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Capitulating on a Wednesday

by Cheryl Bailey Preston

She dropped Trish and her friends off at 7:30 a.m., turned up Decker Avenue to avoid the rush traffic, remembered she promised to pick up a roll of film for Bill, stopped at the drug store, waited for three lights, and came home. Inside, she surveyed the breakfast dishes, then went upstairs to make the beds and collect the wash. Above Jamie's bed the calendar still said January. She ripped off three pages. The picture for April showed a pussywillow bush and a little black lamb. She looked out at her own yard. It was raining, as usual, but little green buds shyly ornamented the bushes. "So spring is coming," she thought. "But then doesn't it always come, every year, right after winter?" The thought disturbed her. She went back down to review the kitchen.

"Wouldn't everyone be surprised if I just didn't do the dishes today?" she thought. She envisioned the scene. No, the kids would creatively ignore it, afraid that if they mentioned the dishes they would be handed the dish rag. And Bill, he'd just think she'd had a "bad day." He'd say he understood and would put on an apron and parade around as if he were organizing the

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Western front. The scene splashed out of her mind. She knew she'd do them eventually. Resigned, she

*Resigned, she cleared the room
without a wasted motion. Her
mind wandered ... not needed.*

cleared the room without a wasted motion. Her mind wandered . . . not needed.

The mail came. Another letter from Mother. That made four letters she hadn't answered. She opened her desk, reached for a fountain pen and a stack of stationery embossed with her name, and wrote:

Dear Mother,

Sorry I haven't written for so long. I never seem to get around to it--so busy. Everything is fine. Trish still likes school. She has a bunch of friends who never leave her alone. She is so boy-crazy. I don't remember ever being that bad. She takes cookies to a boy down the street every week, but doesn't sign her name to them. Jamie is still busy at school. He practices with the team until dinner every night; we hardly ever see him . . .

Everything she wrote seemed so . . . so like everything she wrote in the last letter, like everything she always wrote, like everything every woman on the

street wrote to their mothers. Surely her mother wouldn't find it any news. But she owed a letter.

She re-read what she had written. "Everything is fine." She stopped. Inside she lacked conviction. How she wanted to run to Mother's arms like a child and cry. But why? Mother would only tell her that nothing was wrong. Didn't she have an attentive husband with a prestigious profession? Didn't she live in her dream house? Didn't she have lovely, healthy kids? Didn't she have friends and interesting hobbies? Didn't she have her faith and her religion to support her? Didn't she have everything she ever wanted? Didn't she? She continued with the letter.

The morning dwindled into afternoon. At two o'clock, she turned off the old Cary Grant movie she had been watching and decided to go to bed and never get up. She wouldn't miss anything. If dinner wasn't ready, Bill would take the kids to a fast-food drive-in without a word. If Jamie didn't get a good breakfast, he'd make up for it at lunch. If Trish got up in the morning with nothing ironed to wear, she would iron it herself and be a little late for school. If the dog didn't get fed, he would run away. If Bill were a widower, he would get married again.

She walked into her room, took off her clothes, and absent-mindedly hung them up. She put on a faded blue nightgown with the shoulder almost worn through and got into bed.

Four hours later, she awoke. The night had begun to creep up and her room was full of shadows. She looked over at the fluorescent hands of the clock: 6:15. Trish must have gone to a friend's house after school; she didn't hear her come home. Jamie was still at practice. Bill would be home at 6:30. She lay there for a moment, then slid out of bed and hurriedly put on

jeans and a shirt. Rolling up her sleeves, she walked to the kitchen, opened the fridge, pulled out a tupperware container and a package of hamburger; then she reached for a can in the cupboard.

Bill came home right on time, as usual, and walked in to kiss his wife. "Dinner will be just a little late," she said.

"No problem. I'll read the paper. Have a busy day, dear?"

She stopped, put down the knife, and looked at him. "Yes," she said, but her eyes were cold.
