

Anne Bonny

When he told her he wanted a divorce, she was sad, but not surprised. She'd known about his affairs for some time now. She was more surprised that he wanted to keep the house.

She'd felt the house was more hers than his, reflected more of her emotional involvement than his financial upkeep. She'd tried to engage his interest, sharing each paint chip, tile sample, or fabric swatch. He'd shown no more curiosity that he had toward her job, her friends, or her dreams. In the end, she decided the house was an anchor that was pulling her down and she let go, but not without regrets. It was that or drown.

She rented an apartment near her church and the library where she worked. Her friends visited and told her was fortunate she didn't have children. Divorce was tough on kids and he'd put up a custody battle she couldn't hope to win.

She would have liked to have had a tall, strong son to help with reaching and lifting, or a daughter to watch movies with, sharing popcorn and confidences. But it hadn't happened. She didn't feel alone, however. She had her job, which she enjoyed, and she went out to an early dinner every Sunday after church with other women who had no need or desire to run home and prepare a meal. Once a month she played cards with a long-standing group of friends.

A few months after she left, she found a stray, half-grown cat in the parking lot behind her apartment. She picked it up and discovered that one eye was matted shut and it's emaciated body was covered with fleas. She took it inside where she bathed it until every flea was swept down the drain. She fluffed it dry with a towel, feeling every tiny rib, tsked over the eye which she could do nothing about, and fed it a can of tuna. She put it out, but in the

morning it rose from where it had been sleeping by her door and greeted her with a happy chirp. She gave in to the inevitable.

The vet said the eye couldn't be saved, so she left the little cat there to have both its eye and its uterus removed. While it recuperated she purchased a basket that she lined with an old quilt, two dishes, both dry and canned food, and an assortment of toys that she put up until the cat was healed enough to play.

The little cat had a rakish look with only one eye, but Pirate seemed too bold a name. So she named it Anne Bonny after the female buccaneer.

When the divorce was final, her friends insisted on taking her out to dinner. They ordered several bottles of wine and some of the women got tipsy. One raised her glass and shouted, "To the happiest day of your life!" The others joined the toast and no one noticed that she quietly placed her glass on the table without taking a sip.

She'd accepted a lump-sum settlement in lieu of alimony, so all contact was severed; there was not even an impersonal monthly check to connect them. But it was a small town and she occasionally caught glimpses of him, leaving a building or walking on the other side of the street. One Saturday morning while she was doing her weekly shopping she met him coming down the aisle, carrying a bag of apples. She opened her mouth to say hello, but his glance swept over her without recognition and he passed by.

She felt cold even as her hands on the cart handle grew wet with perspiration. She had a few fine lines around her eyes now, but her hair was still a shiny brown and her figure was a trim as it had been on their wedding day. She realized that she had moved from being ignored

to invisibility. After that moment of shock, she regained her composure and finished her shopping. She did not see him at the checkout counter and was grateful.

At home she discovered she'd bought whole milk instead of the two percent she preferred. She grew uncharacteristically angry, calling herself stupid and other names that had become familiar during her two-decade long marriage. She poured the milk down the sink, still berating herself, when Anne Bonny jumped on the counter and nudged her arm. She dropped the carton and picked up the little cat, burying her face in the soft fur until her chest stopped hurting and the lump in her throat disappeared.

Time passed and she estimated Anne Bonny was now eighteen years old. She lost the sight in her good eye and refused to eat. She still wanted to be petted and cuddled, but she no longer purred. The woman doctor who had taken over the old vet's clinic told her what she already knew. After the procedure, which was done while she held Anne Bonny in her arms, she asked the vet to cremate the little body, explaining she had no yard to bury her in.

She hurried home. She was hosting the card game that evening and had to get ready. She put out the card table and chairs, and poured mints and nuts into little dishes. The brownies were sliced, to serve with ice cream after the game. She put the coffee on and sat down to check her email while she waited for her guests to arrive.

A well-meaning friend had sent a message that said only "massive heart attack" and a link to the local funeral home. Curious, she clicked on the link and saw his face. Lines that looked as if they had been carved with a knife made parentheses around his mouth and his hair

was silver. Otherwise, he was as handsome as ever. She read the notice, surprised that he had never remarried. Her name was not mentioned.

Her friends arrived all at one time, and she took their sweaters and jackets, and invited them to sit. One looked up at the counter that divided the living area from the kitchen and asked where Anne Bonny was. The cat loved to sit there, her front legs tucked under her chest, and watch the flutter of the cards with her one good eye.

She explained and accepted their murmurs of sympathy. The cat was old, after all. She'd given it a good life. She should get another for company.

She knew she wouldn't.

When the first hand was dealt, she discovered that her hands were trembling too much to pick up her cards. A tear rolled down her cheek, and then another. She began sobbing uncontrollably.

Her friends jumped up and fluttered around her with little cries of concern. They massaged her shoulders and patted her hands in an effort to stop the flood of tears. They all thought she was crying for Anne Bonny,

But then, they had been wrong before.