

# Unfulfilled Dream

**Dani Kaplan**

I was sitting in my office staring at my tea getting cold and thinking about my confrontation with Adam, my husband, the night before about his having another affair. We've been married twenty-five years and I didn't do anything about because I didn't want to upset my twin children Tammy and Howard. I didn't plan on having children but at age of 30 my mother started to remind me that my biological clock was ticking and I shouldn't wait much longer.

“I don't want to have children,” I kept telling her.

“You're an established architect and Adam has a successful engineering business. You'll be taking a chance if you wait a few more years.”

Adam let my Mother convince him that we should have a child and together they kept putting pressure on me to get pregnant. I finally gave in, feeling I had no choice in the matter. Everybody was happy when Tammy and Howard were born but I didn't share their happiness. Howard was a colicky child while Tammy was the perfect toddler who always smiled. Our relationship changed after the twins were born. Adam started having affairs, coming home late at night and using the excuse that he had to meet clients. On weekends he went with his friends to various ball games, telling me that he needed to relax after working hard all week.

I didn't think about my unhappy marriage. I just focused on a project that was due the following week until the evening when I looked out my big office window that faced the statue of liberty and saw the sky was changing colors. It was bright yellow and then turned pink before it became dark. It reminded me of my childhood summer vacations in Chatham, a small town in Cape Cod. In the evenings after the crowds left the beach, I took my easel and painting gear and walked down the long wooden stairway to the water's edge, looked at the big orange ball of a sun setting into the ocean. It painted the sky and water deep orange red and so I started to paint. After it got dark the rays of the lighthouse painted the beach with a swath of bright yellow before the darkness took

over again. It hypnotized me and I didn't want to leave until I heard my father who came looking for me.

"Dianne, you need to come home. Dinner is ready."

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*What did you achieve in the past twenty-five years? I asked myself in a loud voice, Instead of becoming an artist who wanted to paint seascapes I became a successful architect, have two children and an unhappy marriage. I wonder how my life would have been if I hadn't given into my mother's pressure to have children.*

Jean, my best friend and partner brought me back to reality when I heard her voice.

"Dianne, don't think about what you should or shouldn't have done."

I turned around and saw her standing by my office doorway holding a dozen long stemmed red roses in a vase.

"Happy birthday," she said. "I would like to take you out to dinner tonight."

"Let's do it another evening."

"I already made reservations at Villa Capri for 6:30 PM."

"Thanks. I love you."

Jean left my office, closing the door softly. At that moment I remembered the first day we met. I often spoke with her about my unhappy marriage and how I had conflicts about leaving Adam. She always responded in a calm voice.

"Dianne, you must focus on your work and not let the realities of your home life affect it. As a female working in a male dominated industry, we have a difficult road ahead of us."

Villa Capri, a Northern Italian restaurant located in the South Street Seaport next to the bay, was our favorite dining place. When we walked into the restaurant I looked at the beautiful paintings of the Isle of Capri and wished I were on a remote beach painting the sun slowly setting into the ocean as I remembered my childhood vacations in Cape

Cod. Anthony, the host, was happy to see us. He gave us a warm greeting which brought me back to where I was and led us to our favorite table by the window which had an undisturbed view of the East River. I stared out the window at the streetlights reflecting in the black, murky water making beautiful gold and black patterns. Once again, I remembered the career I didn't pursue. Jean voice interrupted my train of thought.

"What would you like to eat?" she asked.

"I can't make up my mind. Order for the two of us."

"We'll have calamari for an appetizer and a bottle of Borolo," she told the waitress who stood next to us.

"I'm planning to leave Adam," I told her after the waitress left.

"Why are you doing it now?"

"I'm fifty years old and feel that I missed something out of life."

"You can't just walk out on your family."

"Adam is having an affair. While Tammy and Howard were growing up I didn't want to disrupt their family life. Now that they're in college, I would like to fulfill my old dream of being an artist painting beach landscapes."

"You have two beautiful children."

"I know. That's the conflict I'm facing. I'm concerned about how they'll react. If I don't leave Adam I'll always regret not doing it."

"What are you planning to do?"

"Take a six month leave of absence from work and paint on a remote fishing village beach."

"Don't make a hasty decision you might regret later."

"I won't miss Adam."

"I'm not talking about him. I'm concerned about how it'll affect Tammy and Howard. They might drop out of school."

I didn't respond, picturing myself at sunset painting the fishermen's dark figures against the orange sky as they stand in the water casting their fishing pole. Jean's voice interrupted my daydreaming.

“Let’s take a two-week vacation at a small fishing village called Corea on the coast of Maine. I’ve vacationed there in the past and always enjoyed it. It’ll help you decide what you want to do.”

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Corea’s main street had five stores and a small, rustic coffee shop across the street from the beach with large bay windows facing the ocean. We stayed at the Black Duck, a weather-worn bed and breakfast located on the outskirts of the town facing the ocean. The living room walls had white pine wood paneling and a blond Cocker Spaniel slept on the couch. When she realized that we came in she gave us a warm welcome by wiggling her tail. Dawn the Inn Keeper gave us a warm smile.

"Lily loves to greet people. She might not leave you alone."

"We love dogs," I told her.

"Give her this dog biscuit and she’ll be your friend forever,"

I bent on my knee and gave it to Lily and kissed her face. Lily happily licked my face.

Dawn smiled when she saw it.

"You made a friend new friend," she said.

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Every morning Lily waited for us in the living room, wiggling her short tail before we went to the coffee shop. Over breakfast I discussed with Jean my conflicts about how Tammy and Howard would react after I left Adam. Jean had a concerned look but didn’t say a word. After we finished breakfast I went down to the beach with my painting gear and Jean took off to visit the remote fishing villages along the coastline. Lily, who was on the beach, was happy to see me and gave me a warm greeting by wiggling her tail. I spent the day walking along the water’s shoreline with Lily keeping me company as I thought about Tammy and Howard.

"Am I making a mistake leaving Adam?" I asked her. She didn’t reply, sat down and looked at me confirming my fears. It was dark when Jean found me sitting on a big

driftwood staring at the waves rushing to shore before retreating back to the sea, leaving white foam patterns behind them.

Jean sat next to me on the driftwood and patted Lily head who was happy to see her.

"Did you spend the day painting?" she asked me.

"No. I spent the entire day obsessing about whether I should take the time off."

"It's an important decision. We should discuss it over dinner."

The next morning, I went back to the beach and sat on the driftwood with Lily keeping me company. The fishing boats were leaving for the open sea and it reminded me of my vacations in Cape Cod, so I started to paint. In the evening the fishermen came back with their daily catch. I looked at the seagulls that flew screeching above them and spoke to Lily who kept me company all day.

"I'm finally achieving my old dream and must pursue it otherwise I'll always regret not trying."

She responded by wiggling her tail, giving me the message that I should follow my decision to leave Adam no matter how it would affect Tammy and Howard. I spent the entire week on the beach Painting with Lily keeping me company. Every so often she went to say hello to the dogs she met and when she came back she looked at my painting and wiggled her tail as if she approved what she saw.

On the last night of the vacation I couldn't sleep obsessing how leaving Adam would affect my children. At 5 a.m. I got up and went down to the beach without my easel, brushes and paint. Lily woke up when I entered the living room. She joined me as we walked together along the water's edge looking at the orange red sky resulting from the sun rise.

When we met for breakfast at the coffee shop Jean gave me a concerned look.

"Dianne, what's the matter?" she asked.

"I can no longer justify not leaving Adam because Tammy and Howard would get hurt. If I don't do it now I'll hate myself forever."

Jean was preoccupied and just nibbled at her cheese omelet.

“Your food is getting cold,” I told her.

“I’m concerned about what you’re planning to do.”

“I don’t have a choice.”

“It will definitely affect Tammy and Howard.”

“I know. It's been on my mind the entire vacation. Rather than making a hasty decision I’ll take time off from work and come back to Corea to paint. It might help me decide what I want to do with my life.”

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I was unhappy being back in Manhattan and obsessing if I was making the right decision for me and my family. The minute Adam walked into the apartment in the evening I approached him.

“I’m planning to take six months off from work, live in a small fishing village in Maine and paint on the beach.”

“Are you out of your mind? Nobody just walks out on their family and job.”

I didn't respond at first. I just looked out the large window facing the East River. I was admiring a sailboat that gracefully passed by, leaving a white wake in the water. I finally responded.

“I need to take time off to evaluate what I want to do with my life after tolerating your affairs for the past twenty years.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Don’t try to play dumb. You know what I’m talking about.”

In the morning I entered my firm’s managing partner office to tell him my plans.

“I need to talk to you.”

“What’s on your mind?”

I stared at him, unable to say a word.

“Dianne is something wrong?” he asked, sounding concerned.

“I would like to take a leave of absence for six months.”

“Is somebody sick at home?”

“Everybody is fine.”

“Then why do you need the time off?”

“It’s a long, involved story and I’d rather not get into it.”

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The evening before I left for *Corea* Jean took me out to dinner at Villa Capri. She looked sad as she sipped her wine and stared at the river. I was unhappy also.

“Please don’t be upset about me leaving,” I told her.

“I understand the reason why you need to take the time off.”

“Time will tell if I made the right decision.”

“Call and let me how you’re doing.”

The next morning, I packed my easel, brushes, and paint, chose casual clothes and sat at my desk composing the letter for Adam.

*“Dear Adam,*

*I plan to live in a small fishing village in Maine called Corea for six months and will be staying at the Black Duck Inn. I hope you’ll understand.”*

On the way to Maine I asked myself if I had made a mistake walking away from my family and throwing away a career that took me twenty-five years to build. All of a sudden my mother’s voice rang in my ears, “*You’re being irresponsible leaving your family. I didn’t leave you and your father when I gave up my career as an artist to become a high school art teacher.*”

Upset, I got off at the nearest exit ready to turn around and head back to Manhattan. At the end of the ramp was a truck stop with a coffee shop. I decided to have lunch, hoping it would help me control my turbulent emotions, reminding myself that if I go went I’d always regret it.

“Are you ready to order?” the waitress asked.

“I’ll have egg salad on whole wheat bread and tea.”

Half the sandwich was untouched and the tea was cold when I her asked for the check. She didn't say a word and stared at me when she gave me the check.

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When I saw the road sign directing me to the University of Vermont I panicked because I was afraid of Howard's reaction. I wasn't concerned about Tammy. She was on the dean's list and photographed landscapes. On her school vacations we visited photography galleries on weekends and in the evenings went to classical music concerts. I often spoke with her about my frustrations. Tammy, trying to convince me to paint, offered to go with me to the beach. We tried it a couple of times early in the morning before the crowds came. Tammy photographed and I sat on the sand unable to paint, staring at the sea. Unlike Tammy, Howard was an average student who focused on playing football. He adored Adam and when he came home on school vacations he went with him to baseball, football and hockey games.

My heart was pounding when I arrived at Tammy's dormitory.

"Mom what's the matter?" she asked the minute I entered her room.

"I need to talk to you and Howard."

"Is something wrong?"

"Yes, but I would rather discuss it with both of you."

"He's practicing with his team."

"Let's find him."

We sat at the perimeter of the football field and watched Howard run with the ball as his teammates chased him. Howard walked over to us with a frown on his forehead after finishing his practice.

"Why did you come here?" he asked.

"I'm taking six months off from work and plan to paint on..."

"I hope it's not a trial separation, before a divorce," he said.

Tammy hugged me and cried. I held her and felt her body shake while the tears rolled down my face.

"Where are you planning to stay?" she asked while wiping her tears.

“I’ll be living in at a Black Duck in Maine. I hope both of you will visit me when you have your school vacations.”

“Don’t count on me,” Howard snapped, leaving Tammy and me staring at his back as he walked away.

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For the next two weeks I walked on the beach with Lily keeping me company as I wondered if I had made a terrible mistake. She sensed my mood and when I sat on the driftwood she licked my hand. When I ate at the coffee shop I tried to keep to myself by not talking to anybody, but it didn’t work. An older man who sat with his wife at the next table decided to start a conversation.

“Are enjoying visiting Korea?” he asked.

“Yes. I live in New York City and decided to get away from the crowds.”

“You came to the right place. You’ll find peace and quiet here.”

That was as far as the conversation went. I continued to eat without responding. Soon after, my reputation spread as an unfriendly loner. The people I met were polite but didn’t start a conversation. It suited me fine. The last thing I wanted to do was discuss why I had come. After having a restless night with distorted dreaming about my mother, I went to the coffee shop in the morning to have breakfast, sat at a table by the window and stared at the horizon, unable to eat.

“Is something wrong with the food?” the waitress asked.

“I’m not hungry.”

“Would you like me to bring you something else?”

“No. Please give me the check.”

On the way out, I stopped at the public phone booth located at the entranceway and called Jean. Her voice had an alarmed tone.

“Dianne, what’s the matter?” she asked.

“I’m wondering if I made a mistake and should go home.”

“I’ll come tomorrow and spend a week with you.”

We walked on the beach discussing my conflicts with Lily keeping us company. Jean listened but didn't offer suggestions. In the evenings we had dinner at the coffee shop. The tables were set in such a way that each one had a view of the sea. Jean alternated between having the daily catch and seafood. The waitress, aware of my eating habits, asked the chef to prepare vegetarian food for me. After we finished our dinner we walked on the beach listening to the waves and watched the lighthouse beam painting the sand and the water bright yellow. It reminded me of my Cape Cod vacations when I was young.

*Should I go home with Jane*, I asked myself the morning she was supposed to leave. I stood by the window facing the sea and looked at the sky slowly changing color from deep red purple to pink as the sun came up. Agitated, I left my room without my painting gear and walked down to the beach. Lily, who was sleeping in the living room on the couch, woke up and was happy to see me. She wiggled her tail and decided to join me. The fishermen who were boarding their boats waved to me. I waved back, happy they accepted me despite the fact that I avoided having prolonged conversations with them.

"Can you stay another week?" I asked Jean during breakfast.

"I can't. I'm already behind with my work."

"I'm not sure I made the right decision."

"Call Adam and ask him to visit you. It will give the two of you a chance to work things out."

"He'll insist I come home."

"He might not."

I walked to the cash register and asked the cashier to change a five-dollar bill into quarters. Jean gave me an encouraging smile when she saw me standing by the phone booth, unable to make the call.

Adam's angry voice gave me a startled reaction.

"When are you coming home?"

"I would like you to visit me so we can discuss our issues."

“There is nothing to discuss. Nobody in their right mind leaves their family and goes to Maine to paint. You’re lucky that you still have a job.”

My knuckles were white from holding the phone so tightly.

“Goodbye Adam. I’m sorry I called you.”

I stood by phone and was unable to move. Jean walked over, put her hand in my arm and walked me back to the table. I described to her how the conversion went and she decided to stay another day. In the evening we sat on a large tree trunk covered with sand and looked at the fishing boats unloading their catch. Lily was walking along the water’s edge, sniffing hoping to find something interesting. She must have sensed my mood because she came back and put her head in my lap, licking my hand.

"You found a new friend," Jean told me.

"She keeps me company every day when I go to the beach."

The next morning, I stood in the street as Jean drove away. She saw me in her rearview mirror, opened the window and waved to me. I went back to my room and not knowing what to do with myself, just stared out the window at the big waves rushing to shore. Not wanting to stay in my room, I decided to go to the coffee shop. I changed my mind before opening the door and walked to the deserted beach despite the fact that it was raining. I walked along the water’s edge, reminding myself that if I went back I’d always regret it.

When I reached the boatyard that I’d passed by many times before, I saw the boat maker working on a beautiful wooden sailboat. I hesitated for a moment, remembering that I didn’t want to get involved with anyone. However, I decided to approach him.

“I love the boat you’re working on. Would you mind if I came back after it stops raining and paint it?”

“Be my guest. Just be careful where you walk. I have tools and planks of wood lying all over the floor.”

“Thank you. My name is Dianne.”

“I’m Steve. Please come into the shop. You’re getting soaked.”

“I don’t mind. It helps me clear my mind.”

“I’m glad you stopped by. I saw you painting on the beach with Lilly keeping you company and was going to introduce myself but I didn’t want to disturb you.”

“Thank you. I’m glad you didn’t. I’d rather be by myself.”

“I’m going to get lunch at the coffee shop. Would you like me to get you a sandwich?”

“No thanks. I’d better go.”

“Please don’t. No harm in having lunch with me. It’ll give us a chance to get to know each other.”

“Okay. If you don’t mind, I’ll walk around the shop and look at your boats while you get the food.”

By the time Steve got back it had stopped raining. We sat on a wooden bench in front of his shop and looked at the stormy sea with the black clouds hovering above it. All of a sudden, a rainbow appeared against the steel gray horizon.

“I wish I had brought my painting equipment. I would have loved to paint it,” I told Steve.

“I’ll photograph the rainbow and develop the pictures for you.”

I looked at the beautiful multicolor rainbow that had orange, white, and light blue stripes. Steve photographed it from different angles and every so often looked back at me. After he finished photographing we walked along the shore, looking at the stormy sea.

“I was wondering what brought you to Corea,” he said. “Every time you passed by my shop you looked so preoccupied.”

“I have a lot on my mind.”

“You remind me of the way I behaved when I arrived.”

“What brought you to this village?”

“I’d rather not talk about it”

“It’s a shame. I have to make a major decision that will affect the people I love.”

Steve stared at the waves breaking on the shore leaving white foam patterns and his emotions reflected on his face.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to pry into your private life,” I said.

“It’s a long, involved story that caused me to leave a successful career in the Navy.”

“I understand. I also walked away from a successful career. Why did you become a boat maker?”

“I grew up in a small town in Cape Cod a block away from the sea and always loved sailing. On school vacations I helped the local master craftsman build custom wood sailboats. I wasn’t able to make up my mind what I wanted to do after I arrived here. It changed the morning I met an older gentleman who had a custom wooden sailboat docked at the pier. After I told him that I admired the craftsmanship of his boat, he told me it was custom made by a boat maker who had just retired. When he heard that I worked with the master boat maker he asked me if I’d be willing to service his boat. I agreed and it gave me the idea of building custom wooden sailboats. He became my first client and since that many other people who own wooden sail boats became my clients.”

“I can relate to what you just said. I’m a successful architect, have two children in college and an unhappy marriage. I was supposed to be an artist. Against my wishes I allowed my mother to convince me not to pursue it as a career.”

“Why did she do that?”

“My mother was a talented artist who painted water scenes but couldn’t find a gallery that would exhibit her work. She and my father met on Labor Day weekend at an art show that took place in Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village. He was a law student at NYU who passed by her stand. He stopped to view her paintings, told her that he loved the painting of a sailboat silhouetted against the sunset and said if he could afford it would have bought it.”

It led to a long conversation that resulted in them dating and falling in love with each other. A year later they got married. She repainted the sailboat that was sold the day they met and gave it to him as a wedding present. It hung on our living room wall and was a source of inspiration to me when I was growing up. My mother, instead of pursuing her career, became a high school art teacher and convinced me to become an architect, telling me that I wouldn’t be able to make a living as an artist.”

After I finished talking, Steve was preoccupied as he stared at the waves rushing to shore. I wondered what was going through his mind but didn't ask.

"I wonder if I made a mistake leaving Adam," I told him. "It resulted in Tammy and Howard getting hurt."

"You would have always been unhappy wondering what you had missed out of life if you hadn't done it."

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The next morning, I showed up with Lily at the boatyard. Steve was happy to see me and patted Lily's head. After exchanging few words, I went to the beach, put the easel on the sand and started to paint with Lily keeping me company. At noon Steve came over, looked at my painting and asked what I would like to eat for lunch. Next, he went to the coffee shop and brought food for us and a hamburger for Lily. After she finished her food she looked at us as if to say, "Are you going to share your food with me or eat it by yourself?"

We laughed. I gave her part of my egg salad and he gave her part of his roast beef sandwich. The following morning, I was surprised to see that he had tea for me, black coffee for himself and muffins for both of us. We sat on the bench and ate our breakfast, sharing our muffins with Lily and looking at the ocean. I enjoyed Steve's company and felt as if we had known each other for a long time. It became a daily event. After a month he approached me at the end of the day when I was packing up my painting gear, ready to go to the Black Duck Inn.

"Would you like to come to my house for dinner tonight?" he asked.

"Let me think about it."

"Please come."

"Okay. You twisted my arm."

"What would you like to eat?"

"Surprise me."

"I can make Eggplant Parmigiana and pasta. We'll enjoy a nice bottle of red wine with it."

“It sounds wonderful. Thank you.”

Steve lived in a post and beam home facing the ocean. The outside of the house was weathered by the storms which resulted in the brown wood planks having white streaks of salt. I was impressed with the house craftsmanship.

"I like your house," I told Steve. "It's has a warm feeling. The sun gave a wonderful gold sheen to the pine paneling."

“Thank you. It’s a nice compliment coming from an architect. It took me ten months to build it by myself.”

Steve cooked an excellent meal and the red Chianti Classico wine was a nice addition. After we finished eating I complimented him.

“It was an excellent meal. Thank you. I’m glad I came. At first I wasn’t sure if I made the right decision accepting your invitation.”

"I'm also glad you came. Let me give you the grand tour of the house."

The large living room and two rooms had large bay windows facing the ocean. The bedroom had a wooden platform bed and a dresser with a mirror on it. The other room had a large desk facing the window. The walls had wooded shelves filled with 20<sup>th</sup> century books.

“You have a large collection of Ernest Hemingway’s books. You must like his writing,” I told him.

“My favorites are ‘A Farewell to Arms’ and ‘For Whom the Bell Tolls.’”

“Why do you like them?”

“They’re anti-war books, describing how senseless it is.”

“Is that the reason you gave up your career in the Navy?”

“Yes. I was a Navy Pilot commanding an E-3 surveillance plane when I flew over Kosovo and saw the rape and the massacre. I became disillusioned with our government’s not doing anything about it and decided to leave the Navy. When I told my commanding officer that I planned to leave the navy he suggested that I take a vacation and evaluate my decision. I looked for a small fishing village in Maine where I wouldn’t meet tourists and came to Corea trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. After spending a

month walking on the beach and looking at the sea I returned to the base and notified my commanding officer that I planned to stop flying and leave the Navy. Unhappy, he arranged an interview for me with the air base commander who unsuccessfully tried to convince me to change my mind. After I left the Navy I got lucrative offers from space industry companies and turned them down. My family was upset that I walked away from a promising career and my wife divorced me.”

“Did you have children?”

“No. I didn’t want to have a family. My leaving the Navy was the final blow to our relationship.”

I was speechless hearing about it and felt my heart throbbing as I looked out the large window facing the stormy ocean.

“I love this room,” I said, changing the subject.

“I look at the sea and it helps me to focus on my writing.

“What do you write about?”

“The unpleasant experiences I’ve encountered flying over Kosovo. It helps me make peace with it.”

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Our love affair happened after we had dinner. We sat on Steve's balcony and watched the sun slowly drift into the sea, painting the sky and the water bright orange red as if it were on fire. It reminded me of the day I sat in my office looking at the sunset wondering what I had achieved in my life. I looked at the horizon changing colors thinking how my life had changed since I came to Corea, achieving my unfulfilled dream. When I felt Steve put his arm around my shoulders, I smiled, turned around and kissed him.

I woke up early in the morning feeling the cool wind blowing on my naked body. Steve sat by the open window looking at the horizon that was painted pink-red by the rising sun. I joined him and we watched the sky changing color to bright yellow as the fishing boats turned into small objects on the horizon. It became a daily tradition for me to visit Steve every morning with Lily, sharing our breakfast and lunch with her and in

the evening having dinner at his home. One evening we sat on the deck having dinner, the full moon giving us shadows.

“Move in with me,” Steve said.

“It’s not a good idea.”

“Why?”

“I’m still married to Adam and feel awkward doing it.”

“You left because you were unhappy with him.”

“I’m afraid of how it’ll affect Tammy and Howard when they hear that we are getting divorced.”

“By now they must have figured out that you’re not coming back.”

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The next morning, I called Jean. She was surprised at what I had to say.

“I’ve fallen in love with a wood sailboat maker and would like you to meet him.”

“It sounds great. It’ll take me a couple of days to wrap up what I’m working on before I can come.”

Lilly gave Jean a warm welcome when we met at the Black Duck Inn. Jean picked up a dog biscuit from the jar on the counter gave it to her.

“You look happy,” she said.

“I love Steve. He’s supportive and helps me deal with my conflicts. I need your help to build my courage to tell Adam that I would like to get divorce.”

“It needs to be done but won’t be easy. When do you plan on telling him?”

“I should do it right away.”

“No point delaying it. Pick up the phone and call him.”

Adam’s voice boomed in my ear,

“When are you planning to come home?”

“I’m not. We’ve grown apart and can no longer live together.”

He hesitated for a second before he said, “We should visit Howard and Tammy and tell them we’re getting separated.”

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After Adam finished talking, Howard began to scream.

“You planned it from the beginning!”

“Dad and I can no longer live together and I want to start a new life.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“Howard, please try to understand your mother. She’s unhappy living with me.”

“I don’t care. I don’t want to see her again.”

When I drove back to Maine the warm tears ran down my cheeks. I was afraid I’d never see Howard again. Steve stopped working when I entered his shop and gave me a concerned look.

“You don’t look good. What happened?”

“Howard ranted and raved and said he’d never speak to me again.”

“Let’s take a walk on the beach.”

The wind blowing the salty water in my face dried the tears that kept rolling down my cheeks as I described to Steve what happened. He hugged me and said that he loved me. In the evening we sat on the deck looking at the white ray the moon created on the calm ocean, painting the fishing boats a ghostly white. The phone ringing gave me a startle reaction. Afraid it was Howard, I asked Steve to pick it up.

“It’s Tammy,” he said, handing me the phone.

“Mom, I love you.”

“Are you upset with me?”

“No. I realized long ago you were unhappy with Dad.”

“Does Howard understand it?”

“No. He’s angry. I tried to speak with him about it but he wouldn’t listen. He blames you for breaking up the marriage.”

“When will I see you?”

“I’ll visit when I have my Christmas vacation.”

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Tammy visited us on her Christmas break. She liked Steve and the two of them went for walks on the beach with their cameras photographing the sunset. I was happy they got

along so well but didn't join them because I felt they needed to get to know each other. On Christmas Eve Steve walked into the house and handed a gift to Tammy.

"I bought it from a local artist who crafts handmade jewelry. I hope you like it."

Tammy's eyes widened when she opened the polished wood box and saw a sliver whale tail pendent with turquoise inlay. She kissed Steve.

"I love it. It's the most beautiful gift I ever got."

"I'm glad you do. I wanted to give you something special."

Next, he turned to me with a mischievous look.

"Your present is waiting for you in the pickup cab."

Tammy and I gave him a puzzled look before we went out to the yard. The car engine was running and I assumed he had forgotten to turn it off. When I opened the door, I found a three-month old fuzzy blond Labrador puppy on the front seat. It was sitting on a blanket with a big red ribbon tied around her neck and a note attached to it that read, "Dianne, Merry Christmas, I love you, Steve."

Ecstatic, we rushed into the house with Tammy carrying the puppy in her arms. The minute she put her on the floor she got excited and peed, barely missing Tammy's left shoe. The big decision we faced that evening was what name we should give her. After a long debate we settled on the name Bella. The next day we took Bella to the Black Duck to meet Lily. They chased each other around the living room and Lily kept kissing her.

"I'm glad you bought Bella to meet Lily. She's a great hostess and always welcomes guests that bring their dogs. The only issue we have is a when we feed her. The friendship stops when she eats her supper or begs at the table at breakfast time. That's why she's chunky. We tried to put her on a diet few times but it's a lost battle. She always gets her way and we gave up."

\* \* \*

The harsh Maine winter forced me to paint in the house while Steve was working in the boat house. I spent my days looking out the living room window at the stormy sea and painting the waves covered with white foam rushing to shore. Bella, watching me, lay on

her back near the wood burning stove. The intense look she gave me made me realize that she would be a good model so I started to paint her. She was my model the entire winter, at times sitting and looking at me and other time sleeping next to the wood burning stove as she lay on her back.

The weather warmed up in early May so I was able to paint outdoors. Bella, excited, barked at the seagulls that flew above our heads and stopped short by the water's edge when they glided over the ocean. Lily kept her company and shook her head as if to say, "Stupid puppy. She'll never be able to catch the seagulls!"

One afternoon a visitor who was on vacation walked on the beach with his big, male black Lab. The stranger paused to look at my painting, complimented me and struck up a conversation. Bella and Lily fell in love with the Lab and they ran with him near the water. When the Lab saw a duck swimming at his leisure, he jumped in the sea and tried to catch up with him. Bella, who had never entered the ocean before, hesitated before putting her paws in the water to follow him. Lily ran along the shore barking at Bella to get out. I panicked and yelled at Bella as well. Lily ran around me barking. Busy with her new friend, Bella didn't pay attention and I feared she would drown. The visitor got Bella out of the water by calling his dog.

"Lab's love to swim and it's almost impossible to keep them out of the water," he explained.

Before he finished talking, his dog saw a seagull above his head flying toward the sea and jumped in, ignoring the waves. Bella took after him and swam like a duck without splashing water as Lily again ran along the shoreline barking her head off.

\* \* \*

The next day I opened the wooden mail box and was upset when I found my firm's managing director's letter.

"What's the matter?" Steve asked when I entered the shop with Bella and Lilly running in circles around me.

"Read the letter. I'm afraid to find out what it's about."

"Your firm's managing partner is asking when you plan to come back to work."

“I’m not. I’ll thank him for giving me the time off and ask him to hire my replacement.”

“Why don’t you open a shop in town so the tourists can view your paintings?”

“Do you think they’ll buy my paintings?”

“People would love to have your work in their homes. It’ll remind them of the beautiful vacation they had in Korea.”

The following week I rented a small store on the main street. Steve built a large, white birch wood banner. On it I painted seagulls flying against the orange red sky that reflected in the ocean and Steve placed it above the shop door. It attracted the tourists’ attention. They entered my gallery, viewed my paintings and often bought one.

\* \* \*

Four years had passed since my unpleasant encounter with Howard. Steve and I were having dinner on the deck when the phone rang. I gave him a puzzled look before picking up the phone and was surprised hearing Howard’s voice.

“I’m getting married in the fall. Sandy, my fiancée would like to meet you.”

I felt my heart throbbing and was overjoyed.

“Steve and I would love to have the two of you visit us. When would you like to come?”

“In a couple of weeks Sandy will have her summer break from school.”

“I’m looking forward to meeting the two of you.”

They met at Steve’s shop. Howard kept his distance when he introduced Sandy to me and Steve. I didn’t hug him, waiting for him to do it.

“I’m glad we met,” Sandy said, giving me a warm smile before she hugged me. Howard stared at us and I felt like he regretted visiting.

“I love your sail boat,” Sandy told Steve. “My father always takes me sailing.”

“I’ll be happy to take everybody sailing tomorrow. The sea should be calm.”

Howard didn’t look happy about it.

“All of you can go sailing without me. The last time Sandy’s father took us sailing I got sea sick.”

Steve ignored the comment.

“It’s a beautiful, sunny day. I think you and your mother should take Bella for a walk on the beach. While the two of you walk I’ll show Sandy my boats.”

I walked next to Howard, trying to tell him how happy I was he had come, but could not find the right words. Bella and Lilly kept us company as they chased the seagulls flying above our heads. Howard patted their heads, picked up driftwood and threw it into the water. Bella jumped into the sea and retrieved it and Lily barked loudly, telling Bella to come back to shore. I felt it was a good conversational opening and told Howard how scared I was the first time she swam with the black Lab.

“We have a brown Lab at home,” he responded. “His name is Max and you can’t keep him out of the water.”

“Why didn’t you bring him?”

Instead of answering, he picked up another piece of driftwood and played tug of war with Bella, who wouldn’t let go.

“I’m glad you came to visit with Sandy.”

“She wanted to meet you. Her father teaches math at Harvard University and expected her to follow in his footsteps. Sandy has played the piano since the age of seven and chose to pursue a career as a concert pianist. She applied to Julliard School of Music and was accepted. It resulted in a family uproar. Her parents couldn’t understand why she turned down the Harvard scholarship and discussed it with her. When Sandy told them that she didn’t want to become a mathematician, they were upset and told her that her chances of becoming a concert pianist were slim because it’s a very competitive field. Sandy told them that she didn’t want to find out years later that she had given up without trying.”

“I should have done the same thing,” I explained. “I was going to choose a career in painting sea landscapes but let my mother convince me not to do it. She said I wouldn’t be able to make a living and should become an architect instead.”

“Why did you listen to her?”

“She was an artist who couldn’t find a gallery to exhibit her paintings and ended

up being an art teacher in a high school. I always regretted listening to her and finally decided to follow my unfulfilled dream.”

Howard didn't respond, picked up another piece of driftwood and played tug a war with Bella. When we reached the workshop, we found Steve and Sandy sitting on the bench looking at the sea and talking as if they had known each other for many years. Sandy gave Howard a piercing look.

“Do you understand your mother now?” she asked him.

He didn't reply, picked up a piece of driftwood and showed it to Bella. Howard walked slowly to the shore with Bella and Lily chasing him.