

The Pain of Love.

We were sitting at the kitchen table, talking over a couple of beers as we usually do on a Friday afternoon. She was wearing the usual sexy but inexpensive attire. Faded old shorts and a colourfully tight top that barely held her push-up bra in place. It had the strange effect of making her look like a schoolgirl just discovering her sexual powers even though she was a 27yo mother of one.

I was just wearing the usual jeans and t-shirt that I always wore to college. I was older than her at 33 but I was attending adult classes in order to better myself. Or at least that was the lie I liked to tell myself. In actual fact college was a surprisingly good place to hide from the outside world. Which was what I spent my life doing.

I liked Bev, liked her a lot. I was a friend of her husband and it was through him that I met her. She had an aura of strength surrounding her. You could just tell that she was the type of person who would not take any shit.

Except from one person.

Her husband Brad.

He was the reason she dressed the way she did. Like a child trying to appease her stern father, she would follow him around, answering to his every beck and call. I could never understand that. But I liked her, maybe even loved her in a brother-sister sort of way. And these Friday afternoon chat sessions over a few beers were my favourite time of the week. I would have the afternoon off from classes and she would not have to worry about her daughter because her parents picked Nikki up from school and spent the afternoon with her.

I could always tell when something was bothering Bev and today was no exception. She was not her usual cheerful self. But if there was one thing I knew about Bev it was that you could never make her tell you anything. You just had to be patient. So we sipped our beers and talked shit and I waited for her to get to the nitty gritty. And of course, she did.

“He is seeing a prostitute you know.”

I nearly spat my beer across the kitchen.

“What?” I said after regaining what little composure I had left.

“He is seeing a prostitute. She calls herself a masseuse but I know what she really does. You don’t work out of your own house and charge \$200 for a back rub.”

“But how do you know this?” The idea of Brad going to a hooker was a complete shock to me. Ever since I first met him women have thrown themselves at him.

We all know the type. Never the most handsome looking guy around but they just seem to have that certain something that women find irresistible. It didn’t surprise me

that he was cheating on Bev, I kind of expected it. But actually paying for it when he could get it for free so easily? She had to be mistaken.

“I went through his wallet the other day and found a clipping from a newspaper with her ad on it. So I rang her to see what she was offering. I even told her I was thinking of getting into the business and described myself to her. She confirmed that she was selling her body. She even told me that I could make a lot of money out of it.”

“Well okay, that all sounds pretty bad but how do you know he actually went? He might have just been thinking about it.”

“I checked his mobile phone bills. He has called her a few times. So I checked his pay sheet and the hours he was paid for don’t match the hours he said he was working. And money has been going out of the joint bank account. Hundreds of dollars at a time.”

“Damn.” It was all I could say. I was still in shock over the whole thing.

“Plus he is carrying around condoms in his wallet.”

“Well that could be explained easily enough. Maybe he was thinking of taking you by surprise one day and just wanted to be prepared.”

“We don’t use condoms Sam. Both of us hate them. Not that we have sex all that much any more.”

That was the way Bev was. Once she got talking she would tell me just about anything. I actually felt honoured that she would trust me that much. I decided not to ask about her sex life. She would tell me if she wanted too. And she wanted too.

“I haven’t had a good fuck in months. I have to practically rape him to get any and then I have to do all the work. It’s not the most satisfying sex when your partner looks like he is about to fall asleep on you.”

Now I know what you are thinking dear reader. I should offer my services to the poor girl. And don’t get me wrong, I have thought about it. But I know Bev and I know that she would say no. It is one of the reasons I liked her so much. No matter what shit the world throws at her she sticks to her own sense of morals. Anyway, I would rather have her as a friend than an ex-lover. Friendship lasts longer. I decide to take the easy way out and sip some more beer.

“I honestly don’t know why I stick with him.”

I wanted to tell her to ditch him but I knew she didn’t want advice right now, only someone to listen to her.

“I wanted to give little Nikki some swimming lessons this summer.”

Nikki was her only child, her pride and joy. At just 7 she was already as beautiful as her mother. She was going to break a lot of hearts when she was older.

“So why don’t you?”

“Because he won’t allow it. Not enough money apparently. It’s only \$10 Sam. Ten lousy dollars to make a little girl happy. Is that too much to ask?”

I could see the tears start to well in her eyes but she fought them back. Like I said, the lady was tough. I reached for my wallet but she shook her head. She knew that \$10 was a fortune to a struggling student.

“It’s ok Bev, I have some left over. I can afford it.”

“You can’t lie worth a damn Sam. Put it away.”

She watched as I put my wallet back in my pocket, making sure that I didn’t try to slip the ten onto the table without her seeing. I tried it once before and failed. I could give the money to Brad but I know it would never get to her.

“So how is Nikki?” It was an attempt to change the subject and she was visibly grateful for it.

“Nikki is doing really well at school. You should see what she is doing Sam. She is just seven and she is already writing stories. I think I have one here somewhere.” She got up and went to her child’s room, coming back a few minutes later with some pages clutched lovingly in her hands. She handed them to me and I started to read. It was a simple story about a little princess who rescues her beautiful mother from the evil King. In the end the princess sprinkles some fairy dust on herself and her mother and they fly out of the clutches of the tyrant to live happily ever after in a kingdom in the clouds. The correlation to her real life was obvious.

“It’s beautiful,” I said. And it was. Even at seven Nikki had developed a rapport with the reader. She was going to be very good at this when she was older.

“Yes it is, but you can see what it is really about can’t you?”

“Yes it is fairly obvious what she is talking about. Has Brad read it?”

“I showed it to him but he just skimmed through it. I doubt he actually read any of it. If it isn’t the sports section of the newspaper he usually isn’t interested. I doubt he would understand it anyway. He is not the quickest person on the planet.”

I smiled at her small dig at him. It was good to see that she could still exert some independence from him. But the one disturbing thing about the story was what it said about the writer. She had noticed what her father was doing to her mother and she recognised that it was wrong. I said as much to Beverley.

“Yes I know. She actually yelled at him the other day to leave me alone.”

“Why? What was he doing to you?” My protective instincts had switched on. I was getting ready to do the knight to the rescue bit. It’s funny how women can have that effect on me.

“It was nothing Sam, we were just arguing.” Bev had a habit of understating things like that, but I had never seen him hit her and I had never seen her with bruises or cuts. I guess his abuse was more mental than anything.

I relaxed myself a bit but I still felt a distinct dislike towards him. He was supposed to be my friend but the more I got to know him the less I liked him. I decided to see if I could find out what she really thought of him.

“He’s an asshole, isn’t he?”

“Yes.” She emptied her glass and got up. “You want a refill?” she asked pointing to my glass.

I emptied it and handed it to her.

“Thanks, I think I need another one.”

She went to the fridge and got out another bottle of beer. As she filled the glasses I noticed that she was shaking slightly. She was a lot more upset than she was letting on. When the glasses were full she returned to the table and sat down. I picked up my glass and drained half of it in one gulp. I was going to ask The question and I needed something to brace myself with. I put the glass down and looked at her. Damn she was beautiful. The late afternoon sun was streaming in through the kitchen window and it seemed to lovingly caress her face. I swallowed and asked the question.

“Why don’t you leave him?”

I waited for the indignation, the shouts, and the orders to leave her house. But that never happened. She just put her glass down and gazed out the window into the backyard.

“Because I love him.”

She said it like a judge passing sentence on a criminal. Pure and simple fact. She loved him. He treated her like shit. He took her for granted. He treated their child like an annoyance.
And she loved him.

“Does he love you?”

“He needs me.”

“He needs a maid. But does he love you?”

“Does it matter?”

“Christ Bev, of course it matters. He has always used women. I honestly believe that he has no respect for them.”

“Then why does he stay with me?”

“Because you pick up after him. Face it Bev, you have two children now.”

“Sam, stop. Please.”

“Bev you have to accept that he is just using you.”

“Sam I am asking you to stop.”

“But Bev...”

“Enough!” She slammed her glass down on the table, spilling beer as it sloshed over the rim.

“Okay Bev. I’m sorry, I overstepped my place. Do you want me to leave?”

“No, please stay. Just don’t push me on this okay?”

“Okay.” I sipped some more of my beer. I knew I had come close to being thrown out on my ear. I was about to speak again, to change the subject in my usual clumsy way when I heard a car door slam outside. Bev’s eyes lit up and she looked more like a schoolgirl than ever. I heard the front door open and footsteps in the hall. She stood up and ran to his arms as he walked into the room. I turned to face him and it was obvious by the look on his face that he was not glad to see me there.

“Sam,” he nodded, acknowledging that I at least had a name.

“Brad,” I replied in much the same manner. He turned from me and kissed Bev. A very passionate kiss which had her melting into his arms. It would have been a very romantic picture if it weren’t for the fact that he was staring at me while he kissed her. It was a very disturbing thing to see. They broke and she looked into his eyes.

“I missed you. Did you have a good day at work?”

“Yes I did.” He looked at me. “Do you know what that word means Sam? Work I mean.”

“Yeah I think I read about it somewhere.” He didn’t approve of someone my age being in college and was not shy in letting me know about it.

“So what have you two been talking about? Me I suppose.”

I turned back to my beer to hide my blush of embarrassment. Bev decided the best defence was a good offence and kissed him again.

They kissed for a bit longer then Brad mumbled something to her. I couldn't hear what it was but I soon figured it out when he took her by the hand and led her to the bedroom. She looked over her shoulder at me and seemed almost apologetic.

It wasn't necessary, I understood perfectly. I have done some incredibly stupid things in the past simply because I loved someone and assumed that I on turn was loved. Not that I am saying Bev was stupid, far from it. But when it comes to love we take what we can get. And I guess that deep down, what the other person really feels about us doesn't matter. As long as we can believe that somewhere, deep down inside there is something, anything. It can be enough to base an entire life on.

I finished my beer and made my way out, down the hallway past the bedroom door and out into the late afternoon sunshine. I knew I would be back next Friday and Bev knew it too. We would sit down, drink our beers and chat. She would complain about her life and I would listen. Then I would complain about mine and she would be the one to listen. That's the way it always has been, and probably always will be. Just two lost souls crying on each other's shoulder. I hitched my backpack onto my back and walked home.