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Teddy was shocked at what she had just heard. Never had she seen any trace of emotional instability in Brand. But she felt almost worse about something else Brand had sung to Fritzi! Part of the thrill of the night had been that he had sung that song for her... just for her. And then he had sung it for Fritzi! Well, she had forced him into taking Fritzi for a ride.

Then she heard a big gravelly snort. Bosh! Who do you think you're kidding?

Of course it was not true. Fritzi just made it up. Teddy's eyes lifted to the older woman. She had to believe that Fritzi had just walked in the snow. Teddy's heartbeat fast and hard. Where's Brand now? she whispered. Fritzi did not hear so Teddy swallowed hard and repeated the question.

I don't know, Fritzi answered in a hard voice. Probably whipping his horse into a lather somewhere trying to make it go faster.

Gram stood straight as a poplar tree. Be quiet! she demanded. Teddy! Teddy jumped to the harsh sound and looked down at Gram, who still stood stiff as old bread. Don't you dare believe her. Don't you dare!

I want to hear her story once more, she told Gram. Tell us again, Fritzi.

Well, things started out real nice. He sang several songs to me. And

Which songs? Teddy interrupted to ask.

Well, 'Jingle Bells' was one. Then you'd never believe the change that came over him. He acted so strangely I almost expected to see him growing fangs.

You're exactly right, Gram snorted. I don't believe it. In fact, I don't believe anything you've said. She stomped from the room.

Fritzi's eyes met Teddy's. She can deny it forever, she said softly, but you're the one who's going to be saddled with him. Better watch it, kid. He's not normal.

I'm going to bed, Teddy replied, her voice as raspy as Gram's. We can talk tomorrow. She turned and ran through the door.

When Teddy passed Gram's open door she stopped and plopped down beside Gram on the edge of the bed. What do you make of that? she asked her dearest friend in the world.

Bah! I don't make anything of it and you'd better not either. Fritzi probably jumped out of the sleigh at the end of our driveway and ran home so she could ruin your relationship with Brand. I've seen how cute she is around him. Haven't you?

Teddy nodded. But I didn't think anything of it, I figured that's how she treats men all men.

Gram looked at her bedside clock. We'd better hit the hay, kitten. Those fool llamas will think they're starving in a few hours. We can talk about this in the morning if it's worth talking about. Good night. She gave Teddy a little push toward the door.

Don't we live a crazy life around here, Lord? Teddy asked silently as she lay on her bed in the dark. *Bless us and guide every move we make and even our thoughts so we'll be just what You want us to be and help us find out what happened tonight. Could You even help me forgive Brand for singing to Fritzi? Thank You, God. I love You,* She prayed longer, not asking for anything, just to be close to Him and savor His love and nearness.

The next morning she hopped out on the first peep of the alarm. She finished the morning chores, taking special care to check the young llamas, and headed for the house, feeling strong in the Lord. With Him she could handle anything.

Gram had breakfast on the table as usual but Fritzi had not put in an appearance yet. Did you sleep? Gram asked, looking very tired.

Teddy nodded. Not too badly. Where's Fritzi?

Leave her alone, Gram grumbled. Maybe she'll have a change of heart and tell us the truth.

Before they sat down to breakfast, the phone rang. Brand? I'll get it, Gram said, rushing to the shrilling instrument.

Tell him to come over, Teddy said just as Gram put the phone to her ear. After listening a moment Gram nodded at Teddy. 'Teddy wants you to come over. Could you do that? Thanks, sonny. She jammed the receiver back on the phone. He's coming.

Teddy ate a large bowl of oatmeal and a slice of toast. Then she started washing the few dishes in the sink wishing Brand would hurry and tell them what really happened the night before.

Brand did not execute his usual energetic attack on the front door, but opened it quietly and slipped inside. I'm here, Gram, he called quietly. I'm dumping my boots.

Then he strode into the kitchen, looking fresh, well rested, and happy. After washing his hands, he rubbed them together. He looked from Teddy to Gram. I thought one of you were gone. Where's your little truck?

Gram's bushy white eyebrows shot up. Right where it always is. I guess it's covered with snow. Are your eyes giving you trouble, Brand?

He moved to the window, I see tracks, Gram, but no red truck.

Teddy and Gram both dashed to the window and, sure enough, tracks led right past the house and down the driveway.

Fritzi! they yelled at the same time stampeding for her bedroom. They did not find Fritzi in her bedroom. Neither did they find any of her clothes nor the blankets, sheets, and pillows that had been on the bed.

She's gone, Teddy said. Why would she do that?

She decided the ranch was out of her reach, Brand said, so she moved on, I guess.

The three looked in every corner and crevice of Fritzi's room but the woman had been thorough nothing of value remained.

Do you have a cup of coffee? Brand finally asked, smiling at Teddy, Personally, I'll feel more comfortable in the kitchen than in this room.

In the kitchen, Gram turned on the coffee. Brand dropped to the couch and motioned for Teddy to sit beside him. Somehow, having him there reassured Teddy. Soon, all sat around sipping the welcome, steaming brew. Fritzi's leaving is for the best, you know, Brand said to Gram. She'd never have been satisfied to fit in here.

Oh, I know that, but we have to ask you a couple of questions, sonny. All right?

Of course. Just don't get on that tack Teddy was on for a while, wanting to know all the commandments I broke while growing up.

Nope. This is now. Last night to be exact Fritzi told us you turned from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde went stark raving mad and threw her out of the sleigh into the snow, then whipped Thunder into a wild run getting away from her. That's what she said. What do you say?

Brand set down his coffee, leaned his head back on the couch, and laughed. Neither of you believed that, did you?

Teddy shook her head. No, but we could tell she had walked in the snow and we need to know what really happened.

I hadn't planned to come home tattling like a little kid. But if you're sure you want me to. I didn't want to take her in the first place as you know, Teddy. I wanted to go to bed with our ride fresh in my mind. I was so exhilarated that I started telling Fritzi all about it. I even told her about singing to you, Teddy. He shook his head. She told me she's closer to my age than Teddy, and would be much better for me. I tried to turn her off gently but she kept coming on to me like a steam roller. Said Teddy's just a dumb kid and I'd get bored with her in a little while, Finally, I told her, in no uncertain terms, that I'd never be interested in her if we were stranded together on a deserted island. He nodded again. That did it

I guess that was a relief, Gram said with a smile.

Well, not too much. She stopped trying to kiss me and started trying to kill me. That's when it got tough. A guy can't hit a woman, you know, so I tried to protect myself somewhat without hurting her. Finally, she got tired of the whole thing, jumped out of the sleigh, and took off walking. I followed her half way and she told me to get lost.

I should have known, Gram said. I'd noticed her buddying up to you for some time now. I should have

Suddenly, although snow fell quietly on a still world, the sun broke through and shone brightly in Teddy's heart Brand had not sung to anyone but her! He had not sung to Fritzi!

Then a dreadful thought occurred to her. Gram! she yelled. Do you have anything around that Fritzi could have stolen? I'll bet she knows exactly what's on the place.

Gram stopped short, rushed into her bedroom, and tore open the bottom drawer of her huge chest. They all saw the sagging door of the little fireproof box which had obviously been emptied. Gram turned to face the other two, her face pale. Well, so much for all the cash we had around close to \$1,000, I think, and my only valuable jewel my diamond wedding ring.

Anything else? Teddy asked.

What about the deed to this place? Brand asked.

Oh yes, it was in there too. She wiped her forehead and sat down on the bed.

Don't worry, Gram, Brand said. That's why deeds are recorded at the court house. We'll just report it stolen.

Before the day ended they discovered Fritzi had taken Gram's heirloom silver flatware, three gold ingots, and several of Gram's handmade quilts.

Are you going to report all this to the police? Brand asked as he changed the outside door locks.

Gram laughed. Naw, she boomed in her big voice.

Everyone's always telling me how much their kids beat them out of. Fritzi just takes hers in big bunches. Maybe she made me feel a little guilty, giving the ranch to Teddy. Not sorry, just guilty. Anyway, she cured my guilt.

Brand shook his head. You're some lady, Gram.

That evening, Brand gathered Teddy into his arms. I'm sorry our exquisite evening turned out so awful, he whispered into her ear, We'll do it again and again, until we forget all about this.

Teddy pushed herself a little away from Brand so she could see him. One more question. What did she whisper in your ear that convinced you to take her to Bend that night?

That? Oh, she said she wanted to buy you a wedding present. But she forgot all about it as soon as we left here. After that I knew she wasn't up to any good with me. He smiled ruefully.

Let's try to forget we ever heard of her, Gram said.

The days went by and Brand tried to make Gram and Teddy truly forget the past few weeks. They rode horses almost every day. You know Pharaoh's yours, don't you, Gram? Brand said one day while they put the horses back in the barn and rubbed them down.

Dear me, no, Gram rasped. I couldn't take him from you. I do love him, though.

He's yours, just as Misty's, Teddy's. I'm glad for you to have him, Gram, because I'm so proud of the way you handle him.

The gruff old voice laughed happily. We do get along, don't we? Thanks, son.

The snow melted, but returned a few days later, though not as deep. One morning, a fresh blanket of snow covered the roads, with light flakes still drifting down. Brand bundled Teddy into the warm sleigh blankets and took her out again.

Where do you want to go?

I want to go into Bend. So they drove right through the center of town, Thunder's bells jingling all the way. People called out to them, laughing and throwing snowballs. Teddy waved, feeling happier than she ever had.

When they reached Teddy's driveway, Brand did not turn in, but directed Thunder on down the highway past his place. After a small effort to turn in, the horse seemed content to trot on into further isolation. Teddy and Brand sang together. They sang all the sleighing songs they both knew, then taught each other others.

Finally, Brand turned Thunder around and laid the reins at the edge of the sleigh. Are you eager for Thanksgiving? he asked. And our wedding? He cuddled her as close as possible with all their heavy winter clothes and warm blankets.

Yes, it's only two weeks. Nearly everything is ready. The church people really took over the preparations. Gram is making the dress. Oh, Brand, it's so beautiful and more so because she's doing it for me.

He reached a frosty mittened hand to her face and gently brushed a rosy cheek. Did you know I love every little thing about you? Your bright blue eyes that reveal your whole being to the world. I love your innocence, I love your kindness to Gram, to your animals, to me, and even to that woman who wasn't very nice. I love your enthusiasm for your work and also for life. I love the way you love our Lord Jesus, and always talk to Him. Oh, Teddy Bear, our life is going to be heaven right here on this little earth.

Teddy lifted up a little and planted a kiss on his cold lips. I love you so much I can't begin to tell you, Brand. I love you so much I touch your cup after you drink your coffee, and feel jealous because it touched your lips. Your golden hair and laughing brown eyes live in my every dream. Yes, I guess I'm eager for our wedding all right.

The harness bells had become still and Teddy came out of her cocoon, expecting to find herself at Brand's barn, but Thunder had brought them to her ranch house. He's getting smarter every day, Brand said chuckling as he guided her down from the sleigh.

Brand helped Teddy do her chores all the time now, leaving his to Rolf. Feeding, keeping plenty of fresh, unfrozen water available for the llamas, and making sure they were comfortable made up the bulk of the work now. Aren't you glad we don't have to haul loads and loads of manure from the loafing sheds? Teddy asked Brand with a wicked twinkle.

He shook his head. Never quit, do you woman? Just don't tell Rolf that your llamas are housebroken; that's all I ask.

Brand took Teddy sleighing every time they had a fresh snow and she taught him to ice skate. They laughed over his clumsy first attempts to skate, but he learned quickly. Then she took him to Mount Bachelor where she taught him to ski. They went to several theater productions and an art show. And they entered Gram's new butterfly quilt in a quilt show.

Teddy and Brand spent nearly every waking hour together, doing something exciting, working, or doing nothing at all. Teddy's only desire was to be with him.

Good thing you two are getting married next week, Gram said one evening. It almost takes a suck of dynamite to get you apart these days. Not to mention the trouble I had finishing the wedding dress without you seeing it.

Brand agreed. It's getting tough all right, Gram. One more week and we can be together all the time.

Where?

Two pairs of eyes watched Brand, waiting for an answer. You know, he began, I like your house a whole lot better than mine. Would you girls be terribly disappointed if we lived here? At least for a while?

Happy smiles covered both faces. I guess it's all right, he said. His brown eyes met Teddy's happy blue ones. I'd live anywhere you want, you know.

I know, and I feel the same way. You'll have to make the choice.

Hey, he said, off on a new subject, I read in the paper some dog sled races are starting from Bend tomorrow morning at six o'clock. Would you like to go watch them take off?

Teddy wanted to go, so they got up extra early, finished the chores, ate Gram's buckwheat pancakes, and took off in Brand's pickup. In spite of the early hour, the large crowd provided a festive atmosphere. Vendors sold lots of hot coffee and sweet rolls; the harnessed dogs yapped their eagerness to hit the trail.

What are they waiting for? Teddy asked.

I think they have a certain time to leave. He looked at his watch. Didn't the paper say six o'clock? That's only five minutes away. Want some coffee?

Teddy did not have time to answer for two men came up against Brand, turning him from the crowd. Are you Brandon Sinclair?

Yes, I am. What can I do for you?

We'd like to ask you some questions, Mr. Sinclair. In fact, I have here a warrant for your arrest on suspicion of bank robbery.

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Brand's face blanched. Bankrobbery? What on God's wide earth are you talking about?

The parka-enclosed man pulled a slip of paper from his pocket and read: *You have the right to remain silent, Mr. Sinclair. If you give up that right, anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to have a lawyer present during questioning, and if you can't afford one, the court will appoint one for you.*

Brand wrenched back from the officer. Wait a minute. I haven't the foggiest idea what you're talking about, but you have the wrong man.

The officer looked at his warrant again. Brandon J. Sinclair, 1234 Highway 20?

Brand nodded, looking very puzzled. That's my address, but I don't rob banks.

Are you from Eugene?

Yes, but

Come on, Mr. Sinclair, we can talk about it where it's a little warmer. Will you come willingly? Or do I need the cuffs? He gave Brand a shove, but Brand put on his brakes and reached his right hand toward his pocket. The man knocked Brand's hand away from his pocket and handcuffed him so quickly Teddy almost missed seeing it happen. Then the man did a quick search of Brand but came up empty.

You thought I was after a gun, didn't you? Brand asked incredulously.

The man nodded. The thought crossed my mind.

Teddy, Brand said calmly, would you get my keys out of my pocket and bring the pickup down to the station? We'll need it to drive home.

Come on, Sinclair, we don't have all day. And you won't be going home for a while. Brand gave Teddy a small smile and walked away between the two police officers.

Teddy ran to the pickup and drove through the snowy Streets to the police station. I want to see Brand Sinclair, she said to the first uniform she saw inside the door.

The officer pointed toward the door. You may as well go on back home, lady. Sinclair won't be receiving visitors today.

But I have to help him.

He shook his head. Somehow I don't think you're the right person to be helping him. You go home and come back tomorrow.

Suddenly, Teddy simply had to talk to Gram. May I use a phone?

He nodded toward a pay phone by the door and Teddy hurried toward it, eager to hear Gram's beautiful gravel voice.

Why don't you do as the man says, kitten, and come home? Gram suggested calmly when she had heard the news. We can sort it out together.

Teddy drove as fast as she dared on the snowy highway. What are we going to do, Gram? she asked when she finally got home.

Gram settled Teddy onto the couch and put a mug of steaming coffee into her hands. Then she stirred her own and sat down in the rocker. The officer was right, we can't help Brand. We can alert Rolf so he'll take over all the work over there. Otherwise.... Hey, I'll bet Lynden turned him in.

A frown creased Teddy's forehead. Of course he did. I think I'll call him and tell him what I think of him.

Better not. On the slight chance that he didn't, he's the last person we'd want to tell. I suppose it'll be in today's paper anyway, though.

The telephone rang and Teddy lifted the receiver. Brand's voice greeted her, and he sounded tired. The Eugene police are coming for me in the morning, he said. It's just as well. I'm as eager as they are to get to the bottom of this thing. Are you all right, Teddy Bear?

I'm all right. Brand, I'm going to Eugene, too.

No! I want you to stay right where you are. Will you call Rolf and tell him he's in charge for a few days?

I already did. I'm going to Eugene, Brand. I have to.

We won't get to see each other. It'll be a wasted trip.

So it'll be a wasted trip. I've wasted things before.

If you must go, be sure to stay with my folks. And tell them what's happened. They'll help.

Rolf readily agreed to care for the llamas while Teddy was away, so she left early the next morning. Driving over the treacherous winter roads in the icy mountains gave her little time to think about her wedding that was supposed to be less than a week away. *Could Brand be guilty of this crime?* She had finally put it from her mind and now she must keep her faith. *But how could they have arrested him for something he did not do?* She knew Brand did not do it. *Had she not asked God to give her peace if everything was all right? And uncertainty if it was not?* She had never had one worry since that prayer. *If she could not trust the Lord, whom could she trust?*

Finally, about noon, she turned into Frank and Donna Sinclair's driveway and pounded on the door. Frank opened the door and, seeing Teddy's grim face, helped her into the house.

What's happened to Brand? the older man asked, closely watching Teddy's face.

Teddy sniffed and swallowed hard, then pulled a tissue from her purse and wiped her nose. He's all right. He hasn't been hurt or anything. Could we sit down, please? When they all found seats, Teddy continued. Please don't get excited, but Brand is in jail.

Frank burst out laughing. What did he do now, rustle somebody's post holes so he could put them together and use them for a well?

No, they arrested him on suspicion of bank robbery.
Frank laughed even louder.

Bank robbery? Donna repeated. He wouldn't even shoplift a candy bar.

If he robbed a bank, he'd give it all to the poor, like Robin Hood, Frank said, starting up his loud laugh again.

This isn't funny, Frank, Donna said. Let's go to the police station.

They arrived at the station at almost the same time Brand did. Teddy's heartbeat wildly when she saw the tall blond man. He had never looked more beautiful to her, though his ordeal showed on his face. The police let him hug his folks and kiss Teddy. I love you. he said wearily. We'll laugh about this in years to come when we tell our grandchildren. He gave her an extra squeeze and released her. Somehow, it isn't all that funny right now.

We're with you, son, Frank told him. Surely they can't keep up a farce like this for long.

They say there was one witness, the bank teller, Brand explained. They'll try together in this afternoon. When she sees I'm the wrong guy, that'll be the end of it. I took a polygraph in Bend. They wouldn't tell me how it came out but I've heard they're usually accurate. They also told me they've checked my pickup and it's exactly like the one used in the robbery, even the tires. Too bad they didn't get the license number. He looked at his folks. If we could remember what we were doing the morning of May 2 it would help.

Brand and his parents hashed the date over for a while but none of them could come up with any thing on that particular date. Who's going to remember what they did at a certain time on a certain day seven months ago? Frank asked.

Can we be here when the woman comes in? Teddy asked the officer.

I'm not sure, the man said. If you sit quietly over there by the wall they may not think about chasing you out.

Brand's parents and Teddy were allowed to wait with Brand until word came that the woman had arrived. The guard took Brand away, saying he would be back with a group of men. Teddy remained with Frank and Donna on a bench in the quiet corner.

After a half-hour wait, a woman walked in accompanied by a police officer. You just sit here, he said to her, 'and in a few minutes we'll have seven men come in and go to that center table. I'll be with them and make sure to talk to each of them. They know a witness is in the room but there are several other people too, so you watch and listen but don't say anything.

Teddy felt faint when the seven men, all tall, broad-shouldered, and blond, all dressed in dark slacks and light sweaters, came in. They walked around the room, close enough for Brand to give her the slightest wink. Then the police sergeant led them to the big round table in the center of the large room. They all sat down and talked for about fifteen minutes before the officer casually led the men out.

The man in blue returned almost immediately and pulled on his earlobe as he talked quietly to the woman. The little group, waiting so eagerly, could not hear the discussion.

After about half an hour, the woman left and the guards brought Brand back in. They all sat around the same table where the men had been. The woman couldn't finger you, the man said. She said she'd have thought any one of the seven did it if she'd seen only one. Your polygraph came out negative and we didn't find anything when we searched your place in Bend other than the pickup.

We really don't have any reason to hold you longer. It appears to be simply a matter of coincidence, looking too much like the man who did it, and owning a matching rig. But I do wish you could come up with a solid alibi just to close the case against you with 150 percent certainty.

Teddy looked into Brand's jumbo brown eyes and loved him more than she thought possible. How awful that he had been put through such an ordeal, and even worse that she had had moments of doubt.

Brand's wide smile reached almost to his ears, and his white teeth sparkled in the winter sun. Let's get out of here. He held out his hand to the police officer. No hard feelings, he said. I want you to catch the guy as much as you do, but I sincerely hope I never have to go through something like this again.

Teddy and Brand stayed with his folks that night, so they could all travel back to Bend together for the wedding. After calling Gram, Teddy enjoyed staying up late with the family, talking about the ordeal they had just been through, then about the llama and cattle ranches and how Teddy and Brand planned to handle them both.

The next morning they all sat around relaxing and drinking coffee after a potato, ham, and egg breakfast, Teddy feeling secure in the crook of Brand's arm. I know some people who'd be glad to stay in your house and help around the ranch for the rent, Frank said.

Yeah? Who?

Frank belched out a long jolly laugh. Why Mother and I, of course. We're not only bored with city life, we're lonely for you.

Brand jumped up and cranked Frank's hand up and down. Great, Dad. We'll be happy for you to stay as long as you like. The house will be taken care of, we'll all be together, and first thing you know, you'll have that grandchild you've been whining for.

The little caravan pulled into Gram's place at mid-afternoon and everyone stayed for supper. Before the evening meal, Brand managed to find Gram alone and suggested she call on him to ask the blessing for supper.

You bet you can ask the blessing, son, Gram said. Not only tonight but all the time. I'm glad to learn my boy's all grown up now.

Brand asked a special blessing on each member of the family gathered there that night in a thoroughly adult way.

Want to go for a ride? he asked Teddy after they did the evening chores.

Sure. Where we going?

I want to give Lynden a bad time for turning me in. Not that it was his fault.

They parked the pickup and walked into the newspaper office where they found Lynden scribbling on a yellow pad. I want a retraction put in the paper immediately, Brand ordered in a harsh voice.

Lynden looked up, surprise showing on his face, and scrambled to his feet. Sure thing. You just tell me what this is about and I'll take care of it right away.

You know what it's about!

Lynden shook his head. Sorry.

My arrest for suspicion of bank robbery?

Lynden's eyes opened wide. You were arrested?

You bet, and spent two days and one night in the slammer.

Lynden tried to keep his mouth straight, but ended up unable to suppress a relieved smile. I didn't report you, Sinclair, but I'm glad someone did. That's a serious crime.

Who did report me then?

Lynden shrugged. I guess that's your problem. He picked up his black pen and started writing again.

Brand snatched Teddy's hand. Let's go to the police station.

I'd like to see the record of my arrest, he said, once they were inside the brick building. I want to know who turned me in.

Mr. Sinclair, the police officer began, it was just rotten luck. Your description exactly fit the one given by the only witness and you also could easily be the guy in the bank picture. He shoved the pad to Brand and turned it around so he could see it.

Brand read a moment then turned to Teddy, pointing, There it is, in black and white. *Fraedrick Marland*. He studied it another moment then raised his eyes to the man at the desk. Can anyone turn anyone in for any old thing and get them into this much trouble?

The man read a little farther. Not just from a description, but this says the woman heard your girlfriend and her boyfriend talking about the crime, as if you had definitely done it. He looked up with a question in his eyes. Your girlfriend has another boyfriend?

Teddy almost stopped breathing.

Brand shook his head. I'll be getting to the bottom of this. He turned Teddy toward the door and steered her outside into the snowy world.

What was that all about? he asked when they sat in the truck with the mot or running and the heater going full blast. I take it Greeley is the one Fritz called your boyfriend. Did she make this up out of thin air or did she hear you two say something? Then his eyes opened wide. Teddy, did you know anything about this bank robbery?

Teddy scrunched down in the seat and pulled her coat closer around her throat. That's why I've been asking you personal questions, she mumbled. Lynden brought me some items from the newspaper a few times and tried to tell me you did it. Then, when you refused to talk about it, I never felt quite sure.

Brand shoved it into reverse and backed out, then slammed on the brakes, killing the engine and sliding twenty feet across the icy snow. I might be able to understand how you could believe something like that before you knew me, but how could have the faintest doubt later? He started the truck again and headed gingerly toward home.

I believed in you after I knew you, she said. The night Fritz was talking about, I told Lynden to get lost. She hid around the corner to listen and turned the story all around. She stopped and watched him, but he seemed to be concentrating on negotiating the icy road. She had to say one more thing. But you never would tell me where you got the money for your ranch. She spoke in a whisper, then drew several small breaths. Not even yet.

He glanced down at her and stopped the truck in the middle of the snowy road to take her into his arms. You know what? The cops knew I'd paid cash for my ranch and they wanted to know where I got the money, too. They thought that was just too much coincidence. But I was able to prove I got the money legally. I should have told you long ago, love. The only excuse I have is that my folks believe strongly that it's in poor taste, even tacky, to reveal your financial prowess. I should have told you when we grew closer. His eyes grew misty. But you should have told me about Fritz too, you know.

He started the truck and explained to her as the pickup slowly found its way home. My folks got nearly two million dollars for their ranch in Alvadore. They gave me about two-thirds of it. Said the ranch was more mine than-theirs, as I'd worked so hard for so long. He drove a while then took her mittened hand. It was sort of like Gram giving you her ranch, understand?

She understood. Then she remembered the pickup. How-come you never drove the pickup anywhere? You drove it to my place and around on yours, but that's about it. A person could think you were hiding it.

He looked at her, a surprised look on his face, then burst into laughter. Tell me, Teddy, would you drive that thing anywhere important? That rig's what I call a real bummer.

At last she understood it all. They hurried home to tell their folks what they had learned.

Why should you be surprised? Gram asked. Fritzi merely paid you for rejecting her advances.

Guess what else we remembered while you were gone? Frank said when a lull in the conversation allowed. You didn't even own that pickup at the time of the bank robbery. It came as part of the equipment from the ranch. Now, if we could just remember what you were doing on in the morning on May 2.

Brand nodded. You're right. I'd never have bought a pile of junk like that. I should have remembered and told the police. Anyway, let's forget the whole thing and get on with our lives.

You know what this all reminds me of, Teddy said, snuggling close to Brand. All the time I kept telling myself I believed in Brand, I still had doubts. We do the same thing with God, know that? Whenever things don't go exactly as we think they should, we begin to doubt. I'm going to use this as a reminder to keep my faith in God no matter what.

Right, Brand said. I made lots of mistakes that caused you to doubt me but He never makes any. I hearby pledge to keep my faith too.

Three days later Teddy stood trembling in a small dressing room at the church. She pulled the lacy white creation over her head and watched breathlessly as it fell around her. Leaning over, she kissed the little gray head. Thank you,

Gram. It's the most beautiful wedding dress I've ever seen. And you're the most beautiful person in the world. I love you so much. Gram, her mouth full of pins, kept adjusting the train. Hold still, kitten. There, that looks right. I'm glad you like my work, Teddy, because I'm planning to make christening gowns for all of your babies.