

## Okay, so...what was in the envelope?

From the author, Stephanie Bond:

When I wrote the manuscript for *Kill the Competition*, it was my intention for Belinda to put her past behind her, most notably demonstrated when she returned the envelope her almost-husband Vince Whittaker sent her, unopened—after all, the opposite of love is indifference.

When I turned in the manuscript, my editor and I discussed, as usual, any revisions to the story she wanted me to make. At the end, she said there was just one more thing—she understood why I'd had Belinda return the envelope unopened, but it was driving her crazy not knowing what was inside.

Quite honestly, I hadn't given much thought to its contents except, like Belinda, to mull the possibilities. And I resisted the idea of writing a scene showing Belinda opening the envelope—my loyalty was to my character, and frankly, it wasn't in her best interests to open that envelope! Sure, she might learn its contents at some future date, in a conversation with her mother or a friend, or even if Vince himself called her at some point, but regardless, it was more important that she take an emotional stand and send that envelope back *unopened*.

Yet I couldn't ignore the outcry from various other people in the publishing house who read the unpublished manuscript and even my own writing critique partners who demanded to know, "What was in the envelope?" So I suggested to my editor that we run a contest and let the readers decide. At the end of the original printed book, readers were asked to choose among several possibilities for what could've been in the envelope, and I promised to write an epilogue around the most popular answer showing the contents being revealed. Readers voted, and the votes for tallied. So without further ado, here's the answer to "*What was in the envelope?*"

## Epilogue

VINCE WHITTAKER loosened his tie with one hand as he pulled his little sports car into the sloping driveway toward the redbrick ranch. Unbidden, the memory of him and Belinda first pulling into the driveway came rushing back.

“What do you think?” he’d asked, giving her his most cajoling grin. He’d liked the house on sight and he’d already pictured them living there, had known where every piece of his furniture would go.

“I like it,” Belinda had responded, nodding and smiling.

He could tell it wasn’t exactly her taste, but he’d known that Belinda would go along with whatever he liked because she was sweet and easy-going that way. They’d never had the disagreements, the conflict, that most couples experience. At times he’d thought he would burst from the monotony of their relationship, but then he would be touched by some gentle gesture that Belinda would make simply because she loved him.

His stomach cramped. It was difficult to think about Belinda these days... so much had changed. He stopped next to the mailbox and pulled out a handful of mail, then touched the remote control on the visor and drove into one of the bays of the two-car garage. The other side sat empty... but not for long. And his beloved sports car was soon to be replaced by a minivan.

His stomach cramped again.

With another push of a button, the garage door descended. Vince gathered the stack of mail, his suit jacket and briefcase, and entered the side door to the house. For a moment he paused, his ears piqued to hear the patter of little cat feet running to greet him, then remembered for the hundredth time that Downey was with Belinda and Belinda was in Atlanta. It had been good of her to take the cat—the two females hadn’t exactly gotten along. But he couldn’t very well have kept Downey under the circumstances... the *new* circumstances.

Draping his jacket over the back of a chair, he dumped his briefcase and the mail on the hall table. He sorted through the stack, but when he saw the buff-colored envelope marked “Return to Sender” in purple felt-tipped ink, he stopped.

Belinda had written the three words herself... the neat capital letters were her trademark accountant’s penmanship. He smirked. And the purple felt-tipped ink was a subtle hit... she was well aware of his passion for quality writing instruments. It was the crowning touch to her act of returning the envelope—he turned it over—unopened.

*Wow.*

So Belinda was finally exhibiting some spunk... good for her. Vince bit his lip hard. It appeared that Belinda Hennessey was through with him. It made his situation a little easier, but not much.

He slid his finger under the flap of the envelope, tore it open, and withdrew the card.

*Announcing the nuptials of  
Shelly Anne Beckham  
&  
Vince William Whittaker*

If Belinda hadn't heard the entire sordid story from her mother or her friend Suzanne, she would soon. She would probably loathe him, and he wouldn't blame her. He should have been honest with Belinda about why he hadn't signed the marriage license—he'd known then that Shelly was pregnant, but God help him, he'd been a coward. He'd sweated his way through the ceremony, then at the last minute, realized he couldn't put Belinda through the agony of finding out her new husband had fathered someone else's child. So he'd split, making vague excuses that undoubtedly had left Belinda feeling as if she'd done something horribly wrong.

Tucked inside the announcement he'd included a brief hand-written note—his pathetic attempt to explain himself. He owed Belinda that much. It was her pervasive goodness, her sweet, trusting face on their wedding day, that had jolted him out of boyhood and made him realize he had to take responsibility for Shelly and the baby conceived during their casual affair. But in his shame, he'd handled things badly with Belinda. She'd been blindsided, and he hated himself for it.

Another cramp almost doubled him over. Life with Shelly wasn't going to be easy, not with all her demands and neuroses and allergies, her two ill-behaved children from previous relationships, and now a baby on the way.

But he'd made his bed, and he was going to lie in it.

He grimaced. *Good God, what have I done?* The years stretched ahead of him like a sentence.

On the way to the bathroom, Vince dropped the envelope into the trash. He hoped that Belinda was doing well in Atlanta, and would find the love and happiness she deserved.

From the quiet yet unmistakable statement of the returned unopened envelope, he somehow suspected she had.

*The End*