

Best 'Round Christmas

“But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me,”
Jeremiah 29:24

He's Saved the Best For *NOW!*

He says “I have plans to give you a hope and a future.” *Jeremiah 29:11*

Not “I had plans but you screwed them up”.

Not plans to give you a past, but a *future*.

Not plans to discourage you, accuse, fault-find, nitpick or beat you up about yourself. Plans to give you *hope*. Plans, *good plans*, for moving ahead into the glistening future He has for you.



AND YOUR LIFE WILL BE A REWARD, A SURPRISE, A PRIZE FOR YOU. *Jeremiah 39:18*

He never takes His Eyes off you.

He thinks about you constantly.

His thoughts toward you are more numerous than the grains of sand on the seashore. He's thinking about you right now, right now, not just yesterday when you thought about Him. He holds this day. He holds *you*. He knows what's coming and He delights in you! *Psalms 138:19* Imagine, He *smiles* as He watches you.

He isn't disappointed about what you didn't get right yesterday; the only reason He lets us see our failures is to make amends and to ask for His help. It's in there, it's in The Book. Those who call upon the name of The Lord won't be dismayed, disappointed, ashamed. If *He's* not ashamed to be called *your God*, if He's delighted with you, then shouldn't we be delighted with you, too?

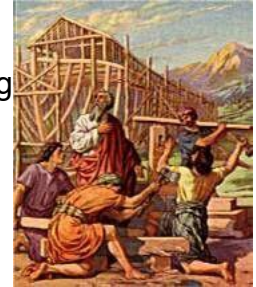
I love Noah.

I really *love Noah*.

Of all the men on the face of the earth, God was pleased with Noah alone. And for the sake of Noah, and God's Plan and Purpose, God also saved Noah's whole family. And He's close to yours, too, for your sake and His Plans and Purpose. It's a done deal.

God dwells outside of time. He's got your before and after In His Hands. He's very, very good at being God.

Noah worked on that ark-building project for 75 *years*. That's a very long time to stick with something, anything, especially because Noah was building a boat! A very big boat on a mountain top on dry ground awaiting something called rain which mankind had never before seen.



Doing something in faith, even *privately* - come on, you feel pretty doofy doing something that flies in the face of reason and what you can see with your eyes. But here's Noah building a huge ark far away from a body of water.

"By faith Noah, by his faith became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."
Hebrews 11:7

Day after day after day Noah worked on this *thing!* instead of something a bit more commercial like making a living. Investing his time and talents in something profitable. What a doofus.

And who ever told Noah he was a marine engineer? He was a farmer with a couple goats. So where did Noah get that blueprint and that knowhow? Well, obviously Noah didn't know anything because he was building a ship on a mountaintop.

But Noah kept at it. Bang, bang, bang! you heard his hammer. You knew that he was mopping the stinging sweat out of his eyes when the banging stopped for just a moment.

And day after day after day everyone else, those folks whose minds were bent only on evil all the time, walked past Noah.

Do you think they were kind to him? Not so much. They probably took their time and took turns at mocking Noah. They had 'more time' back then, and you can hear the good time they had at Noah's expense: making fun of him, mocking, laughing, name-calling. Derision, discouragement and hatred from hell.

And Noah just kept working, bang, bang, bang.

What do we know about Noah's wife? Nothing. What do you think she was doing all this time?

"Oh, Noah, dear, I'm so proud of your faith!"

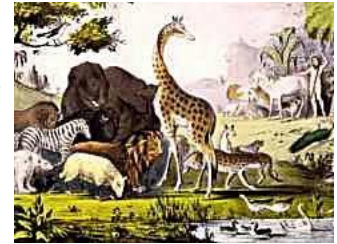
Doubt it. My bet is she was plenty tired of being the wife of a maniac and hearing about her lunatic husband every time she drew water at the well. 75 years of year after year of pointing and laughing. Scoffing will wear you out! Daniel called it the 'wearing down of the saints.'

I believe if Noah's wife had been a mighty woman of God, we'd have heard more about her. As it was, she probably joined in the humiliation of Noah. How else could she redeem herself from public scorn?

Even as the ark was only boards, it was already Noah's safe place to be.

Bang, bang, bang went the hammer on those boards.

"Sorry, honey, I can't hear you." It worked then, it works now.



What tremendous, inexplicable grace and strength God gave Noah to be able to keep doing all that the Lord had commanded him to do. God called Noah to do it. "Lord, all that we have accomplished, Thou hast done for us." Isaiah 26:12

God made Noah capable of believing Him and doing it all. Despite that ridicule and catcalling, *and no water*, God kept Noah standing and doing. "And he will stand, for The Lord is able to make him stand. Romans 14:4

It was a God thing, an act of God. Good ol' Noah with all his humanity sticking out in plain sight right in the middle of the miraculous. I wonder what Noah said when he dropped a board on his toes, *hmmm?*

After what seemed like an eternity of preparation, suddenly the rains came down and the waters came up. When Noah was 600 years old, *and not 60*, the floodwaters came upon the earth.

No one was laughing anymore as the Lord loaded all the animals on the boat, both the clean and the unclean.

Then the Lord shut the window on the ark's roof from outside, noises mixed with eerie silence.

For no less than 375 days, which is also a really long time given the circumstances, no one messed with Noah. His wife, his sons, his sons' wives, no one said 'boo!' about Noah to his face or behind his back: because the guy was very credible now.

In order for God to sustain Noah through all those years of *preparation*, God had remained very close to Noah. Get close to God you see Him: He's wonderful, *just wonderful*.

God's not petty, critical or gossipy. God's not mean-spirited and He's not insecure. If you want to have a great time, go hang out real close with God. You'll see Him smile.

And while you spend time together, you'll somehow become kinder, more generous in spirit, stronger and more confident *in God*. The stuff of you just falls off, bit by bit, (glory to glory) because we resonate with Those we love.

Well, given that Noah had been resonating with the Lord for a long time preparing for the future that God had for Noah *after* the age of 600, we can rest assured that Noah wasn't

running around the ark saying “Nah, nah, I told you so!” Everyone had plenty of time to consider that Noah was, indeed, a mighty man of God. Not because of Noah *but because of God*. God’s Plan, God’s Might and God’s Purpose.

I’m just putting this out there: how long did it take to change Noah into who God needed him to be before the great global restart? 75 years?

"For we have this treasure in an earthen vessel, that the excellence of the power might be seen to be of God and not of ourselves." 2 Corinthians 4:7 "Not that we are capable to claim that anything comes from ourselves, but our competence comes from God." 2

Corinthians 3:5

So there you have it:

The unrighteous had seen Noah up close, seen all the cracks in his earthen vessel.

Righteousness is not about *our* perfection, it's *about believing in His*.

One of my favorite recurring miracles is watching God patch me up and fill me with hope and His Holy Presence again and again. Then I, or life itself, or Purpose punches more holes in my vessel and We start all over again. "I shall rebuild you, and you shall be rebuilt." Jeremiah 31:4. I shall restore health unto you and heal you of your wounds." Jeremiah 30:17. "You are Mine." Isaiah 43:1

After years of being broken and fixed up by God, there comes an *abiding* faith. Your vessel might be shattered in pieces all over the landscape, but you've seen Him do this miracle of restoration so faithfully that your little pieces just sit there calmly and wait. And whatever remains pooled in those shards of your life is more than enough for God to sustain you while you wait.

Because you know He will come because you know *who He is!*

Not because of you, not because of Noah, but because of God your Heavenly Father. The Father God that is more wonderful than people imagine.

Now here's why I love Noah so much -

After all those years of Noah's trials and repeatedly having his vessel smashed and then restored, God also planned to start the earth over again using Noah. What an immense privilege! The only righteous man on the face of the earth gets into special covenant with Almighty God (think rainbow), as God had planned. God commanded Noah to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

"NOW NOAH, BEING A MAN OF THE SOIL,
PROCEEDED TO PLANT A
VINEYARD. WHEN HE DRANK SOME OF
ITS WINE, HE BECAME DRUNK AND . . .

" Genesis 9:20



Misprint? No. Typo? Nope. *History.*

Now Noah knew about vineyards *before the flood* and he knew what he was doing. He waited years for the vineyards to mature, waited for a good, ripe harvest, and then waited for the grapes to turn into wine. He knew all about that stuff and he *certainly should have known better.*

Just like building an ark, wine takes time. Time in the sun doing the patient work of a farmer. Plenty of time to hear from God, the One Who deemed Noah the only righteous man on earth. *Hel-lo?*

Then why on earth would God choose Noah if Noah were going to fail like this?

No sooner than God restarts the earth through Noah than Noah gets drunk and curses one third of mankind. Then again, no one can curse what God has blessed. Numbers 22:12

Where'd all of Noah's righteousness go?

Same place it came from: it's still in God.

Noah believed God! *Not Noah did perfectly.*

And it's still in you if you're a believer, He's given you His righteousness.

We are believers, not achievers, and anything good in us is a reflection of God's presence in us.

That's why I love Noah. It's why I love God and I can love me and so should you.

By the grace of God, we can get some things right.

By the mercies of God, we can spend time with Him and in so doing, we begin to see things through our Father's Eyes. "Gee, she looks just like her Father."

And we can know that at any moment in time, God has a Plan for you and a Plan for me, whether we're 60 or 600. We are always Mid-Plan.

So, we can rest in Him and His Plan for our future regardless of ourselves. Oh, I *love* that part! Believing in God's Plan, that *His* Perfection will keep me no matter what.

If something in you is rising up to argue the theology about Noah, then you've had way too much 'ology' and not near enough Theo.

Go plant some grapes and enjoy His Presence tending the vineyards together in the Son.

After the flood, Noah walked the face of the earth 350 years more. Then Noah started on Phase Two of the Plan.

“You have saved the best till now.”

John 2:10

I've Been Around

“The proud He knows from afar off.” Psalm 138:6

Years ago I demanded answers,

"Where were You then?

“Why didn't You . . . ? ”

But I wasn't the least bit interested in hearing Him, just His explanation. I was still god back then and if it didn't revolve around me, why would I care? And I was an angry little god, too.

“Look! Look at what's happened! You could have put a nice, steady, reliable young Baptist right in my path when I was 18 and everything would have been different!”

Not necessarily. I had a stony little heart that needed years in the Rock Polisher going 'round and 'round and 'round with all the other little stony hearts until some of my rough edges smoothed off.

Life had produced some of those rough edges as parts of me had been broken repeatedly.



But most of the things that cut and scratched and just rubbed the wrong way were the authentic me, my own self-centered sin nature – *human*. It's basic equipment.

I never ever wondered where all of the great stuff came from, all the success and all the international travel. I never saw a hungry kid. I never saw an old person sitting alone, no heat, no food, no hope. I never gave a thought or anything to anyone *including me*. I gave all to whatever my work was.

~ Around and around and around and around and around and around in the Rock Polisher getting tumbled with other stones until I had had enough.

Then I came to Him and just laid there face down in His Presence.

"Papa, can I please stop going around and 'round?"

"Let Me see, sweetie", He said as if He didn't know, as He held me in His Hand. (He just loves to hold me.)

He turned my heart over and over again in His Hand watching His reflection in the smooth, polished surfaces of the 'new me'. Oh, how I love being in His Hand! His strength, His love, His acceptance turning my world upside down until my *world is Him*.

"I love the rough and broken you forever, just as you were! I love the new you, too. I can see Me reflected in you. B-e-a-yoooooooo-ti-ful. Which do you prefer?"

"Whatever pleases you, My Father."

"EXAAAAAACTLY."

I still have that Bible with the red leather cover that dad gave me when I was seven. I've lost houses and photo albums and jewels and my mink coat (I like mink) and every belonging but I still have my red leather Bible. How did that happen?

Here are the two foolish statements I'd made to myself when I first tried to understand what was so good about the Good News: This salvation is great for people who've sinned, but I won't. Grace is great for those who need it, but I won't.

And that explains my life back then. The sin He hates above all else is pride; we who suffer from pride get longer than others in His Rock Polisher.



When the sand of other peoples' rough edges hurts my eyes, I say no-thing. Absolutely no-thing. I've been around.

“She who is forgiven much, loves much” Luke 7:47

It's Why ~ A Christmas Tail

“When my mother and father forsake me, then The Lord will take me in.”
Psalms 27:10

It sounded like a sound, maybe.

Maybe not.

“Twas the day *after*” Thanksgiving, the time for real thanksgiving, particularly this year. This year had worked and all the boxes had checkmarks.

I had a job: Resident Manager, beautiful, upscale apartment community: check!

I had a home: Resident Manager meant an apartment with a view: check!

I had arrived: hostess for Thanksgiving this year: check!

And I had passed! Good Housekeeping, Martha Stewart, Sunset Magazine. A checklist was posted on the side of the refrigerator (turkey, gravy, mashed potatoes, carrots and green beans, dressing . . .) and every single box was checked off: Check, Check, Check, Check, Check

As the third generation of a Sunset Magazine family with a great cover and less than promised inside, Thanksgiving was more of a performance than being thankful. If everyone approved of your event, you really *were* thankful the next day. And very, very tired.

Performing does that. It takes all the life out of you.

This day after Thanksgiving was triumphant: nothing left to do. Having worked 557 days straight for this achievement of hoped for quiet time off with no emergencies, we



whispered, we tiptoed, we treasured OUR DAY OFF. Being perfect doesn't allow for many of these.

"Chloe, did you hear that?"

She looked at me and didn't roll her eyes, much to her credit. "I didn't hear anything, Mama" she said, and nothing more: *genius!*

I stared at a magazine ferociously as if a trance might save me and stroked Shadow, our 16-pound-wonder-cat. A day to relax, and I was going to make it work: stroke 1, stroke 2, stroke 3. Shadow couldn't take my loving relaxation and jumped down.

Now, *there!* I *did* hear something! *Ha!*

I stealthed over to the patio glass doors and nudged the blinds open as a tail of black smoke whisked into the corner. Stepping outside, I peeked down behind the plastic storage bin that sat in the corner of the patio. In that two inches of space was a something made of fur. I *knew* I'd heard a kitty! It was tiny, *tiny* black. Coiled black fluff with no arms or legs or even eyes. "Oh, you poor little baby!" Gently reverent, I picked up the kitten.

It's spring-loaded arms, legs, and lots of little claws answered back. "Yeooooow!" My screaming brought Chloe out to the rescue. The kitten's, not mine.

"Oh, you poor little baby!" she crooned as she swept inside with her reward. Oh boy, I could see it coming and it wasn't all peace and quiet and relaxation.

She held the kitten like a wide receiver making a run for it: "Oh, I didn't have anyone to play with or anything to do, so God sent you here!"

Block, block!

"She's meant for someone who's been waiting just for her, and OUR JOB IS TO FIND OUT WHO THAT IS."

"Yeah? Then why'd she come to *our* door?"

"Because God gave me great hearing and I'll find out where she belongs."

Respecting her claws, I reached over to explore the long, black fur for a face. "Oh, there you are baby." Two nasty little pinspots glared at me.



All sweetness with killer instincts, my daughter handed the kitten back to me, crooooooning again “Here, Mama, *you* hold her, she *needs you!*” *Crooked* genius.

Fearing the dreaded shredders, I held the little thing to disable her. But confinement turned into embrace – how could you not?

“Isn’t she cuuuute, Mama?”

“Sweetie, all kittens are cute,” I started in on Mothers International Speech #34.

“But Mom, not like *this* kitten!”

“ . . . all kittens are cute, and – “ See, the trick is to find a carrying container quickly and drive immediately to the Humane Society before running out of Speech #34.

Did you know that the Humane Society is closed for Thanksgiving Day *and the day after?* Returning home with ‘not our kitten’ and no more of Speech #34,

Chloe did all of the talking. To the kitten. And to everyone else *about* the kitten.

Busiest ‘Friday off’ ever. Forget sitting down, forget reading, forget pretending we’re not home so we can have a quiet day. WE HAD A NEW KITTEN! Not to *keep*, but to keep until Saturday when the Humane Society reopened.

And to bathe and to dry, to feed, to house and to litter box – which required a trip outside to the cardboard recycling container for the *right* litter box.

Chloe at the cardboard recycling container, in the parking lot, at the mailboxes, impaled everyone she met with the story of her new kitten – and the story got longer as she rounded up a larger audience. Now the entire neighborhood knew that WE HAVE A NEW KITTEN! She was betting I wouldn’t *dare* give the kitten away, what with everyone being so excited about her. Oh boy.



Kids, many, many, kids, started running in and out of our nice quiet home, ooo-ing and aaaaaah-ing and sometimes fighting over OUR NEW KITTEN. I alternated pleasant grimaces with refereeing but not one iota of private time.

“Look, Daddy, loooooook, isn’t it cuuuuuute?” peeped one of the kids.

Good ol' Dad bumped into me while I was still wiping the kitty shampoo off my cat scratches and I didn't look at all like the Manager he sees in the office. Each child was sure that he could parlay a new kitten out of this.

"Daddy, Chloe says that maybe her mom is going to make her give it away."

Pause, all eyes turn to stare at me.

"If she does, Chloe says that I can have it. Isn't she cuuute?"

"Sweetie, all kittens are cute," Dad started in. (Hey, he knows Mothers International Speech #34!) ". . .but it's *Chloe's kitty*," pause, stare. (Dad may have bought the tape, but he sure didn't play by the rules.)

Turning to me, Dad finished me off, asking "What are you going to name her?"

"Jelly Bean! Her name is Jelly Bean!" Chloe shouted, flushed with triumph, and invited her adult accomplice to sit down and visit with the others who had already settled in, comfy.

Better go make some turkey sandwiches for the crowd.

And wait for Saturday.

Still chewing turkey, I sat down to take a load off. Crazed by the power of turkey aroma, Jelly Bean sprang out of who-knows-where and 20 tiny needles landed on my thigh. Yeooooooooow. Running straight up, she took a starving, feral bite out of my nose. Wwwwwwwow! The pain! The attack was over before I even saw it coming.



"Oh, Mama," Chloe looked weird clenching her jaws to stop laughing, "you're *bleeding*! Oh, does it *hurt*?"

Nothing, absolutely nothing, hurts like little feral kitty teeth. On your nose.

Then our guests had two exciting points of interest: the fastest kitten on earth and my bleeding nose.

"Oh, look," said a youngster peering upwards, "she got you inside your nose, too!"

Resentment amplified the pain as I soaped up a washcloth thinking "Saturday. Saturday. Saturday." Holding my nose in the washcloth, I opened the

front door, accepting a mix of congratulations and condolences as our 'guests' left. One hand on my nose, I cleaned up after our 'party', never losing sight of Jelly Bean, who was faster than any kitten should be.

After the craziness, exhaustion ruled. Tomorrow, Saturday, could be a 'day off'.

I decided to keep Jelly Bean in the empty washer/dryer closet space. The new linoleum floor and the louvered door made it ideal and in she went.



Whereupon Shadow, mature but not maternal, assumed a guard position in front of the door, solemnly wrapping her front paws under herself. We humans departed for TV land.

It sounded like a sound, maybe.

Maybe not.

"Chloe, did you hear that?"

"Nah", she said, glued to TV land. I groaned and got up to go inspect.

Shadow looked like a ventriloquist as though the grim, growling sound coming from her belonged to somewhere else.

"Shadow, you leave her alone! *She's* not coming out and *you're* not going in, so leave her alone!" I scooped up my guard cat and hauled her back to the living room. I zoned out and Shadow padded off.

Soft, swishing sounds. Whiiiiiiiiish. Whishhhhhhhhh.

Watching a Gilligan's Island rerun, laughter from the TV show and then from us. Whish. Whish Whish! What was that *sound*? Then a rattle and I knew what that was.

"Oh, for goodness sake!"

"Mama, what is it?"

I shot to my feet. "Well, for a quiet day off, I'm sure not having any quiet time!"

And there lay Shadow on her side, eyes huge, fishing with one long arm under the louvered closet door.

Whish. Whish. Whish as her paw groped under the closet door for the kitten.

Rattle, rattle, rattle, her arm bumped the door. This was going to go on all night, and I wasn't going to win. Back out into the very cold night, back to the cardboard recycling container to look for another box: a big box, a big, *sturdy* box that wouldn't rattle.



Back inside but not back in the holiday spirit, I opened the louvered door and checked on the kitty. So small, but so much trouble!

"Good night..... JJJJJJJJ....." No names, please. She didn't answer back, so much the better. Securing the cardboard box against the closet door, it was bedtime all around. If they made noise after that, I didn't hear it.

Saturday morning was bright and clear and windy and "unscheduled". I always enjoy the quiet of mornings before the world wakes up. I eased out of bed to cuddle our little friend all by myself.

Not a sound inside as I moved the big box and opened the closet door. And not a sound out of me as I tried to understand what I saw inside the closet. *What had happened here?*

Overnight, the closet had been repainted, a decopage of brown paint with interesting texture. The kitten was stre-e-e-etching as she woke up in her litter box, which was nearly empty now. Food and bedding were indistinguishable, now part of that textured poop on the walls and floor.

And the kitten!

No longer an adorable little bundle of black fluff, someone had glued the ends of her fur together with brown, textured hair goo which matched the walls and she looked like a punk rocker. *Eeeeeeeew!*

Visions of kindness exploded into a 'to do list' of unappetizing duties.

Waiting for the coffee, I cleared everything off the counter, brought out a heap of towels, warmed the water, trying not to be angry. I prepared a new box for her, new snuggling towels for her, too. Spic n Span? Just enough left for the closet cleanup. I tested the water in the sink which woke up the kitty scratches covering my arms.

What a great start to a great day off!

Without describing how yucky it was to wash dried brown goo out of her fur, off the walls and floor, our new morning ritual lasted an hour and a half. Just in time for my daughter to wake up and carry off her prize. Glad to be of help, dear!

With the day in full 'eeeeeeew', it was still too early for the pound and way too late for quiet time. By the time I sat down with my morning coffee, it was time to make lunch. Our guest went back into her mountain-spring-fresh closet, my daughter and I sat down for a short lunch.



"Mama, Jelly Bean loves it here with us, *she does!* And we don't need a washer and dryer in the closet 'til she's housebroken."

If she only knew! I didn't want to explain what I'd seen that morning, I just couldn't over lunch.

"Honey, you promised me that if we could just keep her overnight, we'd take her to the Humane Society today. There's someone visiting there, *maybe even right now*, who's looking for this kitty."

She nodded her head and chewed even more slowly.

"Eat another bite, sweetie."

Chloe left the table and went to fetch the kitty while I waited.

"*Eeeeeeeeww!*" She didn't need to say anything else.

It was amazing. Instead of the tiny, black fluff, our raunchy, brown, punk rocker had returned. And the interior designer of despicable taste had visited again, too.

Ah, a picture's worth a thousand words.

Back to the basin and this time, *fast*.

"Chloe! Get another box, grab some towels!" My daughter moved so quickly she surprised me. Soon we were all in the car rushing off to the Humane Society with the gift of a lifetime.

Did you know that the Humane Society closes at 2 pm and not 4 pm on the Saturday after Thanksgiving? A nice sign said “We’re closed Sunday and Monday and will reopen Tuesday during regular hours. Thank You!”

“No, *thank you!*” I thought as we drove to the vet.

“Oh, isn’t she cute!” said Dr. KnowNothing, unaware of what lurked at home in the closet. I explained what her ‘problem’ was and he just laughed. “Her little system will settle down in a week or so. You’re doing great!”

And that’ll be \$68 bucks.



With my nose still throbbing and no way to overturn my sentence, we picked up more boxes on the way home. She was ours until Tuesday. Tuesday at 10 A. M. Home we went.

Tuesday. Tuesday. Tuesday.

Three or more times a day I scrubbed, washed, shampooed and replaced boxes and fluffy towels. At the very least, Jelly Bean should know the difference between a gra-ve-ly litter box and the cud-dl-y sleeping box, but *no*. And that’s pretty much how my four-day holiday weekend went: it went and went and went.

Tuesday morning countdown: I had a box all set aside to transport the little one in style one last time. Placing a small but elegant, monogrammed hand towel inside, in she went: bye bye. Four-inch masking tape sealed the box and I smiled as the gas tank registered full. Check! It was 9:18 AM and only a 10-minute drive, but shucks, I didn’t want to be late.

It’s a short drive downhill but very winding with only one lane in each direction and always stressful. Halfway down the hill, the box jumped around like a huge jumping bean making loud cries. I pulled into someone’s driveway just as a nose poked through the tape.

Aw, *gee!* I wrestled, she won, and I countered by wrapping her tightly in her towel like a newborn. Holding her firmly to establish my ‘authority’, I was thankful for automatic drive as we took off again. Let’s go! No pun needed.

Did you know it’s easier to smuggle in something illegal than to bring a homeless kitten to the shelter? Oh yes, it is. I held her tightly so no one would see her real personality while I answered questions and the volunteer filled out forms. Let’s go here! After more than a long time, the volunteer brought out a cage.



As I picked up the pen to sign the forms, he held the cage door open.

Cradling her with my left hand, my right hand turned the pen to write. The volunteer jiggled the cage to hurry me up, saying "OK, little one, in you go!" He was smiling but his eyes were crying 'eeeeeeew'!

And I heard me say: "Uhhhhh, what happens if . . . Look, this isn't going to happen, but what happens if, let's just say, for some reason, I change my mind tomorrow morning and I . . . want her back. Can I just come pick her up?"

"Noooo, we take them in for a three-day impound period and no one can take them home. After that, you can come and adopt her for \$80." Rattle, rattle went the cage as he reached for her. I could see his frustration about me asking questions after he'd done all the paperwork. "As soon as she goes in here, that's it."

Something inside me broke.

Lots of things inside me broke. "You mean I can't come get her back?"

"Not tomorrow you can't. You'll have to wait the three days, pay the fees, and then you can take her home again."

Home.

The pen dropped from my hand as I wrapped Jelly Bean more tightly inside her towel. "Oh, thanks so much for filling out the forms, for all your help. You know, I can always bring her back in again. When I'm sure." The staff women erupted in silent high fives behind the volunteer and I think I saw one of them scooping up the money they'd bet.

I'd never have bet on me, but I know Someone who does.

I smiled and exited backwards with Jelly Bean. She was so tiny, so still as I reached for my keys in the cold wind. After the four-day countdown, what was I thinking? *What?*

I held Jelly Bean in her towel on my lap, hoping to keep her captive 'til we reached home. She wiggled out, climbed up to my shoulder. With a few nuzzles, she settled in against my neck and for the first time, she purred. Fast asleep riding home in the hollow of my shoulder.



"COULDN'T DO IT, COULD YOU?"

"Oh, please!"

"I KNEW YOU COULDN'T

"I don't want to heeeear You!" I thought, punching up the radio.

LEAVE HER."

Her little body warmed my neck and the brown, punky stuff poked me. Not exactly a feline with bragging rights.

"YOU LIKE IT, DON'T YOU? JUST HAVING HER HERE WITH YOU."

She'd always need to be fed, provided for, protected and fixed up. My neck tipped left, snuggling. When had she learned to purr? I felt overwhelming love.

"I KNOW. THAT'S HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU. ON YOUR VERY BEST DAY YOU'LL STILL HAVE MESSES. BUT TO ME, *SPOTLESS*."

Oh, how I loved this kitten, how I enjoyed just having her with me.

"I KNOW – YOU THINK YOU SHOULD BE SAYING 'What are you doing up here? You're a cat! Don't you know who I am? We're in a car, you need me to get you Home!'

"BUT SHE'S THE PERFECT PICTURE OF YOU."

"TRUST ME. CLIMB UP ON MY SHOULDER AND SNUGGLE IN – WE'RE GOING HOME. LET BEING WITH ME BE ENOUGH, IT'S WHY I CAME.

"IT'S WHY ~ *CHRISTMAS!*"



**"the one the LORD loves
rests between His shoulders."**

Deuteronomy 33:12

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