear apartment. Tiffany from Sal’s restaurant called and wanted to know how many for the wedding brunch and if 11:30 is a good time.

Michael told her five people and 11:30 would be fine. He asked who set this up and more importantly, who’s paying? Tiffany answered; “You’re Uncle Bill. See you at 11:30 tomorrow.”

Friday morning was a very light fruit breakfast. The wedding couple and their parents were at city hall by 9:30 in the morning. By 10:30 that morning, Amanda Smith became Amanda Webb.

The judge that married them joked by saying that Amanda would have to replace all of her monogrammed clothes. Everyone laughed and left City Hall. They decided to walk to Sal’s Restaurant.

The wedding luncheon went great with the wedding couple and the parents having a great time. Following the luncheon, the parents went on their separate ways. Linda was going home to

change and go back to work. Sarah was going to visit her friends that she hasn't seen in years. The newlyweds went sightseeing for the rest of the day before they went home.

They arrived at home and 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 they went upstairs. The letter was from the Mega Corporation.

“Dear Mrs. Amanda Smith-Webb. We are informing you effective this date; your employment and position with the Mega Corporation has been terminated. Your former position has been outsourced and your employment has become redundant. Your personal belongings will be shipped to you via local messenger. Should you try to enter any Mega Corporation property, you will be arrested for trespassing and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

Amanda sat at the kitchen table and was in shock. “Honey, I've been fired. They said my job has been eliminated.”

They discussed the horrible timing involved and after much discussion; Michael told her he would call Uncle Bill to see if he could help somehow.

Amanda asked; “What could Uncle Bill do for me?”

“I have absolutely no idea; 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 Christine and Bill to the rescue. I'll call him now.

Hello Uncle Bill; it's Michael. ... Thank you very much for the luncheon. ... I'm calling for advice. Amanda was fired today. ... They said her job was outsourced. ... Amanda worked for The Mega Corporation, Accounts Payable department. ... You fired Claire because of what? ... Okay, Amanda and I will be there tomorrow morning. ... I'll let her know right now. ... Thanks Uncle Bill. ... Bye.”

Amanda asked; “What did he say?”

“He wants us in my office tomorrow morning; no later than eight o'clock. He said he will take care of everything by then. He fired Claire for stealing. She wrote a company check for five thousand dollars and tried to cash it at the 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 and he won't call the police. Don't write the letter and leave in handcuffs. He has her letter in his pocket.”

Amanda asked; “Do you think William will be able to do something 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 the same as you were making at the other place. Plus you get to sleep with the boss, what a deal!”

Her response was; “Let’s take my mom out to dinner, come home and I’ll start sleeping with my new boss.”

Michael asked; “May I take that as a yes?”

Amanda smiled; “After tonight, there will be no doubt in your mind!”

The following morning they arrived at Michael’s office about 7:45. William was already there sitting in Michael’s chair. They exchanged greetings and the meeting went very fast. William told the couple that some of his former employees are now working for the Mega Corporation based in Kansas City.

A couple of them work in the IT department. By law, all interoffice email must be archived. Sending so many teenage employees through college has its rewards. It was time to call in a favor.

William was able to get a copy of the email and the distribution chain of everyone that signed off on Amanda being fired. The letter stated that Amanda needed to be terminated because of her high risk pregnancy. It was NOT a job performance issue, a possible liability issue. They felt that if she were to lose the baby, she would sue the company. Terminate Amanda and get rid of a potential lawsuit.

William gave her a copy of the inter-company email. Bill also informed them he has already contacted the law firm of Anderson & Anderson. They will be contacting her sometime next week about the details of the lawsuit.

“Do not speak of this to anyone! Let the lawyers do all the talking. Do not except any severance package without letting the lawyers approve it. Any and all communications must go through the Anderson’s.”

Bill told them she should get an out-of-court settlement in the low to mid six figures. He also suggested to Michael that he show his wife her new work place. Bill asked about how the business expansion is going. They chatted for a few moments before Bill 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 her to every doctor appointment. Williams's wife Marcy fills in for Amanda whenever she has to go to the doctor or doesn't feel well.

The closer Amanda comes to her due date; Marcy becomes more and more of an unpaid assistant unloading materials and supplies for the business. Marcy is going to take over Amanda's job while she's on maternity leave.

Marcy had previously hired a manager run her Dreams Prep Kitchen and Catering business. That way she would be available to help Amanda and Michael.

What Amanda doesn't know is Michael gave Marcy the keys to the rear apartment. Amanda's pregnancy being so high risk; Marcy was secretly putting the nursery gifts and furniture there.

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

"Michael, my water broke and I'm scared. Call the doctor."

He called the doctor and the first question was; "Is there any bleeding?"

Michael responded with; "No Doctor, nothing red what so ever; it looks like plain water."

"Good, now carefully and safely bring Amanda to the hospital. Don't rush there is plenty of time."

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 bleeding out; we're losing her. Get the trauma surgical team in here stat! Call doctors Barr and Stevens; there both working today in the ER. DO IT NOW"; someone yelled.

They dragged Michael out of the delivery room. 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 bouncing off the walls when an older nurse came up to him; "I am 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."

“Mr. 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 the birth she started massively hemorrhaging.”

There was a pause and a change of tone in her voice; “The doctors ‘will’ stop her bleeding.”

“Nurse, what did you mean when you said they will stop the bleeding?”

“The surgeons will tell you when they’re done. Be glad you have your healthy baby boy. Be strong Mr. Webb, your wife is going to need you more than ever. Good luck and Good bye.”

Sometime later the chief surgeon found him in the waiting room and explained what happened.

Doctor Barr-Stevens spoke; “Because of all the previous medical happenings with Amanda’s reproductive organs, giving birth was too much stress and some reproductive organs ruptured. To save her life, I had to perform a radical hysterectomy. She’s alive 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 she was 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; “What is it?”

“Meet our son Michael Webb junior dear; all seven pounds and eleven ounces of him.”

“They never told me he 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 for a few of days. While she was in the hospital, Michael’s construction crew turned the back bedroom into the nursery. Marcy and Linda were the decorating managers 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.

About six weeks after the baby’s birth, Marcy insisted that 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.

Marcy told her; “I babysat and changed the diapers on all three William’s daughter’s children. For a while, two of them were in diapers at the same time. I can handle one little baby boy. Any evening you to want to get away, just let me know. I’ll be the backup grandma whenever you need me.”

When Amanda returned to work, Marcy stayed on as office help and the baby's nanny. The lawsuit against the Mega Corporation was minutes away from going before a judge when they settled in the courthouse hallway. Amanda received the equivalent of five years pay with benefits. Mega also had to pay the attorney's fees. The settlement almost paid for their house.

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



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