THAT KIND OF LOVE

by marci stillerman

On my way to work, I stop to check out RAINBOWS parking lot for crazies. If I decide to make an appointment for an abortion, I don't want to be shot on my way to keep that appointment.

A red pick-up pulls in and I park across the street to see what gives. A guy and a much younger girl get out. They kiss. I check her abdomen. No bulge. What are they doing in an abortion clinic parking lot? But people have their reasons.

Before I tell Bailey I'm pregnant, I need time to think over how I feel about having a baby. Once he knows, it will be a green light to parenthood. He's crazy about kids.

It's not the best time for me to have a baby. I'm on my way up the ladder at Macy's, a rung or two away from cosmetics buyer, my ultimate goal. A baby would nix that, maybe forever. But Bailey Worthington is the sweetest guy I ever met and we're in love, though he's never said so. Some guys, the word love freezes their mouth. He'll thaw the minute he hears about the baby.

The abortion clinic is a plain single floor house on a street of similar houses, no sign in front to identify it. But when they buzz you in, you know you're not in a house. You walk into the waiting room, furnished in the sterile fashion of waiting rooms, a sofa and assorted chairs, coffee table with magazines and the receptionist's office. Behind the wall is the clinic. I sign in. The appointment clerk is on the phone. A girl, about twenty, the only occupant in the waiting room, stares at my abdomen as if to see how far along I am. She hugs herself as if cold or scared. Is she a walk in like me, or is she waiting to see the doctor?

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Bailey is a Brad Pitt clone, a classy, rich guy. I was surprised when he said he was 23; he looks more thirty. I'm 26 but I'm frequently tagged for ID.

About a year ago, he asked my advice about a perfume suitable for his aunt, a middle-aged woman running for a minor political office. He'd come in just before closing time and, after buying some over-priced scent, suggested we have dinner, offering to tell me about his aunt whom he described as quite a dame. It was the beginning of a series of dates for dinner, theater, museum openings, political affairs at which I met his aunt and his father. It was five months of platonic evenings before he kissed me, despite my efforts to seduce him. I was getting discouraged; wondering if he was gay, married, or had aids. But when it came, the kiss, at end of an evening at his favorite club, extra sweet and super exciting because I'd waited so long and just about given up, it was only the beginning.

He turned out to be not great in bed. Foreplay was exceptional, imaginative, sweet, slow, keeping me begging for it, but when it came to performance, I'd get there long before he did and sometimes he didn't make it at all. I convinced myself not to be concerned, that it had nothing to do with how he felt about me. Some people are just not that passionate. I'd heard of successful marriages where there was very little sex. If we married, it would be an adjustment I'd just have to make.

The clerk slides the window open, phone still in hand.

Be right with you, she says.

I take the vacant chair and grab Working Women from the table. The magazine is nine months old, the time it takes to make a baby.

I've made a lot of bad choices in men up to now, looking for love, and my heart has been broken to pieces. If I have to choose between a career and a good marriage, I'll choose marriage in a heartbeat. Bailey might not be the dream mate but he could give me a better life than I'd have as a lonely professional woman. A fine home and a

family, and the love of a good man. I'd be a fool to give it up for the best job in the world.

The clerk has finally puts down the phone and slides back the glass window.

“I'm here to see about an abortion.” I realize how stupid this has to sound. I'm more nervous than I thought I'd be. “I mean, I want some information.”

She asks questions about the father, the date of my last period, other pregnancies.

“When can you see the counselor?”

“I don't need to,” I say. “I just want information.”

Seems it's required, so I make a date, knowing I'll cancel. As soon as Bailey knows about the baby, he'll propose. Still… I've learned the hard way, nothing happens before it happens.

Bailey and I have never lived together. He lives with his father in Hylane, an hour from my place in Los Angeles. His father has been depressed since his wife died and Bailey doesn't want him to be alone.

Bailey drives in on Fridays and spends the night and Saturdays at my apartment. When we marry, we will probably live with his father until the baby comes, then buy a house in Hylane. This is my plan. When he knows about the baby, I'm sure he'll agree.

I invite Bailey to dinner at my place on Friday night. A celebration I tell him.

It will be the first time I've cooked for him

“What are we celebrating?”

“It's a surprise.”

I'm going to tell him about the baby.

He arrives on time. He is never late.

Eighteen candles light my small apartment. I've bought Waterford goblets for the wine, a delicate white Bailey introduced me to. Called Forsythe. Rod Stewart's *My One and Only* fills the

room, soft, romantic music. I am wearing a really amazing dress from Neiman Marcus, pearl gray satin, knee length, with deep cleavage. Bare legs. Stiletto heels.

I've tried to duplicate our first dinner at Chantilly: rack of baby lamb, asparagus vinaigrette, potatoettes. Plenty of wine. I pour champagne at dessert, ice cream with hot brandied cherries.

"You're a gourmet cook. You've hidden it from me." Bailey reaches across the table and kisses my hand.

He's brought a gift. It's a gold heart bordered with sapphires and it takes my breath away. The first piece of jewelry he's given me.

I take his hand and place it where I think our baby is nesting.

Guess what, I say.

He gets it.

"Oh, my God." Does that mean he's thrilled?

My heart soars on hope for a moment, until Bailey says one cold, heart plummeting word. "Impossible."

Silence. Then it pours out.

Bailey is gay. He has a lover in another life. He will not come out while his father lives. I'm his shield.

He admits he has never had an orgasm with a woman.

The counselor's office is across the narrow hall from the surgery, a small spare room with pastel blue walls.

We face each other across her desk.

"Tell me something about yourself."

I want to pour out my anguish to the motherly looking woman, but why should she care? She's heard the story a million times. I tell her enough to assure her that I'm ready for the abortion and sign the consent.

I make an appointment for tomorrow. Return to work

I'm completely numb.

I finish a sale of bath products and watch a young boy sampling perfumes at the end of the counter. He sprays from a tester onto the palm of his hand, sniffs, sprays from another, sniffs. Teenagers,

mostly girls, often stop at the display of perfumes and squirt scent on their wrists, necks, behind their ears.”

“Can I help you?” I ask the boy. He's about eight. He's wearing a blue baseball cap, visor in back, and a green sweater, unraveling at the wrists, an elbow out.

“I want to buy some perfume,” he says. “It's for my mom. I have money.”

“Is it her birthday?” I ask.

“It's not for her birthday. It's because she lost her job. She feels bad.”

He digs a handful of cash out of his pocket, three bills and change.

“Is it enough? I can get more.”

I straighten out the dollar bills and count the change.

“Perfume costs a lot,” I say. “Some people prefer candy.”

“I know what she likes.”

He loves her; that's why he knows what she likes. He wants to make her happy. My whole body aches to be loved like that.

“Okay,” I say. “What kind?”

“The kind that smells like flowers. The same kind you'd like.”

I pick up his money. Take a shopping bag the size of a book from the drawer under the counter. From the sample drawer, I drop his money into the bag with handfuls of vials and miniature bottles of perfume, body lotion, hand cream, three lipsticks and a half dozen nail polishes. I crinkle pink tissue paper to top the bag.

“Cool,” he says when I hand him the bag. “Thanks.”

He bounces down the aisle to the exit clutching treasures to make his mother happy. A small, shabby, exquisitely beautiful boy. I grab a tissue to catch a tear before it smudges my mascara.

That kind of love makes life worth living.

I call the clinic on my cell. Cancel my appointment.

My heart flip-flops with happiness.