

“My Husband, My Blessing”

"Darn!" Shelly looked in the cupboard and scowled.

"I'll be back!" She yelled to know one in particular.

Shelly threw on her coat and headed out the door to the car. Putting her key in the ignition and igniting the beast to life she backed out of the driveway.

She thought to herself as she drove. "Thanksgiving! How did I get into this? I hope the store is open. Darn him. How did he get me to host our families this year?"

Shelly and Bob had been married a little more than ten years. Struggling as all young families do with two kids, two jobs and too big of a mortgage Shelly had somehow agreed to the Thanksgiving dinner. It had all seemed so simple when Bob had come home with the Turkey given to him at work. Pop it in the oven, add a few rolls and set back and stuff herself with food and good company. Then the phone calls from her in-laws and family started to come in. What should they bring? Did she need any help? Don't forget Uncle Walter's diabetes, he'll need a special desert. On and on it came, then she had to work late the day before and all her plans for shopping and a leisurely meal preparation flew out the door.

"And Bob, let us not forget poor innocent Bob. Home asleep in the bed while she flew out to the local convenience store praying they had some spices so the stuffing would be just right. Darn!" Shelley muttered out loud to herself again.

The car screeched into the deserted parking lot. Well not quite deserted an old land cruiser station wagon was hunched over in the corner of the lot with a wisp of white steam rising from the hood. Shelly noted that at least her car was running. Geez, it would be just the topping on the cake if the car gave out today of all days. She jumped out of the car and raced inside to the glare of modern convenience.

The red tile stood in remarkable irony to her mood. Without a glance at the poor soul at the counter she raced to the one section where she believed they might have some semblance of baking supplies and prayed they would have her needed spice. She looked intently at racks before her.

"Why when they call them a convenience store are their racks so darned inconvenient to find things on?"

In her stillness and intensity at staring at the racks she barely noticed the form move past her. It was the quiet sobbing that made her look up and pulled her from her concentration.

"What child could be sobbing so and why?" She wondered.

The sound was plaintive and desperate and it broke her heart just to hear. Looking around she was surprised to hear the muffled sounds coming from the form that had just passed her. It was not a child but a small woman seemingly cowering in the corner next to the soda coolers. She seemed so tiny; so hurt standing in that miserable stale mini-mart. It bothered Shelly just to be near the figure. She started to move. After all she had enough of her own problems, she did not need to add another's burdens to her load. Besides she had to look out for her own family.

"At last!" Shelly saw her spice grabbed it and started to head for the door. She was anxious to get back to her husband, her meal, her life and away from this untenable situation with this woman.

Suddenly she heard one small final sob, soft, yet clear as a bell to Shelly's ears. Cursing at her own weakness she turned and walked up to the form.

"Hello. Miss, are you all right?" Shelley asked as she tapped her on the shoulder.

The form turned around startled and looked up from tear stained eyes, trying hard to hide her face from the voice that addressed her.

"Yes, I am. I will be fine." She squeaked from dry parted lips.

Shelly stood stunned. The cut lip and the black eye could not be denied or concealed. She had never seen anything so horrible on a person before her. It took a few moments for Shelly to regain her voice, then she heard herself ask if there was anything she could do.

"No, I'll be fine." Replied the small desperate form in front of her. The form turned and walked to the front of the store when two small beautiful raven-haired children pushed through the doors. In hushed tones of a child, scared and frightened, they asked their mom if they could eat now. The form placed the few packages she had in her hands on the counter, looked down at her purse, then at the chips and cookies on the counter and shook her head no. The two girls and the woman started for the door. Shelly spoke up.

"Don't forget your packages, Miss." Shelly said as she handed the chips and sodas to the woman. Shelly met the cashier's look with a frown that made him keep his counsel and he added the woman's tab to Shelley's. The woman took the bags and nodded a sigh of thanks and headed out the door. Shelley paid the tab and followed closely behind the figure.

Settling into her beast, Shelly had a moment to glance around and noticed the woman enjoying her few snacks in the front seat of the old land cruiser located at the far end of the lot. She ignited her tired old car and thanked her blessings that she had Bob and a home. Backing out she hurried to get home to the warmth of her Thanksgiving meal.

Bob met her at the door in his pj's.

"What's wrong?" He asked. He knew by her look that something was bothering his beloved.

Shelley wiped away a tear and choking on a few of the words related the story to Bob. He hugged her tears away and kissed her on the forehead. Suddenly the phone rang. Shelly went to pick it up and found her mother-in-law on the other end. Shaking herself free of her reverie, Shelley began the task of negotiating the many problems associated with big family gatherings. Bob grinned and headed for the other room.

"Where the heck is he?" Shelley asked herself again.

Caught up in the business of making Turkey dinner, Shelly had lost track of her husband. She looked out into the driveway and noticed his pickup was gone.

"Darn, him! He took off and went somewhere! Probably to get another six-pack, if I know him." Shelley grumbled.

"First no time for dinner, that lady at the store, the cleaning wasn't done. Well, not right anyhow. Now he takes off to get beer! He will get a piece of my mind." Shelley grumbled.

She heard the truck rather than saw it. She knew he had finally gotten home and she was ready to give him a "what for" when he came through that door.

"Aunt Shelly, Aunt Shelly!" Squealed a small voice from the hallway.

Shelley couldn't place the voice and looked up from the table she was setting to look in the deep dark smiling eyes of the little girl she had seen at the store. Shelley was stunned. She managed a smile back as the girl came up and hugged her leg. Another pair of eyes looked around the corner at her in wonderment and a little fear. It was the second child. What was happening? Had they followed her home?

Bob came in next his arm supporting the tiny woman that she had helped earlier.

"Shelley. You remember Marcie? She had a little car trouble getting here today so I went and picked her up at the store where it broke down." Said Bob motioning to the children now crowded into the room.

"Why yes, of course I remember Marcie." Said Shelley recovering slowly from her amazement and joining in the deception for the sake of the children.

"Well, I won't be able to fix the car until tomorrow and the store said it would be alright to leave it there for the night. Since we can't find any shelter for Marcie tonight think we can survive a night with her under the roof." Asked Bob.

Shelley stood up and looked at the fear in Marcie's eyes. She looked at the little girls now playing happily with her own children.

"Why of course, Bob. We'll make room." Said Shelley a smile of love and happiness began to fill her heart.

"Marcie, company is coming and we got to clean you up. Bob finish setting the table." Said Shelley as she took Marcie into her room.

Family started coming and the doorbell rang several times. However Marcie and Shelley still remained in the room. Marcie had cried and told Shelley how she had fled in terror from her husband the night before. She was sure this time he was going to kill her and hurt the kids. She had taken what she could and drove until the car broke down. She didn't even know where she was or how far she had gone. She was just so scared. She and Bob were the first kindness she had seen in a long time. Then Marcie cried some more. Shelley just held her and listened. Quietly and softly Shelley got her cleaned up and put her in one of her old outfits. The white one Bob had always liked. Finally with some serious makeup on and feeling a bit more like a human being, Marcie followed Shelley into the main room.

Bob grinned and Marcie's kids, Janice and Jennifer, smiled at how pretty their Mom looked. As they gathered around the table Shelley noticed that everything had been set and prepared. The whole family had pitched in to make this a perfect Thanksgiving dinner. Shelley smiled as Marcie sat next to her and Bob. Then Bob's father asked to give the blessing and as he prayed Shelley squeezed Bob's hand tight. Shelley knew who and what she was thankful for on this blessed day.