



THE CHOICE

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Sheila heard a squeak outside the door and tensed. While her smile tightened, the chattering pre-schoolers at her feet didn't seem to notice. Good. She didn't want them to know the fear that lurked inside.

Ever since yesterday when she made her stand clear, she wondered how long before she'd be called to account for standing up for what she considered her rights and the rights of the children who gazed up at her with such trust--a trust she could not betray. Could she?

The thought of the bills sitting in a pile on her oak desk at home made her uneasy. How far could she push this without losing her job? She couldn't afford to lose this job. A firing on a resume left a black mark not easily overlooked.

The doorknob rattled, but Sheila kept her focus on the children. She was much too paranoid. Sheesh! She'd worked at this pre-school for what? Four years now? She'd stated when her little Johnny was in this very class. He was a big second grader now.

Sheila wanted him to grow up as brave and faithful as his father so recently lost in some obscure outpost in Iraq. She swallowed the lump in her throat. She would raise their son with the principles that guided his father--faith, family, and country.

"Sheila." The tall, almost gaunt red head caught her attention. Jenna.

"Yes, what is it." Sheila hated being interrupted while working with "her" kids. Yet the smirk on Jenna's face caused a strange reaction somewhere in her middle. For no reason Sheila could name, Jenna disliked her.

Sheila repeated. "Yes,"

"Take it down."

For a moment, Sheila had no clue until her gaze followed Jenna's to the poster on the wall.

"Take it down. Now."

Sheila's first instinct was to tell the woman precisely what she thought of her and of her dictate. Her second thought made her hesitate. She couldn't afford to lose this job. Jenna,

after all, was just following orders, though her timing, Sheila guessed, was geared to cause her the most humiliation possible.

Turning slowly, Sheila reached a shaking hand toward the poster. Behind her the silence of her kids caused her to glance back. Twelve pairs of eyes stared at her. Hadn't she carefully taught them the words and what they meant?

Their eyes reminded her of another pair of eyes, deep blue eyes that shone with trust. Those eyes echoed the blue of his father's eyes now closed in death. He died to preserve this very freedom.

Job or no job, he could not and would not do this. With growing confidence, she faced Jenna. Her demeanor seemed to surprise, even confuse, the intimidating taller woman.

"No." Sheila straightened her shoulders. "My husband died for this country and for the right to express the words on that poster--every single one of them. Secondly, if you have a problem with me or my teaching, wait until after class."

Jenna's cheeks flamed. "Your job..."

"You don't decide that, Jenna. Besides, I'll have something to say about legally protected rights."

The look Jenna shot her as she stormed from the room promised retribution. Yet, Sheila felt a sense of quiet peace inside. Her job might well be on the line, but she had not let down her husband, Johnny or the children sitting on the floor--her charges still, for now, at least.

Proverbs 3:6-7 flashed in her mind. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. God would take care of her and Johnny as He promised. He always had.

With a smile, Sheila asked the children to stand. "Okay, remember what's on that poster? Let's recite together. **I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation under God, indivisible, With Liberty and Justice for all.** "