

We Put a Smile Back on Your Face

by Fred Osuna

Her voice mail announced: "I'm coming for three days and I'll need you to pick me up Tuesday at 11:15. I have two large bags, so empty the car. Make sure the dog hair's cleaned up, I have allergies."

His sister could be pleasant under her terms. But his life was never enough of an open book for her; after he'd rearrange his apartment to her satisfaction, she'd excavate the place while he was at work. The visit would invariably end in a melodrama punctuated by revelations she'd acquired in her scavenger hunt. He was old enough now, jaded enough, to anticipate this routine.

He dug deep in his writing desk and found a complimentary postcard from an Indiana Holiday Inn. He addressed it to himself and invented a message from a fictitious woman that mentioned drunkenness, a car accident, a gay dalliance, wanton credit card use and cocaine. When it arrived in the mail, he ripped it in two, dividing the litany of secrets proportionately. He slipped one half under his mattress, the other beneath a Tupperware tower in the pantry. And he waited.

On the day of her departure, she was uncharacteristically quiet. He didn't push her.

When he got home, he flipped the mattress and found a brochure from a rehab center. In the kitchen was a pamphlet for Journey into Manhood, tucked inside a paperback copy of *Financial Peace*. Within each was a hundred dollar bill. It was an even swap.

