

Betrayal

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I sat in court listening to my lawyer telling the judge why Kathy and I were getting divorced. She sat next to her lawyer dressed in a navy blue business suit, light blue shirt and a burgundy bowtie. Her long black hair was pulled behind her ears and her big blue eyes were moist. At times she glanced at me and I wondered how different our lives would have been if I hadn't walked into our apartment that rainy afternoon to change my wet suit.

"My client has reached an amicable agreement with his wife," my lawyer told the judge.

The judge dismissed the court and looked at us for a few seconds as if saying, "I'm sorry it happened."

We stood in the hallway with our lawyers. Kathy whispered something in her lawyer's ear. She nodded her head before indicating to mine that they should walk away from us.

Kathy hesitated for a second before approaching me and said, "I would like to explain what happened."

"There is nothing to talk about," I replied, wanting to get out of the courthouse. Kathy took a step toward me and tried to hug me.

"Don't," I said, putting my hand out almost touching her chest.

"I'm sorry," she said in a low voice while the tears rolled down her face, mixed with black mascara.

I walked over to my lawyer, who stood next to Kathy's watching the interaction between us, and told him, "We need to talk."

“What’s on your mind?” he asked after we reached the far corner of the hall.

“We didn’t discuss the dogs.”

“Do you want to keep one of them? I’m sure Kathy will agree.”

“We can’t separate them. It’ll stress them out. They’ve been together since they were three months old. We should have joint custody. Kathy will have them for one week and the following Sunday I’ll have them for another week. That will allow them to be together and still have both of us.”

“I have been in practice thirty years and never heard such a request. Do you have somebody who’ll be willing to bring the dogs to you?”

“Yes, my friend John, who referred me to you, will be happy to do it.”

“Did you speak with him about it?”

“Yes. He agreed. He’s also Kathy’s friend.”

“Let me speak with Kathy’s lawyer about it.”

I watched the two lawyers conferring, saw Kathy nodding her head saying ‘yes’ and knew she agreed.

My lawyer approached and said.

“Kathy is pleased. She was concerned that you’d take the Springer Spaniel who’s attached to you.”

“I have one more request.”

“What else would you like?”

“Kathy and I used to jog together in Central Park. We need to coordinate our schedules so we don’t run into each other.”

“Do you have any other requests?”

“No.”

My lawyer gave me a concerned look before he walked over to Kathy and her lawyer and I wondered if he felt the divorce had caused me to have a slight nervous breakdown. Kathy nodded her head while speaking with them and gave me a quick glance. I knew she had agreed and walked out of the courthouse feeling she was staring at my back.

I turned around and saw her wiping the tears that ran her down face with a handkerchief and felt my heart throbbing, sad that our relationship ended the way it did.

* * *

“Take your raincoat and umbrella,” Ann, my executive assistant, told me as I rushed out of the office.

“I’m late for my meeting,” I replied, running to the elevator that had just arrived, afraid that if I missed it the next one would be full of people since it was close to lunch time.

After my meeting ended, I stood in front of the Chrysler Building and saw a big crowd waiting for cabs. The sky was dark; it looked like it was going to open up any second and I told myself, *I will be better off walking since I won’t find a cab.*

I was a few blocks away from my office in Rockefeller Center when I heard the thunder above my head. The torrential rain got my suit soaked and my shoes filled with water. I kept walking fast and told myself, *I will call Ann from home, ask her to reschedule my 3pm meeting, shower, change, and work in my home office until my dinner appointment at 6 pm.*

* * *

Bella, our female Springer Spaniel, and Max, the male golden retriever, ran toward me wiggling their tails and tussled with each other trying to get my attention.

When I heard the voices coming from the bedroom I told myself, *Kathy was supposed to be at her office preparing for her board meeting tomorrow.*

I opened the door and had a sinking sensation in my stomach when I saw Kathy and Tommy naked, trying to get dressed fast.

I must be dreaming, I told myself. They stood frozen, staring at me, unable to say a word. Stunned, I turned around and left the apartment, hearing Kathy's pleading voice calling after me.

"Bobby, please don't leave."

* * *

"Mr. Smith, would you like an umbrella?" the doorman asked.

"No. I'll be fine," I replied, walking past him.

"It's pouring outside. You must take it," he said running after me with the umbrella open.

"I'm already soaked, it won't help," I told him, ignoring his concerned look. I crossed the street, entered Central Park and walked over to the pond that was Kathy's and my favorite spot where we started and ended our five-mile run in the morning. The rain cooling my burning face felt good. I looked at the ducks in the water, who didn't mind getting wet, and told myself *At least somebody is happy not minding the rain*, thinking about Kathy and Tommy's betrayal.

* * *

An hour later I returned home feeling that I had swum in a pool in my suit and shoes. Tommy was gone, Kathy was dressed in her jogging outfit, her face was pale and her hair was tied in a ponytail. We felt like strangers looking at each other.

Her voice trembled when she said, “Please change your clothes, you’re going to catch a cold.”

I didn’t bother to answer and walked to the bathroom. After I showered and dressed she tried to approach me again. I ignored her, walked into my study and called John, my lawyer, who was my roommate at Yale and told him, “I must see you right away; I’m on my way over.”

Before he had a chance to respond, I hung up the phone and walked out of my office.

“I’ll explain what happened. Please don’t leave,” Kathy pleaded while grabbing my arm before I was able to open the door. I shook her hand off, walked out and slammed the door behind me.

* * *

“John will see you in a couple of minutes,” Linda his secretary told me after she buzzed him announcing my arrival.

“What happened? I had to cancel my next appointment,” he asked, entering the reception area.

I didn’t respond, walked into his office and sat in front of his large cherry wood desk. John closed the door behind him and sat next to me.

“Are you in trouble? You don’t look good.”

“I need a divorce lawyer.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I came home early this afternoon and found Kathy and Tommy naked in the bedroom.”

* * *

Tommy and I grew up in an upper middle class neighborhood in Great Neck Long Island. Every house had a manicured lawn and a swimming pool in the backyard. Some of the neighbors had boats docked at the nearby marina, and on weekends they went fishing. In the evening the air was filled with smells of charcoal grilling fish or meat. Our parents were friends. Tommy's father was a surgeon at North Shore Hospital and his mother was a surgery room nurse. My father was a successful lawyer and my mother taught math at Adelphi University.

We were close friends and every day did our homework together. People who didn't know our families often mistook us for siblings, always seeing us together. I was a handsome outgoing boy who spoke with everybody and Tommy was reserved not getting involved in the conversation and giving short answers when he was asked a question.

* * *

We were ten years old when we first met Kathy who was our neighbor. We were playing basketball in his driveway trying to get the ball into the hoop and often missing it when she approached us.

"I'd like to join the game," she said, giving us her charming smile.

"You can't play with us," Tommy responded.

"Why?"

"Girls don't know how to play basketball."

"I can play better than both of you."

"I don't believe you."

Kathy grabbed the ball and bounced it around Tommy a few times before she threw it into the hoop, smiling at us. We were amazed it didn't bounce off. She laughed seeing the

surprised looks on our faces and for the next few minutes kept running in circles around us, laughing while bouncing the ball before throwing it into the hoop, never missing a shot.

We'll be friends, I told myself, looking at her bouncing ponytail and her graceful long legs when she jumped in the air.

“Where did you learn to play basketball?” I asked her.

“My father taught me.”

“I still don't want to play with a girl,” Tommy told her.

“If you let me play with you I'll ask my father to take the two of you camping with us.

We have a big camper that sleeps eight people. When we go camping my mother and father and I and Barney, who is our Beagle, all use it.”

* * *

At the age of seventeen we got our driver's licenses and our parents decided to buy us new cars. Kathy's parents bought her the red Honda Civic she requested, Tommy's parents bought him a sporty looking two-door silver Toyota Corolla, and my parents were going to buy me a boring Toyota Camry with a four-cylinder engine. The reason for this was the cop who stopped me when I was driving my father's Cadillac 60 miles per hour in a residential neighborhood zoned for 30 miles, and called my father about it.

When I got home he had difficulty controlling his anger and told me:

“On Saturday we'll visit the local Toyota dealership and I'll buy you a Camry.”

“I don't want it. It's an ugly family car.”

“What would you rather have?”

“I want a Saab with a sunroof.”

“All you’re going to get is the Camry. I don’t trust you driving a car with such a powerful engine.”

Not having a say in the matter, I asked Kathy and Tommy to join me the day before my parents took me to the Toyota dealership, hoping at least I’d be able to choose the color. It didn’t happen. My father gave me a warning look not to say a word when he picked an ugly bright yellow color, feeling it was an additional safety feature.

Kathy, who saw how upset I was, tried to cheer me up by saying, “The car has a big trunk. We’ll be able to go camping and store all the equipment in it.”

When we got home, she ran to her house, came back with an L.L. Bean catalog, and chose two umbrella tents so she could have her privacy and then bought camping equipment from their outdoor section.

* * *

Our relationship changed when we camped near Hunter Mountain in a small campground located on a lake. The manager, who liked Kathy, knew she preferred a particularly isolated site by the water. Whenever she called and said we were coming he assured her the campsite would be available.

I was sleeping soundly when I felt somebody touching my leg at 1:00 a.m. I woke up and saw Kathy’s smiling face. She put her finger on my lips making sure I wouldn’t wake Tommy and led me away from the tent.

Puzzled by her behavior I asked what the matter was once we were a good distance away from my tent. Instead of answering me she pointed at the full moon that left a white line on the water and kissed me on my lips. I didn’t know how to react but enjoyed it.

Kathy lifted her sweatshirt, took my hand, and put it on her firm breast. I felt the blood rushing to my head and kissed her while stroking her smooth tits feeling her nipples harden. Without saying a word she led me to her tent and got undressed. I almost tore my sweatshirt rushing to take it off. She laughed and started pulling my pants down.

After we made love we lay next to each other panting heavily and I felt my heart throbbing.

“I hope I didn’t get you pregnant,” I told her, realizing I hadn’t used a condom.

“Don’t worry. Three months ago I saw my gynecologist and he gave me birth control pills. I was waiting for the right moment to do it.”

We made love again and fell asleep in each other’s arms. The sun’s rays coming into the tent woke us up.

“I’d better go back before Tommy wakes up,” I told her, getting dressed fast. Kathy lay on her back and smiled, looking at me.

When I entered our tent I found Tommy dressed, packing his sleeping bag.

“What’s the matter?” I asked, hoping he didn’t know I had slept with Kathy.

“Nothing, I’m going home.”

I returned to Kathy’s tent and found her lying in the same position as I left her.

“Tommy knows that we slept together. He wants to go home.”

“Shit. How did he find out? We tried not to make noise.”

“I don’t know. I guess he woke up, saw I wasn’t in the tent, walked over to your tent and heard us.”

Kathy rushed out and found Tommy putting our tent in the Camry trunk.

“Please don’t be upset,” she told him.

Tommy’s eyes filled with tears as he walked over to the table and packed the Coleman grill in its box. At this point we realized that he wouldn’t change his mind and helped him pack the equipment. It was a somber drive home. Tommy sat in the back seat staring out the window not talking to us. When we parked in Kathy’s driveway he got out of the car, picked up his belongings and left without looking at us.

* * *

An hour later his mother called me.

“What happened at the campground? Tommy is upset and won’t talk.”

“We had an argument.”

“Call Tommy and make up with him. The two of you have been best friends since childhood.”

Tommy refused to speak with us and chose to go to Stanford University trying to get as far away as he could despite the fact that the three of us had been accepted to Yale University. When my mother found out she decided to get to the bottom of the matter and cross-examined me.

“Why did you upset Tommy? He chose not to go to Yale University and refuses to say why.”

“We had a big argument in the campground.”

“Make sure you don’t get Kathy pregnant.”

“Don’t worry; she takes birth control pills.”

Kathy and I kept going back to the campground, walking around the lake at night listening to the frogs, and making love in her tent. Tommy's name lay heavily on our minds but was never brought up.

* * *

Kathy drove her Civic fast from Yale all the way home looking forward to a nice Easter vacation.

"I wonder if Tommy will visit his parents," I said out loud.

"He will," I was surprised to hear her say.

"How can you be so sure?"

"I spoke with him. He promised me that he'll come."

Two days later Tommy flew home and had dinner with Kathy that night. I wondered how it had gone, and visited her first thing the next morning.

The minute she opened the door I asked:

"What did Tommy say?"

"Let's go out for a ride."

I was anxious to know what Tommy had said and asked again.

"I'll tell you later," Kathy said, heading toward the Civic. I was surprised to see her pull into the park we always used to go to with Tommy. Kathy parked the car, got out and walked over to the pond. We walked along the water's edge and I could see that she was upset.

Suddenly she stopped walking and kissed me before she said, "Tommy knows that we're lovers. When we were in the campground he had to pee, woke up and was surprised at not seeing you. He assumed you also had to go and went looking for you. When he didn't find you he

walked over to my tent and heard us. I told him that I love both of you and after we graduate we'll get married. Tommy said he understands and agrees we should stay friends."

Did Kathy sleep with him last night? I asked myself, feeling a pain in the pit of my stomach, not believing he just changed his mind.

That evening we had dinner with Tommy. He behaved as if nothing was wrong, kissed Kathy on her cheek and shook my hand, confirming my suspicions.

* * *

We were in Yale graduate school when Kathy suggested that we should get married after we received our degrees.

She can't be sleeping with Tommy if she wants to marry me, I told myself, hoping I was right. Tommy was attending Stanford University medical school at that time and kept writing to us.

When he came home for the Christmas holiday we had dinner when Kathy told him.

"I have good news for you. We'll be getting married in the spring."

Tommy smiled, bent over, kissed her cheek, shook my hand and said, "I'll be your best man at the wedding."

He must have found a girl friend and fallen in love with her, I told myself, hoping nothing was going on between them.

Tommy stood next to me at the wedding, stared at Kathy and tears formed in his eyes.

I stared at him and told myself, *He's still in love with Kathy. Does she sleep with him?*

“The three of us should be photographed together,” Kathy told me, squeezing my hand. Before I could respond she put one arm in mine and the other in Tommy’s and had a brilliant smile looking into the camera.

Kathy put the photograph by our bedside and looked happy when she told me.

“My wedding was the happiest day of my life. When I wake up in the morning I want to look at my best friends whom I love.”

Her remark alarmed me but I forced myself to give her the benefit of the doubt, telling myself we had been best friends since the age of ten.

“Why don’t you have a girlfriend?” I kept asking Tommy every time he visited home and we had dinner.

“I haven’t found the right woman. The ones I meet want to marry me because I’m a doctor.”

Kathy smiled and kissed him.

“One day you’ll find somebody who loves you not because you’re a doctor.”

“You’re right. Until then I have the two of you as my best friends.”

Are they having an affair? I asked myself, hoping I was wrong and the reason he couldn’t get attached to another woman wasn’t because he loved Kathy.

* * *

On the anniversary of our divorce, John brought the dogs for my weekly custody visit, gave me a letter and said, “Kathy asked me to tell you that she loves you and that the letter will explain what happened.”

I put the letter on my desk and felt my stomach tie in a knot. John, realizing I wasn't going to read the letter, told me:

"I'm going to leave now. Call me if you need to talk after you read the letter."

"Please stay for dinner. I don't want to be alone. It will give me a chance to think about whether I want to read the letter."

"Kathy cried when she made me promise I'd convince you to read it."

"It might take me a few days before I'm able to do it. Did Kathy speak with Tommy?"

"No. She said he accepted a teaching position at Stanford University and hasn't spoken with her since he left."

John seeing that I didn't touch my food told me:

"Drink the wine. It will help you digest the food."

"I'm not hungry. I didn't expect to hear from Kathy again."

* * *

After John left I entered my apartment and obsessed about whether I should read the letter or not. Bella and Max gave me a warm greeting, and then started scratching, making me realize they needed to go for their nightly walk. Despite the fact that I wanted to get back home they pulled on their leashes and stopped to say hello to every dog they met.

Back at home I sat in my study staring at the letter, unable to open it.

Should I burn it? I asked myself, feeling my heart throbbing when I held the match box.

My hand shook when I pulled the letter opener out of the drawer and slit the flap open.

Dear Bobby,

It's been a year since we got divorced and I have been thinking about you every day. After you finish reading this letter you'll understand what happened. I always loved you and Tommy and keep remembering the basketball game that got us together. I don't know why I chose to sleep with you rather than with Tommy in the campground. I guess it was because I had fun with you while he was always serious and withdrawn. I was sad when he chose not to speak with us and discussed what happened with my mother. She told me that I was in love with two men who are my best friends and I had to choose whom I wanted to have the affair with.

Tommy came home for the Easter vacation because I told him that I loved and missed him. The night he arrived we had dinner and ended up in a motel. I was thrilled and guilty about having an affair with the two of you. Tommy was happy that I slept with him and accepted the fact that I loved both of you. I kept having conflicts about it but couldn't bring myself to choose. I haven't heard from Tommy since he left for Stanford and I ended up losing both of you. I would like to meet with you and discuss our relationship.

Let's be realistic. In the back of your mind you always knew that I slept with Tommy but couldn't bring yourself to leave me. I don't think I will ever see him again. He was torn betraying you. Before Tommy left, he told me that something died in him losing you as a friend when he saw you standing in the doorway staring at us.

I don't know if it's possible but I would like to try to heal the past and build a new future. The three of us were friends who loved each other and paid a dear price for it. You always told me that emotions have no logic. I never understood why. After we got divorced I realized that it was the way you justified to yourself the fact that you and Tommy were my lovers.

The stains you see on the letter are my tears. I was going to re-write the letter but chose to send it as it is.

No matter what you decide to do I'll always love you.

Kathy

* * *

I kept reading the letter, telling myself that Kathy was right that I knew what was happening but couldn't bring myself to do anything about it.

Should we get back together and start a new life as she suggested? Or should I find somebody else? I asked myself over and over. I knew why Tommy wouldn't speak with Kathy. He felt he had betrayed our friendship, yet couldn't help himself and kept sleeping with her. She was the only woman that we both loved.

Bella and Max were lying by my feet looking at me. Bella, who favored me, had a sad look in her eyes as if she felt my agony.

Springer Spaniels always look sad, I told myself.

Max, who favored Kathy, looked at me and I felt he was winking his eye as if saying,

“You knew about Kathy and Tommy but couldn't do anything about it because you loved them both.”

I remembered the causal affairs I'd had after we got divorced, walking away every time they got attached to me and asked for a commitment.

What should I do?" I asked Bella and Max for the one-hundredth time. *Should I start a new life with Kathy whom I love, or settle for somebody I don't love?* They didn't answer and looked at me with their sorrowful eyes.