

Switches

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A wedding: 1:00 P.M., Saturday, in early May. Wispy clouds dot a pearlescent blue sky.

The florist had already come and gone, leaving the old granite church tastefully decorated: A mixture of garlands and bouquets were harmoniously blended with the stately architectural details of the granite edifice. Silks and linens were woven into the floral arrangements that complimented the finely hand-crafted hardwoods of the interior.

The bride's party was the first to arrive, for she and her entourage, as compared to the groom and his entourage, had much more complicated and time-consuming sartorial considerations. Not too much later, the groom's party arrived, and taking up occupancy in another part of the church, made certain that the tradition/superstition of keeping the bride and groom from seeing each other was scrupulously maintained. However, this did not prevent several individuals, of both camps, from sneaking away from their respective group, in order to engage in the consuming of alcohol and the exchanging of gossip about the events of the previous night's bachelor and bachelorette parties.

These ancillary activities were simply and easily accomplished because most of the members of both entourages were well acquainted with one another. They all were either kin-related, or had attended the same colleges, or worked at the same businesses, or had hung-out in the same hangouts, or partied with the same crowd, or, in some instances, had shared the same lovers—although not usually at the same time; but, on occasion, even that level of shared intimacy had occurred.

All in all, everyone was anticipating a truly festive event. Well, everyone except Jarred. His presence had been expected, but only he and one other person knew the true purpose of his being in attendance; for he had been dispatched by a specific party, in order to perform a specific act, that sought to achieve a specific outcome.

Thus, while the groom's party was in its assigned room, changing into their formal wear, Jarred approached Ty, the groom, and he asked him to come out into the hallway, where the two of them could have a brief, private, one-on-one conversation.

Once they were out in the hallway, Jared began with, "You *know* he's *not* coming. He's just sitting at home crying his eyes out."

"If that's what you say he's doing, then I suppose that that's what he's doing," Ty dryly responded. "As you can see, I've made other plans."

“I never thought that *you* would be so cold, Ty.”

“Look, the ‘thing’ with Greg is history, and I’m going on with my life.” He paused, then asked, “So. Is that it? Are you through?”

“Just one question.”

“What?”

“Does Kat (short for Kathleen) know that you were in a gay relationship?”

“Of course she knows, but she also knows that it’s over.”

“I see. So, doesn’t she see you as being, like even, ‘bi’?”

“Nope. And neither do *I*. I’m going straight, and I’m going to *stay* straight.”

“You know, being gay isn’t like... like...one day you’re driving a Buick, and then one day, you’re *not* driving a Buick anymore. There’s a little more to it than *that*, and I thought that you knew it, but I guess that I was wrong about *you*.”

“Yeah, well, you were wrong. Okay? Now, can I go back and finish getting dressed?”

“Y’know, Ty, sometimes you can be such a pig.”

Ty didn’t even bother to reply; he just turned and went back into the room where he and his party were changing. And even though they were in a church, when Ty opened the door, a whiff of cigarette smoke, the sounds of muted laughter and clinking champagne glasses spilled out into the hallway.

As Ty entered the room, Jarred turned and walked down the hallway towards the green-lettered “Exit” sign. He exited the building and got into the white 1963 Buick convertible that was parked way off in one corner of the church parking lot. Once inside the Buick, Ty turned to Greg and said, “I told him that you were ‘at home crying your eyes out’. He *wasn’t* moved.”

Greg carefully daubed at the corner of each of his eyes. His eyes were only lightly tearing, but he didn’t want his mascara to run. He hissed, “That bitch!” Greg daubed some more—mostly for effect—and said, “I’m going in there and face him. Make him see me.”

Jarred pleaded, “Honey, don’t grovel. He’s not worth it.”

Greg reached over, touched Jarred on the cheek, and said, “You’re sweet to say so because it means that you’re taking my side, but yes, I’m going to go grovel, and it’s because *I* think he’s worth it.”

Jarred shook his head and resigned, “I guess you gotta do what you gotta do.”

Greg said, “I suppose so.” Then, he pulled down the visor, daubed his eyes one more time, and observed, “I look a mess, don’t I?”

“No, honey, you look just fine.”

“My eyes are puffy. Shouldn’t I touch up my foundation, my mascara?”

“Hell no! I should look so good.”

“You’re really sweet. You know that? I wish that I wasn’t so in love with him, then maybe I could fall in love with you, but you and I just aren’t fated that way, y’know?”

“Yes, I know. You and I love each other, but our love lacks that certain spark. It’s a shame, but that’s life. So. Go in there, and fight for the man you love!”

Greg growled. They giggled. Greg got out of the car and entered the church through the back door.

Greg walked up to the door of the room where the groom’s party was located. He could hear the sound of voices coming through the door. He felt hot and cold at the same time. He felt dizzy. He felt flushed. His heart was beating faster than normal. He reached down, twisted the doorknob, and opened the door. When he entered the room, everyone stopped talking or drinking or laughing or whatever it was that they were doing. All present, except one or two, knew *exactly* who Greg was and *exactly* what the nature of his relationship was to/with Ty. If the proverbial pin were to have dropped, its fall would have resounded like an empty 30-gallon tin garbage can rolling down a deserted alley.

Peter, Ty’s soon-to-be brother-in-law, who was one of the few who *didn’t* know who Greg was, and who also had had a little too much to drink, was the first to speak, “Hey, buddy. This is a private party, so back out, and get lost.”

Greg put his hands on his hips, gave Peter a withering look, and while batting his eyelashes, said, “I know *exactly* where I am, Sugar. And I know *exactly* what I’m doing. Do *you*, sugar? I don’t think so. So. Be a good little soldier, and shut your mouth ‘cause this is matter for adults. (It was a threat that could have easily backed up.)

Peter took a step in Greg's direction, mistakenly assuming that he could "take" the gay guy; but, luckily for him, Ty held him back with a restraining arm because Ty knew that Peter didn't know that Greg was a third-degree black belt.

Ty said, "Hold it, you guys. This is an old friend of mine, and we're going to go have a little chat. You know, as in like, where we say, 'Good-bye' to each other because my friend here has to leave." Ty had been slowly walking toward Greg while speaking, so that by the time he was finished, he'd reached Greg, grabbed Greg by the elbow, and was escorting him from the room.

Once they were in the hallway, Ty said, "What the hell do you think you're doing? Besides, I thought that you were 'at home crying your eyes out'. Hell, your mascara isn't even smudged."

"It isn't? Good, because I'd hate to look a mess while I was kicking your little friend's ass."

Ty sighed and said, "Look, Greg, you and I are history. What we had is gone, over with, done for, *fini*. Can you just accept that, and let me get on with my life?"

"Oh yeah. Life with a 'fish'. That'll be just grand. The epitome of aquarium living: a house in the suburbs with a yard, two cars in the garage, and one-and-a-half kids. Sublime, I'm sure. Meanwhile..."

"'Meanwhile' what?"

"Ty, pulleeze. Is that what you really want? Is that anything like what you and I talked about having, one day? What were all of those late-night-and-into-the-early-morning talks? Practice for this? A prelude to all this?" Greg waved his arms in a circle indicating where they were and what was scheduled to take place.

Ty hung his head and quietly replied, "No. But, that was then and this is now."

There was a moment of silence.

Then, Greg quietly declared, "Ty, I love you. I'll always love you. And if you could just look me in the eye, and tell me that you and I never had a real, true love for each other, and that we didn't have a bright and hopeful future together, and that ..." then Greg started getting choked-up and couldn't continue.

Ty looked over at Greg, and with tears in his eyes, he said, "I never meant to hurt you. But, this isn't about you. It's about *me*, and about what I want for me."

Through his own tears, Greg said, "You used to want *me* for *you*. What happened to *that*?"

“I... I... don't know. It just stopped happening, that's all.”

“And when did you develop this sudden craving for ‘fish’?”

“After you and I split up, of course.”

With a bit of humor in his voice, Greg asked, “What did she *do*? Hypnotize you? Put a spell on you? Surely it couldn't have been just because she fucked you? I fucked you and you didn't ask *me* to marry you.” Greg punched Ty lightly on the chest.

Ty laughed and said, “Well, you never asked *me*, either,” and he planted a light punch onto Greg's chest.

They silently looked at one another for a few moments, then Greg held out his open arms and said, “C'mere you,” and the two men hugged.

While continuing to hug, Ty said, “You're getting my tux shirt wet.”

Greg replied, “Well, you're getting my crotch wet.”

Ty pushed Greg back and said, “You're so bad!”

Greg licked his little finger, smoothed an eyebrow with it, pursed his lips, and with a saucy little shake of his head, said, “And you love it!”

Ty looked at Greg and said, “You know what? You're right. I do!” Then, he shook his head and said, “What am I saying? This is crazy! I'm supposed to be getting married in just a little while, and here I am standing in the hallway of the church in which I'm supposed to be getting married, telling my former lover, who just happens to be a man, that I still love him. Why doesn't this not make sense?”

“Because this is real life, my dear. And because you can't deny what your heart tells you, even, and especially, if it doesn't make sense.”

“This is *too* crazy. What am I going to *do*?”

“I'd suggest that you go let the ‘fish’ ‘off the hook’, so to speak. You know: ‘catch and release’,” Greg smirked”

“Oh, right! That'll fly.”

“Uh, s'cuse me? But, would you rather go through with the wedding ceremony and then, *after* the ceremony, tell her that you've changed your mind, and you want to go back to your gay lover, but you didn't want to tell her this earlier because you didn't want to ruin a beautiful ceremony? My dear, I think not.”

“I hate it when you’re right.”

“But, it happens so often, how can you hate it?”

“Damn! What’ll I do?”

After a brief silence, Greg suggested, “Tell you what. You go tell her, and please, let me have the pleasure of informing the ‘the troops’.” Greg pointed toward the room where the groom’s party was getting prepared.

They both laughed, then Ty said, “Please, be my guest. I never did actually like a couple of those guys, anyway. I’ll go break the news to Kat.”

Greg said, “Kat! That should have been your first indicator that...”

“Look, don’t start! Okay? This is going to be hard enough, as it is.”

“I’m sorry. I was just saying...”

“Yeah I *know* what you’re saying. But, let’s just let it go, and go and do what we have to do.”

They embraced, kissed, and embraced again, then headed in opposite directions to accomplish identical tasks.

Since Greg had the shortest distance to cover, he arrived first. He opened the door and entered the room, and with a flourish and a smile, said, “Gentlemen I would suggest that you take off those tuxes and change into something a little more casual because the wedding ceremony will not be taking place.” Peter, once again, took a step in Greg’s direction; whereupon, Greg, held up a wagging finger and cautioned, “Look, I’d hate to have to hurt you, sweetheart, but I *will*, so do us both a favor and just back off, sit down, and get a grip.” (Something in Greg’s tone and manner was sufficiently convincing because Peter demurred.)

Meanwhile, Ty was knocking on the door of the bride’s preparation room. One of the bridesmaids answered the door, opening it just a crack, but then she screamed and said, “You can’t come in here. It’s bad luck; and besides, not everybody’s dressed.”

“Too bad on both counts,” Ty said, as he pushed his way into the room, “but I’ve got to talk to Kat.”

Kat turned at the sound of the commotion at the door. She saw the look on Ty’s face, and she ran to him, asking, “What’s the matter, hon?”

Ty grabbed her hand, and without a word, he led her from the room. He led her into a small chapel that was across the hall from the main sanctuary. He sat her on one of

the pews and confessed, “Kat, you’re a good woman, and I love you, but I can’t marry you, and it’s because I don’t love you enough; at least, not in the way that a man should love the woman whom he intends to marry.”

Kat looked at Ty with a puzzled, but not entirely surprised, expression on her face. She finally responded with, “It’s about Greg, isn’t it?”

“Um, yeah. Greg.”

“You still love him, don’t you?”

“Um, yeah. I do.”

“Hummh.”

“That’s all you’ve got to say, ‘Hummh’?”

“What else do you *expect* me to say?”

“Well, I’m not exactly sure, but I wasn’t expecting ‘Hummh’.”

“So. Now, what do we do?”

“You mean, other than returning hundreds of gifts and telling people who flew in from all over the country that they flew here for nothing? I don’t know. You tell me. It seems to be your show.”

“I suppose we could go through with the ceremony, keep the gifts, and then get an annulment.”

“I don’t think so, Ty.”

“I don’t either. It was just something to say.”

“Well, seriously, we have to do *something*, say something.”

There was a long, silent moment.

Ty said, “You know, it’s a shame ‘cause you look *great* in that dress.”

“Yeah. All dressed up and nowhere to go. Well, I guess I’d better go tell the girls. Have you told the guys?”

“Greg’s telling them.”

“Oh, *that* must be going over great. I’d *almost* like to be there to see that... but, not really.”

Kat stood and said, “Well, Ty, it’s been great. And I suppose that this is all for the best. I hope you and Greg will be happy. I’ve always wanted the best for you. I still do. Please don’t be a stranger. And after all the flack has died down, call me. Maybe we’ll get together, just the three of us.”

“Yeah, maybe. You’re taking this awfully well, Kat. Thanks.”

“Well now, I don’t really have much choice, do I?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“Good luck to you, Ty.”

“You too, Kat.”

They hugged.

Kat slowly made her way back to the room where the bridesmaids awaited. She entered and told them the news. Some wept, some were shocked into near catatonia, and a couple of them wanted to eviscerate both Ty *and* Greg. Kat told them to “leave the boys alone”; and in fact, she “would also appreciate it if you guys would all give me a few moments alone, as well.” They all assented and left the room.

Once alone, Kat didn’t even cry. She was stunned, but not altogether. She had known that Ty and Greg had had a special relationship, a very strong bond, so she was indeed, truly happy for Ty, if being with Greg was what he truly wanted. And yet, another part of her...

There was a single, tentative knock at the door.

“Please, go away,” she said.

The door began slowly opening, and Kat repeated, “I said, ‘Please, go away.’”

Roger, Ty’s best man, stuck his head around the door, and said, “I’m sorry. I can’t just ‘go away’. Not just like that. We have to talk.”

“Oh, it’s you, Roger. Yeah. C’mon in. It’s probably best that you and I, of all people, should have a talk.”

Roger hesitantly approached Kat, and then asked, “Are you all right?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I guess. Considering.”

Roger reached over and took her hand. She didn't resist. He said, "I just *had* to come over because... well... because...well, you know."

"Yes, Roger. Of *course*, I know, Roger."

"I mean, there we were, doing something that we were supposed to be ashamed of; and now, as it turns out, it might have been the best thing that could have happened, for everybody."

Kat gave Roger a "look", but he continued, "You know, when we were making love, we both said some things that, at that time, kinda scared both of us. I mean, there we were, a week before you were supposed to get married to one of my very best friends, and you and I are in bed together almost every day and night. It was kinda weird, you know?"

"Tell me about it."

"I mean, it felt so good to be with you, but it felt so bad because I felt so guilty. But, right now, I don't know *what* to feel. I mean, part of me is really sad for you and for Ty, too; but then, he's going back to Greg, so I guess that I don't feel so bad for him after all, but then another part of me is really glad because I'm hoping that you and I can... But, maybe, it's too soon to start thinking about that. I don't know..."

"Crazy, isn't it?"

"Boy, I'll say."

"Hey! Wait a minute. Alison mentioned something about the two of you going away together for the weekend. What's with all *that*?"

"Well, what did you expect? You were going to be married to Ty, so I figured that I might as well go off with Alison."

"Well, I'm not marrying Ty, but we have reservations for a secluded honeymoon cottage up in the mountains. What do you say?"

"I say that I never wanted to be with Alison in the first place. Hell, if it wouldn't be so weird, I'd marry you myself, right here, today!"

"You're right. That would be a little too weird, so let's just take it slow for now. Let's start with a few days up at the lodge and just see what happens. Okay?"

"Okay."

“Okay, now that that’s settled, I guess I’d better go and take off this beautiful, but unnecessary, gown, and tell the girls about the new state of affairs.”

“Yeah. I guess that I’d better tell Alison that our thing is off, too. Could you send her out after you make your announcement?”

“Yeah, I’ll send her out. Seems to be a day for cancellations.”

“Yeah.”

Kat called the girls back into the room and gave them a status report. Then, she sent Alison out. Roger told Alison. Alison was consoled by Deb when she reentered the room where the confused and angry bridesmaids were gathered. Deb and Alison decided to go ahead and make use of the weekend reservation that Roger and Alison had planned on using. (It wouldn’t be the first time that Deb and Alison and spent time together, intimately.)

So, while Alison and Deb drove off in Alison’s car. Both the minister and the entire wedding congregation were astounded and aghast as they sat and listened to Kat, with her arm around Roger, as she smiled and explained that the ceremony between she and Ty, who was smiling while arm-in-arm with Greg, would *not* be taking place.

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