

Call Me Kathryn

I'm going to imagine for a moment that I'm my perpetrator finding love.

Speed dating wasn't what I thought it would be. I didn't imagine meeting *the one* over a three-minute introduction. The Magnolia Gastropub and Brewery smelled of yeast and hops and I was strictly a Tanqueray and tonic, whiskey sour, captain and diet sort of girl. Beer made my stomach cramp and the morning-after beer shits weren't exactly a good start if one of these guys was actually going to take me home. The first three men I *dated* were a jock, a nerd, and a masochist in that order. I wasn't trying to stereotype, but thought I had a knack for labeling on the fly. When a guy introduced himself as a sports fanatic, a gamer, or just in San Francisco for the close proximity to Alcatraz, it didn't take a clinical psychologist to determine what sort of person he was. I took a swig of stout and grimaced not only at the taste but at the wet ring on the table. Tonight and at home this was all getting posted online.

I stood up and smoothed my sundress of any wrinkles then offered my hand. "Hi, my name is Kathryn."

"That's a lovely name," the guy said. "It's refreshing to hear something with class and antiquity all rolled into one. I just dated Mercedes back there." He motioned with his head behind him to a girl with a homely face and a knockout body dressed for a nightclub lounge.

I pondered whether antiquity was his way of saying my name was old-fashioned.

"I've always loved my name," I said. "Just don't shorten it to Kat or Cadi." We shook hands and I smiled, but not too wide. I didn't want my oversized gums to win a battle against my

teeth. At one point I was considering jaw surgery to rectify the problem. At least I didn't tower over this guy. He was tall.

"I remember going through a phase of hating my name," he said. "I thought only children were named Brad and that it wasn't adult enough." He placed his nearly full glass of pale ale across from mine.

"Not me. I guess I'm different that way. I feel for you. Brad reminds me of those fasteners that hold papers together."

"The only brass I use is on my knuckles."

"That sounds like a challenge." I slammed my beer, drinking it in close to three seconds. A personal new record. "Why don't I grab us both a drink?"

"But mine is still full?"

"And I'm betting I only have to buy you two beers to get you to come home with me," I said. "Am I wrong?"

"Who are you?" he asked.

Brad told everyone his version of how we met, but one thing was always consistent with my side of the story – my pick-up line about the two beers. He always said that's when he knew I was *the one* because of the bold confidence I exuded. I started spending the night at his apartment. One night turned into two, two into three. It was better than finding different parking places for my Econoline van around the city, where I would sometimes awake to a cop banging

on the window and asking for my ID. I was starting to like living the easy life without having to find public bathrooms and showers. Then an omen came, a plush black box flew into my lap.

“I was too excited to be creative.” Brad stepped back from the loveseat and put the knuckle of his pointer finger in between his teeth. “Once you said yes, I knew I needed the ring.”

I was trying to slip the ring on my finger but it was jamming up over my knuckle.

“I believe my answer was, sure, why not?” I said, not possibly considering that he was serious when he proposed at that hippy dippy band we saw the week before. He was wasted and I was half in the bag. “I think I may need a size or two bigger, but it’s nice. I really like the design.” I spun the plain white gold band around in a circle, but it remained the same and reminded me a little of a ball bearing. Brad came to my assistance, with a pained expression as if it were his finger with the circulation being cut off.

“Incompetent jeweler,” he said. “I told her your height and weight. Hope you don’t mind.”

He must have known he was transgressing on a woman’s sacred ground.

“Did you tell her what color panties I wear too? That I like thongs.”

“Hot pink granny panties,” Brad said. “That’s what I told her. And from that, she said an eight should be your ring size. I should have given her your shoe size too.” He said and looked at my wide feet stuffed into dainty white pumps. I crossed the tips as I imagined Dorothy did in the Wizard of Oz, before she started clicking the heels. I wasn’t going back to Michigan that was for sure. I didn’t want that, not ever.

“Are you calling my feet big?”

“You’ve got the feet and the height for playing hoops,” Brad said.

“I did play varsity. Nice deduction.” I pulled my mocha painted toenails up close to my chest. “You know this is the third time I’ve been proposed to?”

“But he’s never been me. You’ve never said yes.”

“I’ve never been married, true.” I wiggled my toes and the sunlight coming through the bay window made the glitter sparkle. “It’s a little more than the yes and no answer. Tell me who do you see right now.” I grabbed his shoulders and squared them off to me. His eyes left my face and started trailing down my long brown hair to the headlights on beneath my dress. The nipples always erect and ready for action.

“The woman I fell in love with,” he said. “The one who bought me three beers.”

“You’ll never let me forget that, will you?”

“I’ve never been with anyone like you. It’s as if you’re part of me. You know my heart, thoughts, body, and I don’t just mean that night with the hot candlewax.”

“There might be a reason for that,” I said, not wanting to call him out on his less than poetic description of love. “And the candlewax was your idea. I think you scarred me in the process. Do you want to play a game that might be helpful if we’re thinking of getting married? It’s called, Have You Ever?”

“And this is your alternative to premarital counseling?”

“Consider it a prenup. Normally you would play with a group of people but we can play just you and me. I’ll start.” I folded my legs into a half lotus and made my back erect. “Have you ever eaten dog food?”

Brad screwed up his face. “Once when I was a kid.”

“You don’t have to explain or justify. You can raise your hand and we’ll take turns asking the questions. In a group of people everyone raises their hand until a question is asked where only one person raises their hand. Then they have to do the walk of shame to the center of the circle and they ask the next question until they get one out of the group.”

“Have you ever wished your parents were dead?” Brad asked and I raised my hand. Why lie about it? He wasn’t going to meet them.

“I see we’re still regressing to childhood,” I said. “Have you ever peed standing up?”

“Why waste your question?” he said. I raised my hand along with him. I had to be honest, it was my downfall. “That has to get your legs all wet.” Brad leaned over and felt my smooth shaven legs.

“No, honey, only you can do that,” I said.

“I don’t really like games.” Brad plucked a dart off the carpet from a pile of remote controls and dried spaghetti. At least he wasn’t asking me to marry him in the hopes of getting a maid. He made a quick bullseye on the board behind my head.

“One more. Have you ever wished you were someone else and did it?”

“Did what?” Brad asked.

“Raped someone else?”

“Your name isn’t really Kathryn, is it?”

“And you’re not answering the question. No, it really is. I claimed it, oh, about nine years ago.”

“Claimed it? Did you find it in a lost and found box?”

“I like to think of myself as having found it. I’ve always loved the name Kathryn since I was a little kid. Like you said it’s classy, timeless. So as an adult why shouldn’t I take it as my own?”

“Because it’s not on your birth certificate,” Brad said.

“It’s on my social security card and my license. Do you want the skinny or not?”

“I thought you just gave it to me and broke your own rule.”

“They’re my rules to break. There is a little more.” I held a small space between my pointer finger and thumb. “I almost was married once. I was *this close*.” I again held the space with Brad’s head framed in between. An old *Kids in the Hall* trick of squishing heads. “Me and my partner were homecoming king and queen at Michigan Technological University, where we went to school. We were both big members in the Greek scene on campus.”

“Funny, you never struck me as a sorority girl. You’re too smart for that.”

“You know, I never really liked the sorority girls myself.”

“Why didn’t you marry your frat boy then?”

“I wish you wouldn’t call him that.” I pulled out a cigarette and saw Brad looking at the small wrinkles around my mouth. I had been a smoker for some years then quit. He’d never seen me pick up a cigarette until this point. “Like I said, we were close and had even gone through the engagement party and telling our parents. We started shopping for the gown and tux.”

“He wouldn’t let you pick out your own dress.” Brad snatched his cigarette back out from my hand and took a puff.

“It’s a little more complex, I’m not a sorority girl in my heart. Dresses matter and yet they don’t. To make you understand I may need to go back farther. Please don’t judge me.”

“What makes you think I would do that?” Brad said.

“Experience and your face. But mainly experience.” I breathed in long. All of these guys were such liars. A pair of sunglasses was all he needed now.

“Om”

“I’m going to ignore that.” I was getting sick of retelling my story that always ended the same. It was the beginning of my sophomore year and me and some friends had just rented a place together close to campus, we called it *the house*. I told Brad in a voice like it was a trailer for a summer thriller just to pizzazz it up a little. All of us that lived there belonged to different frats. Tau Kaps, SigPi, SigEps, and they were mainly our suppliers of the usual –nugs, acid, shrooms. Brad was pretty tame but he knew I had experimented in the past. I started in for another cigarette and fumbled all over the coffeetable with my nails trying to tap a Morse code greeting for a lighter. Brad pulled the lighter from his pocket and lit it for me.

We had something a lot of other people wanted. Some local girls started coming and hanging out, taking three-foot bong hits. I gave one girl four rounds of the three-footer and then some flaming shots of Everclear. I kept closing my left eye to block the smoke I was exhaling, while talking through it. I hated smoking. It always reminded me of Becky from the other welfare house. Her mom was bi, but that wasn't what interested me as a kid about her. It was the hole in her throat. She had a windshield wiper plunged through it at sixteen and sounded like a monster. I can still imitate her voice and see the smoke curling out of her throat.

But the girl I was talking about, she took everything in stride, was a real champ. She told me she was sixteen and her friends said the same thing, so I believed her. I was trying to blow away the memory of the girl, *incidentally me*, behind the loveseat, unsuccessfully, when I exhaled. She wanted to wait for someone who loved her. The next morning I bragged to the rest of my roommates that she was a virgin and I had the bloody sheets to prove it. It was a rite among us to collect virgins like kids collect marbles. It made me one of them in their eyes.

Brad was looking unsettled at this point. His brows were furrowed. "I'm not sure how these things work." He said.

He looked like he was trying to block the image of me with a strap-on popping some teenager's cherry. He was still in denial.

"The girl was lying, that's how it works," I said. "She was only fifteen."

Brad tilted one corner of his mouth up towards the ceiling and shrugged his shoulders. Obviously, statutory rape wasn't a concern for him. Maybe he had never had the opportunity. "The fifteen year old girl started dating another Chemistry major at the University. Same age as me and it was a small campus. He cornered me after one of our classes. He started screaming. Do

you have any idea what you did to her, you piece of shit! And then he struck some sort of Shitaru defensive stance like I was going to brawl with him. I said to him, look into my eyes and tell me you can see that I'm sorry."

I grabbed Brad by the shoulders at this point and forced him to look into me with his blue-grey eyes. "I wanted her boyfriend to see the inside of my head, my past, my everything. That I loved her, I loved every girl I ever met. That being with her was like reconnecting back to a piece of me." I pulled up my dress sleeve. "I even tattooed the name of the first girl I was ever with on my arm." I said.

All that was left of the knife carving was a slight bumped up letter K. "I lived my life through them," I said, "I showed the guy my scar and he looked at me and said, I don't see anything. Nothing. He dropped his karate chop arms. You're a fucking rapist." I pulled my sleeve down. "And he hocked a loggie into my eyes."

"That was the moment I knew I wouldn't live this lie forever." I snuffed my cigarette on the underside of my pump. I got up and moved from the loveseat to the lazyboy. Brad's forehead was becoming calm again.

"Shouldn't you have told me this a little sooner, like before we got intimate?"

"You would run," I said.

"But wasn't that my choice. You took your choice. Don't I deserve the right to make a decision?"

“That’s what we’re doing right now.” I put the ring back in the plush box, stood up and placed it in Brad’s palm. “I stood behind the homecoming queen watching her spin and transform in front of the mirror in her wedding gown. That’s all I ever wanted.”

“Do you want to know what I think you wanted?” Brad asked. “I think you wanted to absolve your guilt for raping a girl by becoming her.”

“This started way before her,” I felt I was quickly losing control of the narrative. “I grew up going to Catholic school,” I said as if this should be an opener to explaining everything. The suffering hours locked away in my bedroom and at school paying penance.

“Why no tears?” Brad picked up another dart and was stabbing it without any real malice into his palm like I was somehow supposed to respond. “What are you Kathryn? You’ve got the hardware but not the software. You can’t have a baby.”

“There’s always adoption,” I said.

“I never said I wanted one. I’m just saying that you don’t bleed once a month. The box of tampons you put in the bathroom never change. Three missing. No more, no less.”

“You count my tampons?” I asked marveling at this new level of snoopiness I was uncovering.

“I take out the garbage. There’s never any applicators in there, no pads.”

“Alright Master Poirot, are there any other mysteries you’d like to solve?” I asked.

“What about forgiveness?”

I didn't answer. I was no stranger to the AA twelve step program, forever in a cycle of relapse and recovery. I left Brad with the box in his lap and put the key in the ignition of my Econoline. Vans are nice that way, an instant home on wheels. This time I was driving farther than a river in the Redwoods to crash. The girl's memory was dragging my ass back to Michigan. I knew she would go back home after leaving. No one can leave Michigan and survive on their own for long without crawling back to the quiet shores of mini inland freshwater bodies that feel like a multitude of peaceful seas.

Three days of steady driving and I was back in the flatlands. I stalked her with the help of my iphone and public wifi. Michigan was getting progressive on me. There she was on Facebook without any privacy settings, but her picture was just that of some fluffy clouds and a child's finger pointing up to them. I'm sure she looked the same, long brown hair but shorter than me. Hmm, still single and a master's student at the same university where I met her. She was taking her sweet old time.

I knocked on the door and tried to smooth the wrinkles out of my linen pants. But linen won't budge. I knocked again and a man opened the door. He didn't say anything, but his eyes looked familiar.

"Hi, my name is," I said.

"I know who you are Kathryn," the man said. "I've been following your story online."

This is where I imagine I'm my perpetrator's avenger.

He lit a cigarette. His eyes were a blue-grey that shifted with the cloud's shadows. Then he looked up and down the street and leaned close to me and stood on his tiptoes to reach my ear.

“But *have you ever* had a sister who was raped?” He smiled at me then and I was completely confused and repulsed by his dragon breath.

“Is your sister home?” I said. I just wanted to get rid of this heaviness in my chest and I was feeling a little loopy from driving on no sleep. Nothing made sense.

“You already met my brother and now you want my sister too. You are some devil.”

“I’m Kathryn. Not who you think I am.”

“Call you what you will. I know you honey. I know your body, your mind, your soul. Kathryn with a K for Kelly worn on the sleeve of her skin. The first girl you ever loved.”

He reached over and pulled up my sleeve and ran his fingers over my scar. I never met the girl’s brother, but this was not what I was expecting. There wasn’t a glimmer of malice for a man whose sister had been raped. He was playing with me, fucking with me. Something was wrong with this guy.

“Too bad the only woman I ever loved was such a birdbrain,” he said and let my sleeve drop. “You’ve got one more arm and one more initial to carve in.”

“Can I talk to her or not?” I asked.

“Sure, I’ll give her the message, seeing as I’m her keeper.”

“Tell her that I’m sorry,” I said.

I tried. I was feeling a little better and had plans to stalk her house later and get a chance to speak with her to see if she would actually forgive me. To look into her eyes. It was my signature line, my only move. I turned to leave and the bastard whistled after me. I turned

around and he looked me up and down. A cross between genuine desire and looking for a hot piece of ass. I felt the heat rise in my face.

“Aren’t you going to ask for my name? I’ll give you a hint, it starts with a D. Or does it end with one, or both?”

He knew how to stop me. I knew Michigan was a bad idea. Ice storms and humidity. Home is a sticky place filled with old ghosts. “You don’t have the right,” I hissed. “My name is Kathryn motherfucker.” I hadn’t fought a man in over ten years and here I was seeing red. I started running fast, a couple of steps and I was on top of him. He rolled up his sleeve and showed me a decent bicep cut with a scraggly letter D.

“Look into my eyes and tell me, who am I?” he said and started laughing deep and far too gaily for tussling on the ground.

The world was a he said, I said blitz. There they were clear shining love. Blue-grey eyes. I didn’t answer. I had just fought myself out from behind the image of the queen wearing the wedding gown. I stood in front of the mirror naked, with breasts, broad shoulders, a laser hair removed head-to-toe body, and no hips. I saw myself reach up and place my hand on her shuddering shoulder and the wings on my back, my lovely hairless back, enveloped the crying girl. *Something like that. I didn’t know who I was anymore, much less him, and I was still in Michigan.*