

Perfect Revenge

by Zalman Velvel

Abe went through his stack of morning messages. Three were marked "URGENT!", from his best friend, Jack. He grabbed the phone.

"Jack, what's wrong?"

"I have to see you right away."

"Your phone works. Talk to me."

"No. It's got to be face to face."

Abe looked at his appointment book. Clients were stacked up all day. "How about Salinger's? 12:30? "

"How about noon?"

"Okay. Noon."

When Abe hung up the phone, his first thought was I hope it's not cancer. Please God. The thought of life without his best friend of over fifty years was unbearable. Abe rushed the rest of his appointments and left early for lunch, only to be delayed at the elevator by furniture movers.

Abe extended his hand when he arrived at the table. Jack looked at his watch.

"Okay, I'm sorry. I know I'm late. It wasn't -"

"Shut up and sit down. There's your Scotch. I'm two ahead of you."

"No. Nothing with alcohol for me. I have to be in court this afternoon."

"Fine." Jack took Abe's scotch and downed it in one quick gulp.

"Now you're three ahead. Maybe you better slow down."

"My mother's dead, Abe, and you're the wrong sex for the job."

Abe studied Jack's face. His blue eyes still looked sharp. His skin looked younger than his seventy-two years, and he still had most of his hair. Life was good for Jack. All he needed was a shave. Please God, let that be all he needs.

"So?" Abe gripped the arms of his chair and held his breath.

"So, I want a divorce."

Abe exhaled and started laughing.

"You think this is funny?"

"Compared to what I imagined, it's hilarious. Now I could use a drink." Abe nodded to the waiter and pointed to his glass. "Please, a half glass of chardonnay."

Jack waited for the waiter to leave before he added:

"I swear, Abe, if I don't divorce that woman, I'll going to kill her."

"Good timing. Two months before your golden wedding anniversary."

"I hate her."

"Jack, come on. What did Janis do that was so terrible?" The waiter arrived with drinks. They gave their food order, and he left.

"She's the devil."

"Could you be a little more specific?"

"You want details? Okay. She doesn't do anything nice for me, that's what she does. Definitely nothing in the bedroom."

"Is there someone else?" Abe whispered.

"No, not yet." Jack looked at his friend. "Oh, you mean for her. No. She's too tired from tormenting me to be interested in someone else. It takes a lot of energy to argue like we do."

"About?"

"About? About nothing. Everything. Little things, mostly. Like this morning, for instance. We argued about the coffee. She said I keep making the coffee too strong. I

said all she needs is a little more milk in it. So I added a little milk and asked her to taste it. You know what she did? She spilled it out without tasting it."

"And you let her live after that? What a guy."

"Hey, screw you, buddy. You don't understand. It's like that every day. If I told you the fights we had over this golden anniversary, it would make your hair stand on end. We argued over the flowers, whether to have yellow roses or red roses, over the wine, whether to have white or burgundy, over the main course, whether to have chicken or steak, or both. We argued over the color of the clothes we were going to wear, who we were inviting. It's been a constant war. Abe, if you don't want to defend me in a murder trial, you better represent me in a divorce."

The waiter brought lunch - soup and a salad for Abe, a thick, juicy pastrami sandwich for Jack. Son of a bitch never has to watch his weight, Abe thought. The waiter got the big shaker, put fresh pepper on Abe's salad, and then excused himself.

"Come on, Abe, spill it. What are you thinking?"

"I was just thinking, if you hate Janis that much, don't you want a little revenge before you set her free?"

"What do you mean?" Jack put down his sandwich, a sure indication his interest was piqued.

"I mean, how much satisfaction will you get by divorcing her right away? She hates you, you hate her. She'll be glad to be free of you. You know she'll get the house, so you'll have to move out and find a new place."

"I'm looking forward to that."

"Don't expect your children to visit you much." Abe ate a forkful of salad.

"What you talking about? My kids love me. Wipe your moustache. You have dressing on it."

"The kids love you now. They will be angry as hell when you abandon their mother."

"But it's her fault!"

"They won't see it that way. Either will your friends." Abe pushed away the salad and started on the soup. It was black bean.

"What about our friends? Stop eating and talk to me, damn it!"

"Your friends are couples. The wives probably know about your constant fights, all from Janis's point of view. You know how women talk to one another about those things." Abe looked down and slurped a spoonful of soup. When he looked back up, Jack's eyebrows were tight hairy cords. "The wives won't let 'the louse that left Janis right before her golden anniversary' poison their husbands' minds. You'll be a leper."

"But -"

"So, let's summarize, Jack. You'll be living alone, in a strange house, in a strange neighborhood. No wife, no family, no friends- except for me, of course. Not the world's best battle plan." Abe buttered a roll.

Jack snatched the roll from his friend's grasp. "Abe, would you stop eating and talk to me. How can you eat at a time like this, you self-centered son-of-a-bitch? You obviously think you have a better idea. What is it?"

"I think you should do the reverse." Abe made a show of picking another roll from the basket, and then buttering every little nook and cranny.

"Reverse of what? Would you close your mouth while you chew, at least?"

"I think you should spend the next two months making Janis fall in love with you again."

"You're nuts." Jack arranged his sandwich so the thick pile of meat wouldn't spill out when he grabbed the sides.

"Am I? What if slowly, and subtly, so no one suspects anything, you become a model husband? What if everyone sees how considerate you are, how much you care about Janis and her happiness?"

"Yeah, right." Jack bit into his sandwich like he was tearing into a fresh kill.

"And then, when Janis least expects it, and she loves you again, desperately, THEN you ask for a divorce. Who will everyone blame? They will blame Janis, my good friend, because you were the picture of loving attentiveness."

Jack stopped chewing. He looked like a snake swallowing a fat mouse. Abe was afraid it was going to be Heimlich time when Jack forced a huge chunk down his throat.

"Abe, that's the most despicable thing I've ever heard. It's cruel, it's heartless, it's so ... so ... PERFECT!" Jack burst out laughing and screamed, "I LOVE IT!!"

Nearby patrons stopped eating and looked over.

Jack lowered his voice, but not his enthusiasm. "I'll be the best damn husband you can imagine. Everyone will see - the children, the neighbors, our friends."

"That's the ticket."

"At the anniversary party, I'll be the perfect host, the sweetest husband, the kindest friend."

"You got it, Jack."

"And then, at the end of the party, I'll get up and make the toast. I'll raise my glass, and announce we're getting a divorce."

"Wait a minute-"

"It's utterly demonic, so cleverly fiendish, so wonderfully diabolical. I'll make a list of everything good I did for her, and then everything bad she did to me. I'll read this list out loud. That will be my toast."

"Jack-"

"And then I'll hand her the divorce papers and walk out. It's PERFECT!"

"Jack!" Abe grabbed Jack's arm.

"What?"

"It sounds a little extreme."

"I need something extreme to help me keep my sanity over the next two months."

Abe started to say something, then stopped himself. Jack noticed it.

"What, Abe?"

"Jack, come to my office the Friday before the party. I'll have your divorce papers ready for you." Abe took out his planner and scribbled in it.

Jack looked at his best friend and smiled. "Abe, thanks for being there for me."

"Jack is here," Abe's secretary informed him over the intercom.

"Send him back." Jack knocked, then entered Abe's office. Abe remained seated behind his desk. Jack walked over and offered his hand.

"There are your papers." Abe pointed to an envelope.

"Abe, do you have time to talk?"

"Sure. Sit down."

Jack walked around the room, examining the memorabilia on the walls.

"Okay, don't sit down." Abe watched his friend straighten the frame that held one his diplomas.

"I was glad you went to law school, Abe."

"Why is that?"

Jack ignored the question and examined the paper next to it. "Remember how many times you flunked the bar exam?"

"I was never a good test taker."

"No, you weren't. I think I got better grades than you when we were in school."

"Yes, I think you did."

"But you were always smarter, Abe. How is that?"

"I'm not sure I understand the question?"

"Forget it."

Jack sat down, finally. After a long silence, Abe said, "So what else can I do for you today?"

"Are you going to ask me about these last two months, or are you going to continue to sit there with a stick up your ass?"

Abe smiled. "Okay, Jack, what happened these last two months?"

"None of your business."

"Screw you!"

"Okay, you don't have to browbeat me. I'll talk." Jack got up and walked around again. "I want you to know, Abe, when you and I finished lunch, I was happier than I'd been for a long time. My mind was on fire. That very afternoon, I started off by bringing Janis flowers."

"A good start."

"Could you shut up and listen? Thank you. She asked, 'What are these for?' and I said, 'For no special reason. For just being you.' And you know what she did?"

"No. "

"Can't you shut up? I didn't intend for you to answer." Jack looked out the window. "She started crying. I didn't want to arouse her suspicions, so I waited a few days until step two."

"Step two?"

"Look, if you're going to keep interrupting me, I'm going to leave."

"Okay. I'm sorry."

"Apology accepted. Step two was I took her out to eat at that romantic French restaurant, La Belle Jardin. We had a delicious meal by candlelight. Finished a bottle of wine. When we got home, I held her in my arms until she fell asleep. The next day I stayed home instead of playing golf."

"You canceled your golf game!? Okay, I'm sorry. I got excited."

"Yes, Mister I-can't-keep-my-mouth-shut. Janis and I went shopping at the Mall instead. We bought her earrings for the anniversary party."

Abe raised his hand.

"What? What? You're driving me crazy, Abe, with all these interruptions."

"She must have suspected something by now, didn't she?"

"Nope. Not a thing. But the next thing she did surprised me. That night, she came to bed wearing a silk negligee like she wore on our wedding night. And I swear, with the lights set just right, and a little imagination, she looked just as good as she did 50 years ago." Jack looked at Abe.

"I didn't say anything. Keep talking," Abe answered his best friend.

"The next morning, I made her coffee, the way she likes it, and put the cup beside her near the bed. I kissed her awake, and we stayed in bed, talking, until lunch. Yes, I canceled my golf game again. My golfing buddies aren't speaking to me anymore. Put your hand down, Abe. You want to ask something, ask?"

"So, does she love you now?"

"Absolutely. I'm sure of it." Jack sat down.

"I guess the plan worked."

"Perfectly."

Now it was Abe's turn to walk around and act fidgety. He went over to his law school diploma and straightened the frame. "I wish you wouldn't touch the stuff on my walls. You have no sense of balance. Everything is cock-eyed now."

"What are you talking about? You made it cockeyed. I made it straight."

Jack got up and straightened the frame his way. Abe moved it back. Jack moved it again, and Abe pushed his friend away. "Leave it be."

"What's with the shoving?"

"Don't touch my stuff. You're always touching my stuff. Even as kids, you had to have everything your way. Well, this is my office, and my diploma, and I say when things are straight." Abe moved the frame one last time. He turned around and glared at Jack. "So did you prepare your toast?"

"You finally asked."

"Go to hell."

Jack looked at Abe and then trained his glance out the window, at the traffic moving in the street outside. Abe was going to repeat the question when Jack finally said:

"Tomorrow night, Abe, when we raise our champagne glasses ..."

Abe studied his friend and was bursting to hear more, but he made himself still and patient.

"... I'm going to say how much I love Janis."

Abe took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

"What did you think I was going to say?"

Jack wiped his eyes, hugged his best friend, and said, "Thank you."

The End

Gift Section

Dear _____

This Story is a special Gift for a Special Person

on the occasion of your _____ .

I love you,

Person Giving Gift

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