



Father Knows Best

William “Bix” Bixby, Jr., (not William “Bill” Bixby, Sr., that would be his father) loved his job selling electronics at Best Buy. His father hated it.

Bix thought selling smart phones and computers and TVs and cameras was the perfect job. He loved the products - who wouldn't? - he got a decent paycheck and his swing shift schedule didn't interfere with his morning painting. If he got up at the right time, and had breakfast with Sarah before she went to work, most days the light was perfect in his spare-bedroom studio by time he settled in to work.

Bill, Sr., thought his son was a thirty-five-year-old slacker-wannabe-artist who needed a real job at Bixby Development Corporation, which had built out half the town of Fremont, Arizona.

Sarah Mae Lawson, Bix' wife of two years, who kept her own last name, just wanted to put together a down-payment on one of BDC's townhouses, maybe in The Owl's Nest, BDC's newest neighborhood just outside the city limits off I-40. Bill, Sr., told her clerk/artists don't make as much as the lowest paid commission salesman at BDC, so she was of two minds about Bix' Best Buy career.

Imagine Sarah's joy when Bill, Sr., called her and offered to give them a no-downpayment, low-interest seller's contract to get into one of BDC's High-Desert-style townhouses. That way they didn't need to qualify for a bank loan. He couldn't believe he hadn't thought of it before. He told her he called her first, because maybe she could *knock some sense into our boy*.

It seemed like that should be easy until Bill, Sr., explained that it would only work if Bix quit Best Buy and came to work at BDC. Financial stability and all that.

When Bix got home from work that same day he was delirious.

"Sarah, you're not going to believe this" he said. "I'm not sure I believe it. The Sandman Cafe just asked me to put a dozen of my watercolors on the wall. Timmy Tillson is a manager there. You know, my best friend from senior year. He saw my Facebook page and *loved* that one I did of Birdman's Bluff. This could be the beginning of something."

"That's cool, Bix" she said. "Maybe I can help you choose the ones to hang. You know your dad called me today. He says we can move into The Owl's Nest, to a place of our own, no down-payment, no bank loan. You just have to go help him at BDC. He needs you, Bix."

"Sarah," he said, "we've talked about this. He really wants me to be his clone, get focused on the perks and the money, like he is. It's like a religion with him and he has to convert me. Did you know he went to art school at ASU, won the Senior Prize, then tossed the whole thing into the shitter when grandpa died and he had to take over at BDC? He says it's the best thing that ever happened to him."

"Sorry, babe," he said, "but no effing way. I'm getting a raise in six-months, your boss at Bitterman and Bitterman always gives you a Christmas raise. We can do this on our own. I like things the way they are."

"Bix," she said, "if it's like every other year our two raises put together might finally be enough to upgrade our phones. I wish you wouldn't be so stubborn."

The next day she called Bill, Sr., and asked if a woman would be welcome at BDC.

"That's a great idea, Sarah," he said. "Lanny Mayhew is a woman and she's our top salesperson. A real go-getter. You'd be great at sales. But I really need Bix, too. No reason you couldn't be the first step, though.

"Tell you what, I'll give you a guaranteed base salary that's at least five-percent more than you're making at that shyster law firm, for a year, before we shift you to straight commission."

"Maybe between the two of us we can put the voodoo on your daydreamy husband until he comes in out of fantasy land," he said. "The

day he does that is the day BDC starts building your dream house. Bix just needs a new dream.“

“Don’t tell Bix I said this, honey,” he said, “but I stopped in to see his watercolors at the Sandman. They’re not bad. I can see why he loved art school, there’s some talent there, but I bet I could find twenty amateur painters in this little town who are just as good.”

Sarah didn’t even tell Bix she was quitting Bitterman and Bitterman. It felt weird to keep it a secret, but she told herself she’d just turn it into a surprise. Call him up from BDC the first day she worked there and have him pick her up for lunch. *Perfect.*

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Her first morning at BDC was fantastic. Everyone was so friendly and welcoming, so eager to help her. Especially Bad Bobby Ballou. *What a character!* When she asked Phyllis, the receptionist, how he got that nickname, Phyllis warned her about him, called him Trouble with a capital T, but the good kind of trouble.

When Bad Bobby offered to take her to lunch at the Sandman, to celebrate her first day, she said Yes so fast it surprised her.

When they got there she showed Bobby Bix’ paintings. All but one of them had a *SOLD* sign. *Wow.* He got a hundred-twenty-bucks for a couple of them, at least seventy-five for the rest. *Wow.*

“These are good, Sarah,” said Bobby. “Maybe I’ll buy that one that hasn’t sold, the one with the movie theatre. I love movies.”

“Oh,” she said, “you don’t have to do that. It’s just a hobby for Bix. Don’t feel like you have to.”

They were just starting dessert when Bix came in. He didn’t see them at first, he was caught up talking to his manager friend. After some hugging and back slapping Bix found a table on the far side of the room from them. They were almost ready to leave and stop by his table when he got up suddenly and headed their way.

“What the hell, Sarah,” he said. “What are you doing here and who is your friend?”

She was speechless for a full half-minute before Bad Bobby jumped in.

“Hey, Bix. Bobby Ballou,” he said, and stuck out his hand. Bix ignored it. “It’s a pleasure to meet the artist,” Bobby said, “I work in the sales department. Sarah brought me over here to show off your paintings.”

“Sales department?” Bix said. “Since when does a law firm have a sales department?”

“Bix,” Sarah said, “I’m working at BDC starting today. I wanted to surprise you.”

“Oh, you surprised me, alright,” Bix said. He turned and walked out of the cafe.

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When Bix went to work at BDC he thought of it as self-defense. He figured he could keep an eye on Sarah and Bad Bobby. As it turned out, Bill, Sr., had him working out of a small office on the third floor. The sales offices were on the first floor, so he rarely saw Sarah after he kissed her good-bye in the morning and climbed the stairs to face his row of computers and scanners and printers.

Bill, Sr., told him how much he appreciated having *a real pro* in charge of the IT department. He also told him that working some overtime, maybe half-days on Saturdays, maybe one or two Sundays, was what it took to *make shit happen around here*.

Stopping by after work, to see the new house take shape, made Sarah so happy he didn’t tell her how he turned down an offer to make more paintings for a group show at The Artful Dodger.

He didn’t tell her that using every afternoon after work, and the remnants of Saturday and Sunday, to look at carpeting or paint samples, or shop for appliances, or look at landscaping plants, made him feel anxious and numb. He did his best to choose carefully between *cotton* and *honeymilk* and *china white* for the interior walls. After all, he was a painter.

He didn’t tell her when he dumped all his painting gear into a black plastic garbage bag one Saturday morning before work and dropped it off at the county dump. How before he drove away he jumped up and down on the bag until he sprained an ankle.

When Bill, Sr., took Sarah and him to lunch at the Sandman, for their six-month anniversary at BDC, Bill, Sr., and Sarah were so busy talking about hardwood floors they didn’t notice when he got up to look at the new exhibition of collages on the walls.

When he sat back down, they had already ordered. Sarah had ordered for him. “I want you to try the salad plate,” she said. “You don’t eat enough vegetables.”

Bill, Sr., reached over and put a hand on his back. “Listen to your wife, Bix,” he said. “She’s one smart cookie. Look how your lives have

changed in the last six months. You're a real grownup now," he said, and laughed. "When she came to work for me, so the two of you would finally have a real life ... that's what I call love.

"It doesn't hurt to listen to your old man once in awhile, either, Bix. Sometimes father does know best."

When the waitress brought their plates of kale and quinoa and arugula, and the flax seed and kidney beans, bell peppers and almonds, with the balsamic vinegar and oil, he took a few bites and realized he should have ordered the mac-and-cheese like he usually did.

He supposed he could learn to like the salad plate. If it made Sarah happy.

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