

Adverse Possession

1800 words

Ed liked to blame the couch, though there was more to it, but that part didn't help.

What Kaitlyn did, she went out and spent four thousand dollars on it, and then when they delivered the thing it didn't fit in the elevator. Ed watched them try removing the little ceiling panel, which he didn't even know came off, but even so they couldn't angle it in.

Ed and Kaitlyn lived on the top floor, 12, a co-op building in Yonkers, which had been another point of contention, since you could have gotten the same exact unit lower down a lot cheaper, but that's what she wanted.

Ed offered the two guys a hundred bucks to carry it up but they weren't interested, which meant he should have trusted his instincts and refused the delivery right then and there. But he didn't, he thanked them, and they left this mauve-colored bubble-wrapped monstrosity in the middle of the lobby.

Ed's friend Tim came down from Ardsley, and the super's high school kid helped out, and they got it up about eight flights before someone realized that as they

were making each tight turn the heavily textured stairwell walls had been methodically cutting through the bubblewrap and had eaten away at the right arm of the couch.

They finished the job, having to take the apartment door off to wedge the thing through, and Tim and the kid got out of there fast, probably thinking it was their fault.

Ed was in the kitchen massaging his third beer, a little college football on, when Kaitlyn came back from her well-timed nine-mile run. She took a moment, and said, “Honey, for God sakes, you didn’t tell them it was defective?”

She looked even more food-deprived than normal. “It *became* defective,” Ed said. “By then, it was a little late.”

“Okay, whatever,” she said. “Your attitude aside, you need to take care of this. Send it back.”

Ohio State blocked a Michigan punt and ran it down to the two. Ed popped open another Corona. “Pretty interesting how you say ‘send it back’ . . . Like a pair of duck booties going back to L.L. Bean.”

“You’re being an asshole, Ed. But yes, just like that actually.”

He was tossing it around, for his own amusement, how you really would handle something like this.

He said, “My guess’d be, you somehow lower it off the terrace.” Looking out there toward Jersey. “Wouldn’t you think?”

Kaitlyn didn’t answer, but when she came out of the shower she said, “There’s a service in the city where they cut them in half, and then reconnect them. I never thought about it much until now.”

“Sorry Babe,” Ed said. “I fucked it up.”

“It’s okay . . . We’ll find someone to repair it. It’s not the end of the world.”

She could do what she wanted, but Ed knew one thing for sure: his rear end was never going to grace that couch.

It wasn’t an organized decision to separate, Ed just started sleeping at the office a couple nights a week, and then pretty much full time, and a year went by and Kaitlyn didn’t seem to care.

He’d picked up one of those camping pads that reduce to a tidy compact square, and at night he stretched out under his cubicle. It wasn’t bad. There was a fitness room and showers, and the company cafeteria

was open long hours and was cheap. What more could you need?

Kaitlyn found a Finnish woman who repaired upholstery. She sewed up the gash, did an incredible job, you could barely see anything, but Ed held firm and never did sit on it.

Though he did utilize it that one time. Kaitlyn was out of town on business (she repped pharmaceuticals) and he stopped by to pick up a couple things, and next thing you knew he ran into Megan from down the hall, and she stood there and said she hadn't seen him in a while.

At that point Ed made a determination, and it seemed the couch was as good a place as any, so it wasn't worth worrying about too much.

Ed thought a divorce made sense.

“Not a problem,” Kaitlyn said. “I'm sure we can find some common ground.”

This didn't have a great ring to it. Nothing specific to go on, but Ed wondering now if it might somehow cost him a hundred grand or so to get out of it, and he didn't bring it up again.

The next spring Kaitlyn announced she had changed jobs and was moving to Florida, and he could do what he wanted with the apartment. For a day and a half he considered moving back in, but then listed the place. After the broker's commission and transfer tax it was pretty much a wash. Luckily the new buyers were fine with the couch, so he threw it in for free.

He didn't hear from Kaitlyn again until right around Christmas. "Uh-oh," Ed said. "This can't be good . . . can it?"

"Doll, I'm in a bit of a situation here," she said.

"You must be . . . Seeing as how you haven't called me that since we lived on 23rd Street."

"I met someone. Things aren't going well."

Ed said, "That wasn't a bad set-up. I mean yes you had the five-story walk-up and the cross-town traffic noise, but we had fun in that place."

"I guess we did," she said.

"And some wild parties as well . . . remember when the Cuban guys showed up with the timbales?"

Kaitlyn said, "Ed, I'm afraid of this person."

Ed was digesting this. She was a button pusher. Way back before he met her, his therapist suggested he was

attracted to difficult women because they acted the way he didn't allow himself to. That was bullshit of course.

“Ah,” he said.

“We'll have a week, sometimes two or three, things'll be perfectly smooth. Then he'll just lose it.”

“Lose it how? . . . You mean slap you or something?”

“It's never come to that, but I fear it could . . . The other night we were arguing, it was quite ugly, and the neighbors called the police.”

“And what, they took you both in? That's what I hear they do these days, if it's not clear-cut what's going on.”

“Don't be silly. But they did speak to us separately, and the female officer, she advised me to pursue a restraining order.”

“So good, and you have that now?”

“Not exactly. I spoke to an attorney. There are pros and cons, they said. One concern is the order can antagonize the person.”

“Yeah, it could backfire on you, I can see that,” Ed said. “No doubt every circumstance is different though.” Remembering his own situation in Santa Monica. He'd just come back from playing tennis when they served

him. He tried to laugh it off, but he never fooled with that Sally woman again.

They were both quiet for a minute. “Okay let me get one thing straight,” Ed said, “you got no one down there can help you with this?”

“Well a girlfriend strongly suggested I move,” Kaitlyn said.

“I see, a pre-emptive strike then.”

“So I did that . . . Today . . . I’m in a motel in West Palm Beach. I parked the car long term, and rented one.”

“Jesus Christ, you’re serious . . . what about work and stuff?”

“It’s an hour down 95. This, hopefully -- it’s only until things -- blow over.”

“Which you think they might not.”

“Ed, he was in Iraq. He’s a security consultant now, well-paid, wears good suits. Gets his hair styled.”

“But he’s unhinged.”

“Possibly.”

Ed said, “Oh boy . . . What’s the fucker’s name? . . . Spell it out.”

It was a hectic week to be travelling south, but he found something halfway decent on Expedia non-stop to Lauderdale in the morning and booked it.

Kaitlyn had been hesitant when he asked for more information on the guy, Ed thinking she's afraid now that I might confront him, so why'd you call me then?

But the guy appeared to be listed, nice and old-fashioned, phone number and address, a low-rise complex in Coconut Creek about fifteen miles from the airport. On *Street View* Ed could see some of the apartment doors.

With the typical delays plus the cab and traffic it was late afternoon when he got there. There was no bell, so he knocked. A man opened the door and Ed said, "If you're Gary, I'm Ed Bostick."

Gary flinched slightly. Ed said, "What happened to working corporate security? It's not even cocktail hour."

"I'm on nights right now," Gary said. "You want to sit by the pool?"

It was a tired, kidney-shaped job surrounded by a cyclone fence. Ed recognized the sound of pickleball being played nearby. He said, "You're not very big, you know it? And you don't strike me as much of a tough guy. I guess that's the way it works though, huh?"

Gary said, “You talking, in my business? Or my relationship with your ex-wife?”

“She’s still my wife,” Ed said, “but forget that. Yeah, both I guess.”

“Listen to me . . . no idea what Kaitlyn told you . . . but if you think--”

“She ever ask you,” Ed said, “how much you make?”

“As a matter of fact she has,” Gary said. “And I’m all about full disclosure.”

Ed was thinking of the time they were on Turkey Mountain with Patty and Gil. Bright fall colors driving up the Taconic, the air crisp, should have been a sweet little hike, but Kaitlyn can’t keep her mouth shut. She keeps harping to Patty and Gil about his job. There was a steep section where you had to be careful, where it dropped off, and Ed had pictured bumping her over the side, wondering how that would have felt after.

Now he watched this pathetic piece of shit fidgeting in his patio chair. “So . . . we’re good then?” Ed said.

“Pardner, we always have been,” Gary said, surprised, reaching out his hand.

Ed ignored it. “Of course the big thing,” he said, “the crux of the matter . . . where she disappeared to.”

“That’d be nice, I’ll admit.”

“Well, you could start with the motel scene up in West Palm . . . probably a piece of cake for a big-shot detective like you.”

When he got out of there Ed thought he might poke around long term parking at the airport for the heck of it. There'd be a lost ticket fee, but he had a set of keys, and what was the rush getting back home, really.