

## Decision Time

Betty snuggled up close, pressing her head against my shoulder. Mmm, I thought, my shares must be on the up as she's been quite distant for some time now.

I was lost in our quiet closeness when she broke the silence with, "I've got a question for you."

"OK. Ask away."

"You promise you won't get cross?"

"Would I have a reason?" I asked, ruffling her hair.

She giggled, "Maybe."

"Well?"

"Will you raise another man's child?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

Still giggling, but less confidently, "I've had a little peccadillo with Paul."

I tried to remain calm but failed, "A what? A peccadillo? Sex?"

"Yes," she giggled again, nervously.

I sat bolt upright, "Holy shit how could you do such a thing?"

"Oh come on. It was nothing. It was just a spur of the moment thing."

"Nothing? Just a spur of the moment thing? You're telling me that you've had sex with him as calmly as if you were telling me that you had a pizza for lunch?"

With a tinge of defensive anger she snapped, "What are you so uptight about. I don't love the guy. I just had sex with him. What's so special about sex?"

"Special? Just had sex? - I'd call it betraying a trust."

"Oh get real."

"I am real. You betrayed a trust. You have the temerity to lie there and ask me if I'd raise another man's child. With a giggle, as though it were some sort of joke."

"Oh don't be so ridiculous. I told you there's nothing between us. It was just a spur of the moment thing. It meant nothing."

"Nothing? You call betraying a trust nothing? You broke a vow, a vow you made before two hundred odd people."

"Oh get real. What about your affair with Emily?"

"What are you taking about? What affair?"

"You were always buying her cigarettes."

"Buying someone cigarettes hardly constitutes a bloody affair. I'd merely replaced some of hers that I'd smoked when I was broke."

"The fact is, you bought her something when we were battling with money."

"Oh please, a couple of boxes of cigarettes that's all."

"All? How do I know you never slept with her?"

"I've told you there was nothing like that. I never so much as touched her arm."

"That's your story. You stick to it."

"This is ludicrous. Suddenly I'm the guilty party. Nice one. I'm not going any further with this ridiculous conversation," I snapped, getting up, grabbing some clothes and heading for the garage.

I drove around aimlessly for some time, castigating myself, searching for warning signs that I might have, wondering what I'd done wrong, or what I'd not done; where and why I'd failed or why I was still failing.

All these thoughts tumbled around, crashing into each other, adding to the hurt and confusion.

Finally the desire, the human need, to talk to someone, drove me to Betty's closest friend, Jenny.

Luckily there was still a light in her bedroom window.

"Hello Roy. What's wrong? Come in. Why do you look so upset?"

"It's Betty," I blurted out.

"Why? What's happened to her?"

"Nothing. She's just asked me if I'd mind raising another man's child."

"She asked you, what?"

"She said she'd had a fling with her boss."

Jenny was incredulous, "Betty? Your straight laced wife. You're kidding me. Sex?"

Her mouth twitched as though she was trying to suppress a strong desire to laugh at the prospect my wife being an adulteress.

The thought annoyed me and I snapped, "No I'm not."

She was silent for a moment, assimilating the sparse facts, before asking, "I'm a little confused. How come she's worried about it being his child? How could she know?"

"I had a vasectomy after James's birth."

Her drawn out, "Ahh, I see," was followed by a distinct change in her demeanour.

Moving closer, she lowered her voice to a sexy whisper, "Well you know what Roy, two can play the same game. Why get mad? Why not get even? Revenge can be so sweet."

Before I could digest her words she took my wrists and placed my hands on her breasts.

That felt so comforting and exciting that it distracted my mind for a moment.

"If she can do it, so can you," she whispered seductively.

My breath quickened, my pulse increased. A flurry of thoughts assailed me. The first was, was this a fantasy about to be fulfilled, followed swiftly by, out of the frying pan into the fire, and then why not? After all, revenge is sweet".

I pulled back my hands and slid my arms around her, holding her close.

Her body was soft and warm and her smell was intoxicatingly enticing.

Pulling back a little I looked deep into her sparkling emerald eyes, "I made a lifetime commitment. I have two children."

"So? That doesn't make you a martyr," she challenged.

"I know, but I also don't want to be a traitor."

"You won't be committing treason," she whispered, "Most married men stray at some stage of their lives."

"I don't have to be one of the most."

"Oh come on. Having sex with someone other than your partner is no big deal. Making love to me won't make you any less of a person. Besides, not only is stolen fruit so much more delicious, it's probably saved many marriages."

"Jenny, I don't even want to think the thoughts that are surfacing."

“Don’t. Let them go. Concentrate on us,” she coaxed, before looking intently at me and adding, “Do what you always wanted to do.”

A guilty, embarrassed feeling swept over me as I realised that she knew how I secretly felt about her.

I kissed her forehead, “You’re a darling and I . . . .”

Sensing my inner conflict she put a finger on my lips, “Shh. What’s wrong about having sex with another person? Haven’t you ever had another woman since your marriage?”

Somehow her question shocked me, “Of course not. I made a vow in a church.”

“Oh don’t be so ridiculously old fashioned. That’s just an anachronism from the past. Part of a charade we all played without really meaning any of it.”

While I’d held her she’d undone her skirt and let it fall to the floor.

She took my hand and put it on her bare, warm tummy, “I want you.” she whispered.

I’d always thought that Jenny was incredibly sexy and had often fantasised about her. Now I realised that she’d felt the same about me.

During my flights of fancy I used to assuage my conscience by thinking that merely having the desire for her was neither breaking my vows nor being unfaithful. Now the object of my fantasy was inviting me, coaxing me, to make love to her.

Still, as much as I wanted Jenny, I felt that I would be a traitor to Betty. I was locked in a horrid loop of lust versus loyalty.

She pulled away from my embrace and took both my hands in hers.

“Come,” she said, backing away, pulling me towards her bedroom, “Come into my parlour.”

My resistance was crumbling and I followed meekly, but still vacillating.

She closed the bedroom door and stopped at the foot of her bed.

Slowly, sensuously, she undid her blouse and let it fall. Her bra followed and I involuntarily sucked in my breath.

Sitting down on the edge of the bed she slipped off her panties before tossing them aside casually. Then she wriggled back sensually until she was propped against the pillows.

By now I wanted her so badly yet it bothered me that Joe was overseas and that Betty was at home, not knowing where I was.

I knew Joe strayed, so I reasoned that, if Joe and Jenny and Betty are not bothered by loyalty, why should I be concerned?

My conscience kicked in again, what if Betty found out? Would I want to hurt her as much as she’s just hurt me? Perhaps she won’t be as hurt as she seems to regard adultery as some kind of frivolous joke. But then I remembered an assessment of her which stated that she has an “I can but you can’t” type of personality.

Shaking my head to clear it, I asked, “How would you feel if Joe slept with other women?”

“Oh I’m sure he does. I told you most men do. He’s probably in bed with some dolly bird right now.”

I was shocked by her matter of fact acceptance that her husband may sleep around. My expression must have shown this for she laughed, “You are the most frustratingly naïve man I’ve ever met.”

“Really?”

“Yes silly. You’ve got to separate love and sex. You don’t have to love someone to have sex with them. You don’t stop loving your partner when you have sex with someone else. Oh, for goodness sake. It’s just sex. Just a bit of fun,” she chided.

She patted the bed, “Come now,” she cooed sexily, “Come make love to me”.

I didn’t move, “I’d better go.”

“Why?” she asked.

Heaven knows, I thought, why was I hesitating? After all, Betty apparently didn’t. Oh hell, I thought, are all women this casual about adultery?

I’d never been offered sex on a plate before, still less by a woman I really fancied.

I repeated an unconvincing, “I really should go.”

“Don’t be silly. I want you and no one will ever know about tonight. Promise.”

“I must go home,” I said, trying to convince myself before my resolve dwindled to nothing.

“Nonsense. You don’t have to go. Come. If you’re shy I’ll undress you,” she said moving to the edge of the bed.

I stepped back, “No Jenny, I can’t go through with this. Not now.”

She swung her legs off the bed, “Don’t be silly. You know we both always wanted this. This is such a brilliant opportunity. Joe’s been away for over a month, you are ready for revenge and I’m as randy as hell.”

Wordlessly I backed away and opened the door.

She looked at me in utter bewilderment, pleading “Roy please, please don’t go. You’re just strung up by Betty’s confession. Don’t be silly. I want you.”

“It’s not just that,” I said, hesitating again, still torn between the two conflicting desires of loyalty and lust.

“What is it then?”

Tortured by the thought of not knowing which decision I would live to regret more, I closed the door.