

TWO YEARS LATER

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TWO YEARS LATER

Two years later, he was still screaming at her in his head. Hour after hour, day after day. Whenever it died down, something would start it up again.

He had to stop this. It was killing him.

He screamed at her in an arena outside time and place. He would be there and she would be there, but neither of them would be anywhere. Just together again so that he could have his vituperative say.

Go back with you? he would scream, though even in his head she had said nothing. *I wouldn't go back with you if you were the only woman left! I wish I never laid eyes on you! I wish I never had to see you again! I wish you lived on the other side of the Earth! I don't even want to know when you're dead!*

He pulled into her driveway, past her boyfriend's car (the boyfriend she was having an affair with when they broke up – the straw, so to speak, that finished off the camel's marriage), and came to a stop.

It wasn't as though he had never actually screamed such things to her face. They had had it rip-roaring out a number of times during the long agony of their divorce, both of them totally out of control, screaming at each other like cats in an alley.

But for the sake of the children they were still cordial. It was even written into their separation agreement and then incorporated into their divorce:

neither was to say anything derogatory about the other either to or in front of the children.

And since they no longer saw each other except in front of the children, on the surface it was all smiles and pecks on the cheek.

He got out of his car and went over to the back screen door that led to the kitchen. Karen and the kids were there waiting, the boyfriend safely out of sight.

"Hi!" he said cheerfully as she offered her cheek. "How are things?"

"Fine!" she bounced back. "Laurie has homework left over for the weekend. And Janice has soccer at 10:30 tomorrow morning."

He nodded. "Hi, kids!"

He knelt down, screen door still leaning on his back, and took his two girls in his arms.

"By 8:00 Sunday night?" Karen said as he ushered them out.

He nodded.

"Goodbye, Wayne," she said, this time kissing him on the cheek. "Have a good weekend."

"You, too," he said.

They exchanged what seemed to him to be a tender look.

But then in the car Janice told him that Mommy had taken them for passport pictures so that she and Jerry could take them to Bermuda over Christmas break, and all hell broke loose again.

Bitch! he screamed inside, barely hearing what Janice, excited by the prospect of the trip, was saying.

Don't you know we have an agreement? A court-ordered judgment? When did you expect to ask my permission to take the kids out of the country?

But you know me. You know I want what's best for the kids and wouldn't deprive them of something they want. So you get them all excited about the trip and then let them tell me about it. So I'll look like the bad guy if I say no, the kids are supposed to spend some time with me on Christmas break!

That's what you've descended to! A lousy, selfish, lying, manipulative bitch! God, I wish I never laid eyes on you! I wish I never had to see you again! I wish you lived on the other side of the Earth! I don't even want to know when you're dead!

"Daddy?" Laurie was saying.

He looked up and saw where he was, who he was with, what he was doing.

"Yes?" he said, as brightly as possible.

"Can we go to the library when we take Janice to soccer? I want to bone up on Bermuda."

He smiled. Leave it to Laurie to treat a trip to Bermuda as though it were an assignment.

"Sounds good," he said, tears starting to his eyes.

He was missing so much! he thought. Weekends were fine, but he was missing the heart of their growing up. And only because late one evening in bed, as he and Karen were about to go to sleep, she decided to tell him that she had been having affairs for several years and was tired of sneaking around the

edges of life, as she had put it. She wanted a divorce, she wanted to be free.

"We have two children," he pointed out, already, instantaneously, hating her, the marriage of sixteen years over in less than sixteen seconds, all but the shouting.

"They'll deal with it," she answered angrily from behind a massive, barred gate that had somehow been erected secretly, silently, stealthily, without his having the slightest idea that anything was going on.

Not once after that had he said he loved her, or wanted to try to work things out, or didn't want the marriage to end. On the contrary, from that moment he couldn't wait for it to end. He couldn't stand lying next to her, slept on the couch that night, and left for good the next morning.

And started screaming at her in his head.

I can't believe you! How many years? How many men? And lying! Lying, lying, lying! Divorce? I'll be delighted to be rid of you! I wouldn't go back with you if you were the only woman left! I wish I never laid eyes on you! I wish I never had to see you again! I wish you lived on the other side of the Earth! I don't even want to know when you're dead!

He pulled into his driveway, suddenly aware of where he was, who he was with, what he was doing.

He had to stop this. It was killing him.

He knew he was doing this to be with her, even in this sick way, that he couldn't let go, that in his head they were together again in the only way now

possible, that his hatred of her was the twisted expression of his love.

But knowing didn't help him stop. He couldn't stop. He had to stop. This was no life. But he couldn't.

He gave the kids supper, supervised Laurie's homework, read them both a story, put them to bed.

You didn't think about what you were doing to the kids, did you! he snarled as he went back down the hall towards the living room. The evening lay long and empty ahead.

What kind of life is this for them? All you care about is yourself! You wanted to be free! Well, you aren't free! Neither of us is free! We've got two little girls whose happiness is supposed to mean something!

He sat down miserably on the couch and put his face in his hands. Of course it was the humiliation. All the screaming in the world wouldn't erase that.

And maybe he could have done more to save the marriage. Maybe if Janice and Laurie had meant so much to him, he could at least have said he wanted to try to work things out, suggested counseling, not just left the following morning.

Maybe all this screaming was an attempt to be right when he knew that some of the blame for their broken marriage was his.

Maybe he hadn't loved her enough.

But what could excuse her squeezing him on the divorce? As though it was his fault for leaving the poor, innocent, loving little housewife! And why was he expected to be the one alone to pay for it?

She had come out of this in good shape. She

had the house and the kids, money from him, money from her boyfriend. Her weekends were free.

He was digging his way down to Hades in debt, living in a cheap condo, tied up on weekends, alone. Who would look twice at a guy who had no money and refused to see you on weekends?

But he cared about the kids, and that was the difference. For her it was OK to sleep with her boyfriend with them in the house.

All you care about is yourself! he snarled, preparing to spend the rest of a long Friday evening with her in the arena beyond time and place.

Only two things matter to you: getting what you want and feeling good about yourself. But since what you want is so selfish, the only way to feel good about yourself is to lie to yourself and to everyone else!

Go back with you? he screamed, though even in his head she had said nothing. *I wouldn't go back with you if you were the only woman left! I wish I never laid eyes on you! I wish I never had to see you again! I wish you lived on the other side of the Earth! I don't even want to know when you're dead!*

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