

Cathy and John: October 20, 2015

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author's notes: If ever I wonder why I accepted the low status position in my relationship with Cathy, remember Liv Ullman, in *Scenes from a Marriage*, when her husband wanted to leave her. She was desperate and would do anything to have him not leave, but she never forgot who she was; she was Liv Ullmann all the way.

Mame says not to worry about it, everyone in the audience will have had one of these. She'd had one. Presumably anyone looking elsewhere will be thinking of theirs.

As well there is "MacArthur Park" and "Layla" if you want to hear from men in anguish about lost love. As well most love songs are written by men.

Inspiration: "Promiscuities" by Naomi Wolf. (see comments in .tex file)

Stage: two chair in center stage. This is where Cathy and I will be sitting in the movies.

Cathy was the backdrop of my life, for much of my decade at university. I knew her through the local church fellowship. I saw her every week. She was intelligent, articulate and self assured. I was madly in love with her. I couldn't get her out of my mind. She was always happy to talk to me, but it was clear I was only a friend.

I thought she was beautiful. It wasn't till many decades later, that I realised this is diagnostic feature of being in love.

My best friend was John. He belonged to the same church fellowship. We did everything together. Mainly we hiked a lot, and talked a lot, about life and what we wanted to accomplish with our lives. We talked a lot about girls. I now see that John was the first person who loved me in any sense that I understand it now.

My father died when I was 6. I grew up without a father to do fatherly things for me. John and his father taught me about car mechanics, things my father was good at. John's father stood in as my father.

Cathy was John's girlfriend.

(pause)

John was at least as madly in love with Cathy as I was. So I saw Cathy a lot. Not only did I see her a lot, but I heard about her a lot. John's stories filled me with hope (what if she was mine?) and agony (she's not mine).

I never said a word to John about my feelings for Cathy. He knew. It was something we agreed not to talk about. I knew Cathy would be choosing the one she wanted to be with; I wouldn't be doing the choosing. In the meantime, John's friendship was more important than Cathy.

Getting away from Cathy and the misery of unrequited love was one of the factors in me leaving home.

Another factor in leaving home was deciding to run my life according to my own morality. The church had been a party to sending me and my generation to the Vietnam War. I had declared the church to be morally bankrupt.

John and Cathy had their ups and downs. With each down, I wondered if I would have my chance, but it never came; Cathy never showed any interest in me. Instead, the next thing I knew, they were back on again. Eventually, after several years, John and Cathy really did break up, or at least that's what John said. I could never tell. They seemed to be together, as much as when they weren't together, as when they were. I assumed John and Cathy would always be together, in some way, no matter what paths their lives took.

By then, I was doing my PhD and was living on campus at Sydney University. Cathy was in the middle of her undergraduate education at a different university. John was a medical student, working in the next building to me. John filled me in on details of Cathy's life, but I noticed she never asked about my life. With Cathy in another university, there was no way our paths would ever cross.

Then one day I returned to where I grew up, for an afternoon garden party. I was returning to the place I'd left, partly to get away from Cathy. Someone was celebrating something, something big; everyone was happy. The event flushed out all sorts of people from home, people I hadn't seen for absolutely ages and who I was greatly looking forward to seeing again. For me, it was going to be the social event of the year.

(move downstage right center)

(look across the stage to stage left)

There she was, across the room, the very first person I saw, the very

person I'd left home to get away from. Having not seen her for 2 yrs, I'd managed to put her out of my mind.

I didn't know she knew these people. She was the last person I expected to see. I wasn't prepared for this.

She was as beautiful as ever. She was just dazzling. I was in love with her all over again.

I didn't want any more pain. I didn't want to have anything to do with her. We saw each other, but didn't acknowledge each other.

(move centerstage right)

I moved to the other side of the garden, to the furthest point from her and joined a group in party conversation. I could hide out there; she wouldn't be coming over that far.

Then she was standing at my side, inches from me, not acknowledging me, not looking at me, not talking, but appearing to everyone else, but me, to be part of the conversation.

Well what do you know,
of all the groups
in all the parties,
in all the world,
she walks into mine.

This had to be coincidence.

(walk backwards out of the group around the back of Cathy to centerstage left)

Without acknowledging her, I left. I joined another conversation, on the other side of the party, as far away from her as I could find.

Minutes later she was at my side, again saying nothing, again not acknowledging me, again just appearing to everyone but me, to be part of the conversation.

(move upstage center)

And then I moved a third time and again she was by my side, not saying a word.

"what's going on?", our first words in several years.

I don't remember her reply, but she indicated that I was now of interest, as if I shouldn't be surprised.

I was. I was very surprised.

There'd been plenty of time since she and John had broken up. She

knew where to find me. I looked at her; what was the change about? She wasn't offering any clues. She was inscrutable. What was she interested in me for? Bible reading? Discussions of philosophy? A boyfriend?

Would I believe her answer if I asked? No. Words are worthless. I didn't ask. I didn't need to be any more confused than I already was. Was I about to be freed of the pain of these years of unrequited love? I didn't know.

end of monologue for Virginia's class)

(move downstage center)

We arranged to go on a date, the next week, to see a movie together. Now 40yrs later, I realise if you want to find out about someone, that sitting in the silence and darkness of a movie theatre, is the worst sort of date you can have; you don't talk. It would have been better to go for a walk in the park and hold hands. At least you can talk and when you don't want to talk, you can look at the trees or the flowers. Back then I didn't know these things, so we did what everyone else did for a date; we went to the movies.

There wasn't a lot of choice; we chose "Ryan's Daughter". I still remember the poster; a man and woman holding each other. At least it wasn't blood and thunder, hopefully it was romantic.

In the lead-up to the date, I was in turmoil. Was she really interested in me? Was I finally going to be with the person I had longed for, for all these years?

I couldn't help but notice the irony of going on a date with the person I'd left home to get away from, who still accepted the church, which I'd left home to get away from.

On the date, the movie itself was unmemorable. The only thing I remember was the scene on the poster; the man passionately kissing the woman. She was wearing a voluminous heavy dress, like an evening gown. They were standing on a windswept moor, with the sea in the background. He was holding her tightly, desperately. As they kissed, he pressed his open hand on the woman's breast, outside her gown.

(sit on chair, hold hands with imaginary Cathy in other chair)

I was sitting in the silence and darkness, looking for signals from Cathy, sitting next to me, and whose hand I was holding. Did she want a life together with me? The image filling the screen, of the man's open hand pressing on

the woman's breast was seared onto my brain.

All my hopes and wishes, for a life with Cathy, had been shut in a box for so many years. They'd been bursting for freedom since the party the week before. The image of the man's open hand pressing on the woman's breast was not the image I wanted in my mind at that moment. It was too confusing.

It was not the image I wanted in Cathy's mind either.

(stand down center)

After our near silent date, we kissed as we parted. This was the person I'd been longing for, for years. For the first time we were doing something together, just the two of us, because we'd chosen to be with each other. I wanted to kiss her more. I had years of kisses for her lined up. She stopped me and said "I'm just a kid you know".

At the time I thought that was her way of putting me in the friend zone. It may have been. But I now see that she was sufficiently articulate and self assured, that she could have thought of herself as a kid and was prepared to let me know and stand her ground.

I didn't want a kid. I wanted a partner. I wanted a woman to love and a woman to love me in return.

About two years later, I contacted Cathy and arranged to visit her in her dorm, immediately after her final exams for the year. Not having a car, getting there and back, was a day long epic in public transport. I didn't tell her how I'd got there. I made up some excuse, like I was visiting for xmas and just happened to be passing by. I can't imagine she believed me. I just wanted to see her again. It had been so long since our movie date.

Cathy seemed to be with a simpering fellow, who I remembered from the church fellowship. He wasn't half of John or me.

As always, she was glad to see me, but I could tell that, as always, I was still nothing special. I'd put 6 or 7 years into her by then.

I was disappointed to find that she was no longer stunningly beautiful. I noticed her acne. Sure it had always been there, but it had never registered in my mind's eye. She was just a pleasant looking, intelligent, self assured female, still someone you'd love to have in your life, but she was no longer stunningly beautiful. I didn't understand why and I couldn't imagine what had happened to this turn this once dazzling beauty into an ordinary female. Had university life crushed her?

As I left, she asked hopefully if I'd visit her again next year, when I would be coming through on my next annual visit. I said I would. But then when the next year came around, I didn't visit her. By then I was leaving to start my adult life as a post-doc in USA. I would only visit her again if I was someone special to her, someone she'd want to keep in contact with from that distance. I knew she wasn't that interested.

John found a new girlfriend, Shirley, who I met just before I left Australia. She was even lovelier than Cathy. I noticed for the first time in a decade, that John wasn't talking about Cathy anymore. It was difficult for me to think about John being with anyone but Cathy. For the whole time I'd know John, it had been John and Cathy like they were one person. It wasn't John and Shirley; it was John and Cathy.

After I left Australia, John and Shirley married and they had a daughter, who they named Kate, a variation on Cathy's name. Cathy had been the major person in John's life for a decade. I wasn't at all surprised that Cathy had been deemed worthy by Shirley and John of being honoured in that way. I expected Cathy would be an aunt for Kate.

One day sitting here in the US, I got a letter from John.

(open envelope and read letter, flipping pages)

I started reading. The letter said

" John is going to die,

John is going to die, "

I wasn't reading the sentences or the paragraphs. I didn't need to. The letter was speaking to me louder than any words could. Every sentence, every paragraph said the same thing.

" John is going to die,

John is going to die "

OMG, What do I do? I'm the only one who knows. Who can I tell? There isn't anyone I can tell. I'm the only one who knows. What if John is supposed to die and I'm not supposed to interfere? I can't just write to John and tell him he's going to die and ask him if he knows about it. What if he knows already? What if he's already agreed to die? He'd just smile and say "don't worry Joe".

How much time is there? How do I stop John dying? I don't even know how he's going to die. If I was supposed to do something, I'd have been given more information. I only know he's going to die; I just have to sit here

10,000miles away and wait till it happens.

Then after weeks of not knowing what to do, I got a letter from Shirley; John had died climbing in New Zealand.

What the hell was John doing in New Zealand? I didn't know anything about this. A trip like this requires months of preparation. Surely John would have told me he was going climbing in New Zealand.

In Sydney when you're off a climb, you're on Terra Firma. If anything goes wrong, you're still on Terra Firma. In New Zealand, when you off a climb, you're standing on glacier. If anything goes wrong, you're still standing on a glacier. John and his party had finished climbing and were walking back unroped across the glacier. John dropped limp to the ground, slid down the glacier without any attempt to arrest his fall, and slipped into a crevass, where he broke his neck, killing him, if he wasn't dead already.

My explanation was that John had large varicose veins on his legs, which had become a medical problem. He'd had them surgically removed just before the trip. A clot must have formed from the surgery and broken loose causing a stroke.

This was John's first major trip without me. If John had been with ME, he would have still been on-rope at the end of the climb, when walking back across the glacier, and would be alive today. It's accidents like this, that have resulted in people now waiting till you're back in camp and sitting down, before you go off-rope.

How in the hell did John get to be climbing in New Zealand without letting me know? I still had John's last letter. I reread it. I was all about Kate and preparations for New Zealand. I hadn't absorbed any of it. All I'd read in the letter was that John was going to die.

When I next met Shirley, she told me that she too knew John was going to die and that she would be left a widow with a young baby.

John's death devastated me. Of all the people on earth who would die, the world could least afford to loose John. John left Shirley a widow, and Kate, a daughter who was too young to remember him. It left me without my best friend.

I did think about going back to Australia, to be there in some way to help raise John's daughter. With my biblical upbringing, I wondered if I should marry Shirley and adopt Kate and be Kate's father.

I have dreamed about John for the past 40yrs. I'm always looking for

him. "John, where are you?" When I find him, I always know it's him, it's exactly the same John. But he never recognises me; I'm just another face. In my dreams, John is growing older with me. It's as if he never died and we're still together. But in the dreams he's not with me; he never recognises me. I always wake in tears.

When I return for my month long hiking trips in the mountains west of Sydney, the place I used to go with John. I always visit Shirley and Kate. Kate, when she was young, looked so much like John, that I was spooked just talking to her. John stuttered. Kate who never knew John, had the same stutter.

I tell Kate stories of the adventures I used to have with the father she doesn't know. I took Kate on the first hike John and I ever did together. Kate has children now and on my next trip back, I'll be taking John's grandchildren on hikes that I did with John.

When I visit Sydney, I talk to Shirley about John, about what John was like before she met him, about what John and I hoped we would do with our lives.

One day I asked Shirley how Kate got her name. It was just a name they liked ... apparently.

(look knowingly)

Shirley has never heard of Cathy. Does Shirley think John had no girlfriends in the decade before she met him? Maybe the breakup between John and Cathy wasn't as simple as John made out. Maybe John liked Cathy more than I knew.

I haven't heard any more about Cathy, since I left Australia 40years ago. My only contact with Cathy after I left, would have been through John. Shirley is no help, she doesn't know who Cathy is.

Yes, I could find Cathy ... if I wanted to ... but I don't. She'd never shown any interest in a long term relationship.

I think about Cathy every time I see Kate or I hear Kate's name. To me at least, Cathy is a part of John's family, through Kate's name.

I have no idea how John's death affected Cathy.

I hope she's had a happy life. I hope she made a difference to the world. With her talents, she should have.

I wonder who Cathy chose for her life's partner. I hope that someone was better than John or me.
