

CONFIDANTS



NOTHING GOOD CAN EVER COME when someone asks you, as Solveig asked me one summer evening, “You know, don’t you?”

“Know what?”

“Oh, you don’t know,” she said, and her face louvered through all the pleasures of an inveterate gossip—glee, malice, titillation, relish.

I was grilling flank steaks. Kate and I were hosting some of her friends for a Labor Day barbecue at her row house in Rodgers Forge, a residential neighborhood just north of Baltimore. The party was a valediction to a good summer in which Kate’s divorce had become final and we’d gotten engaged to become engaged.

What I didn’t know, what Solveig now revealed to me, was that Kate was talking to Charley Rusk again. Charley Rusk, the founder of a company that produced something called “host access” software, applications for mainframes and legacy systems that were quickly becoming obsolete. Dinosaurs. Nonetheless, Charley Rusk had been able to sell the company not too long ago for a bundle of money—enough to buy a small share of the Baltimore Orioles.

He and Kate had had an affair. Somehow, her ex-

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husband never learned about it, though Rusk's wife had. She'd made Rusk break it off, and Kate had been heartbroken. They hadn't spoken in three years. Or so I'd thought.

"Kate told you?" I asked Solveig.

"Charley did." In addition to being, ostensibly, Kate's best friend, Solveig was also, ostensibly, Rusk's best friend. Could she have dreamed of being in a more delightful position?

"He called her?" I said. "Or the other way around?"

"Neither."

Apparently, a week ago, Rusk had ambushed Kate in the parking lot of the new Trader Joe's on Kenilworth Drive as she was opening the trunk of her car. "I still love you!" he had cried. "I still love you!"

"Don't," she'd told him, and had jumped in her car and driven away, leaving her groceries behind in the shopping cart.

As she was speeding out of the parking lot, he began texting her, and he kept texting her, *Will you talk to me? Please talk to me. I still love you. I never stopped*, and after an hour Kate had texted him back, *You can't do this to me*, and then he had texted, *Elisabeth left me*.

This had been news to Solveig, Rusk's putative best friend—that his wife had left him. "I can't believe he didn't tell me!" she whispered to me beside the grill.

I looked across the backyard at Kate. She was sitting in the shade of the patio umbrella, chatting with her friends, not betraying that anything was amiss.

"They've been talking on the phone ever since," Solveig said. She put her hand on my forearm and bugged her eyes in concern. "What are you going to do?"

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