



Knots by Nicolle Caputa | 2018

“If a love has fallen into a dusty box of old, forgotten memories, does that love become knotted up like rope and forgotten too? How could any knot be unraveled and put back together? If you don’t open the box, you’ll never know.”

I sit on the couch, drinking lemonade. The ice has melted away completely. I’m unsure if the water droplets falling down the side of the glass are from the drink or the sweat in my hand. I’ve adjusted the dial three times already today but there’s no use. It’s 95°F outside and at least 80 in here. I know it’s only a matter of time before the thickening air gets to my wife. Right on cue, she comes marching down the stairs.

“That’s it! I’ve had enough.” She fans herself with an old magazine. “I’m going to the beach. You coming?”

I look down at my lemonade not getting any colder.

“No, I’m fine.”

The fan drones on as Melody takes her bag and storms out of the house. She was the reason we moved here. I’ve had an irrational fear of alligators, snakes, hurricanes, and sharks for as long as I can remember. Well, irrational to Melody at least. Her logic is that if she isn’t afraid of it, then neither should I, because I’m the man. Makes total sense to her. But I moved with her because I love her, and therefore I’ll follow her anywhere.

Melody and I are what you would call, ‘High School Sweethearts’. Because of the pure fact that we started dating in high school and later got married. But we were never ‘sweethearts’. She bounced from guy to guy and I bounced away from girl to girl just long enough until we collided into each other again. I fell in love and for some obscure reason, she loved me. Nine years later and here we are: sweaty Florida. In a home that might as well be a fan shop.

Today is hot, but Melody tends to do this.

Too hot? She heads to the beach.

Bored? The mall.

Just can’t stand being in one spot? Moves across the country.

And me? I follow.

Sometimes she complains that I don't input my thoughts enough. But we both know if I attempt to do so, she'll just shut me down. I do really love my wife. She's just not the same anymore. Something changed. She, of course, will deny this if confronted and probably go out. But I don't mind her leaving the house every now and then. It gives me time to think in an empty house without constant phone calls and questioning about whether the white or egg shell napkins will do. It also gives me time to go through my things.

A month ago, when Melody decided to pack up and leave, she left all of her old belongings behind in order to start new again: get a shot at a fresh life. Me, however, I'm a bit more sentimental. These past weeks, I have been heading to the basement to go through my boxes that have yet to be unpacked. I want to see all the things I kept from my childhood, high school, college, and young adult years. They bring back memories of home.

With Melody gone for more than ten minutes, I decide to ditch my warm lemonade and head down the stairs. The many boxes lay there. Some are labeled **TAREN'S** and other's are just simply blank.

The first box I open has all my old baseball things. A worn-down mitt that my dad leant me, many baseballs covered in red soil, bent cheap trading cards, and old socks with holes and shot-elastic. It brings back intense visions of my childhood. Half of my real visions and half of *The Sandlot* movie scenes that I pretend happened in real life.

These things have been in this box long before the move and they'll probably stay there for much longer. I used to put them on a shelf in the apartment, but piece by piece, Melody put them all away until her rustic furniture took over. And I'm fine with that. It's old dirty garbage anyway. I just can't throw it away. So here it sits. In this box.

The second box contains my grandfather's things. The only family heirlooms I ever inherited. There are many scraps of paper, typewriter ribbons and lose keys. Hundreds of calligraphy pen tips as well as several of the pens themselves. There are also many old stamps with faded colors. They smell old like the aftershave my grandfather wore as well as tobacco.

The next box I move to is unlabeled and pushed to a corner, away from the other boxes. I assume it's mine because Melody has had her things put away for weeks now. But inside lies several things I've seen before. There are coffee stained envelopes from her siblings, mother, father, and old boyfriends. There is a small box of old buttons in various shades of pink, small candy tins from the 30's and 40's, and several guitar picks.

Why would she keep these things? That was so many years ago and she's never been a sentimental type. Whatever... I'm sure I at least have one or two notes from past girlfriends. No I don't... As I put the envelopes back in the box I see, deep inside, the cover of a worn, blue journal. I've never known Melody to have a personal journal. The florissant blue tells me it's from her college days. It was always her favorite color.

I pick up the old book and place my fingers on the cover. As tempted as I am to look inside, I leave it be. There must be some reason she hasn't shown this to me before. On the other hand, I've never known her to keep secrets. I pack the box back up and walk downstairs to make myself forget about it.

Sitting on the couch, the clock ticks on and on breaking every silence in the room. I attempt to lay down, then close my eyes. The heat is too much. I head to the fridge to place some ice on my neck. It melts instantly, transferring absolutely no chill into my body. I go back to the leather couch, letting the material trick my body to feel as though some of the heat in my skin is flowing out from the naturally cool fabric. I turn on the ballgame and let myself fall asleep.

I wake to the slam of the front door. Here comes the storm. Melody has at least 15 shopping bags in her arms.

“I thought you were going to the beach?” I say.

Her eyebrow furrows and she drops the bags on the dining table.

“What, I can’t go both places?”

I turn to the TV. Rockies are ahead of Tampa Bay for once with two innings left.

“Hello?” She stares at me with intense eyes.

“Huh?”

“You don’t *ever* pay attention, do you, Taren?”

She storms out of the room and slams another door upstairs. If I leave her alone she’ll come back down and give me the silent treatment. If I go upstairs, she’ll yell. I stay on the couch.

At the top of the ninth inning, Melody comes down the stairs. She’s wearing a tight, black dress with heels. She’s redone her makeup and hair.

“Where are you going now?”

“Out,” she says.

“With who?”

“The girls.” She heads to the door.

The pounding door hits in my chest. I decide to continue in the basement with the miscellaneous box containing the buttons, letters, and journal. After looking through several pieces of paper I close the last piece and let it drop back into the box. This time, I go for the journal instead, pushing the gut feeling to the back of my mind, I open the first page.

May 2, 2006

I miss him all the time. I never know what to do with myself when I see him. I imagine it all day long; what to say to him, what I’ll do with my eyes, how I’ll fix my hair. But then I go to see him and I can’t even control myself. Why is he so perfect?

I feel my heart beating against my ribs. That's how I felt every time I saw her too. She made my stomach tie itself in knots. I grab around my waist with one arm and flip the pages.

January 14, 2007

He means everything to me. He said I love you and I said it back. Am I absolutely insane? He's so sweet and caring. He knows me so well. If I had a rose for every day I've spent with him, I'd be drowning in a sea of petals.

I didn't know she was capable of writing such sappy crap. I skip through the journal, near the end. Our wedding day.

March 3, 2008

It finally happened. I've finally found the love of my life. I can't believe this is real. We dated in high school and separated for some time but we found each other once again. I've already made a new life for myself, but hearing his voice again, kissing him again, made me realize that I'm marrying the wrong man. I have to tell Taren...

I look up at nothing, trying to think straight. I read the last line again to make sure I read it right.

I'm marrying the wrong man. I have to tell Taren...

The book falls to the floor. I hold my jaw for a second and then reach for the journal again. All those poetic words...about another man. Melody is always going out, *without* me. She likes it that way. I like it that way. I try to convince myself that this is fine, that I'm fine. That she hasn't thought this way since apparently our wedding day.

The rest of the journal contains little doodles here and there but no full passages. There are many hearts drawn with the letters *M&R* adorning the paper.

I jump two stairs at a time. My foot rams into the top stair. I scream in pain. I scream in anger. I grab the keys off the hook and slam the door just like Melody does every day. All my life I told myself that Melody was this sweet, beautiful, adorable woman who could never harm a fly. But, here I am driving down the road pushing 80 mph in absolute rage. Feeling anguish and fear. Feeling betrayal. All because of words on a page.

Our whole life was just words. From "I love you" to "I do" to "Who are you?"

I can't imagine why she would feel this way or even if she still does. On the other hand, I can't imagine how she wouldn't feel this way now. She never speaks kindly anymore. She doesn't look at me the same. As if I'm some sort of bug she can't scrape off her shoe. How has the silence gone on for so long?

In the middle of an empty road I realize I have no clue where she is. I never do. I grab my phone and call all her friends that she usually goes out with. After five calls, Jessica picks up.

"Hello?"

"Jess, it's Taren."

“Hey! How’s it going? Having fun toni—” I cut her off to save time.

“Where’s Melody?” I keep my eyes on the white lines.

“What? I don’t know? What’s going on?” I hear the TV turn off in the background.

“Nothing. I...I just need to find her. Are you with her?” My voice is strained.

“No.” There is something hesitant about her voice now.

I grip the steering wheel.

“Do you know where she is?” Silence.

“Jess, do you know where she is?” I emphasize every word.

“No. Sorry...”

I push the gas pedal into the floor, hanging up. The phone hits the floor mat hard. I have no clue what she’s doing, or even where in the world she is. How could she do this to me after all this time? We were going through a rough patch not off a cliff. Obviously we weren't on the same track.

Nearing the bar I know she goes to with her friends, I slow down and pull in. There sits her white SUV beside a red sports-car. I don’t try to assume the fancy car is whoever’s she is with, but I still feel fire in my chest looking at it. I get out and slam the truck door, march through the front, and see them.

The music is blaring and drunk people sway around trying to impress everyone else. She’s standing there, dancing, with some man who doesn’t realize his fraternity life ended ten years ago. She dances like I’ve never seen her dance before. Swaying her hips into the man.

As I narrow my eyes to the center of the room, the lights follow her and the other people turn into dust, and the music melts into a slow relaxing tune. Our wedding song. I see her in the white dress spinning around me, smiling like this is the best decision of her life. Her eyes shine and I feel a tear sneak across my cheek. And then I blink.

The music blares on and she leans her full body in that tight, black dress against him. My fists ball up and turn white. Then, as I see her look at him, all the anger falls through my finger tips and onto the floor. I back up.

She smiles and throws her head back and looks at him with familiar but distant eyes. Distant to me. Perfectly close to him. He looks back at her and leans toward her face. After far too long of my watching them kiss, I turn to leave the bar. I drive home with no radio. Not even the sports station in the background.

In the basement again, I look at the unlabeled box. Inside me, I feel an urge to throw the box across the room. Letting the buttons scatter the floor in a plastic, pink rug. I push the journal back inside the box and tuck the knick-knacks on top. I fold the top of the cardboard and push it against the wall again.

I went in there knowing I would kick the crap out of that disgusting piece of garbage she was dancing with and then drag her out of there. I felt so much rage. But now, I just feel pain. There's a small tug inside me, telling me to grab my things and get out. But after everything we've been through, the fights, the kisses, the long walks while holding hands. So many years ago it seemed like we were the perfect match... I think about what she wrote in her journal. That when she said, "I do." and looked at me with those eyes, there was a feeling in the back of her mind saying, "Don't do it."

Instead of letting this burning feeling fire me up again, my legs collapse on the ground. I let the tears come out. They almost seem to sizzle on my hot cheeks. If I leave her, I lose all that we've worked on, I lose every fight we have resolved, every relationship block we have built together, I lose her family that I so cherish, I lose laying beside her every night. And although she is always quiet and I don't say a word either, I think it would somehow be worse to lay next to an empty pillow than feel her warmth every time she turns over in her sleep. And somehow I feel as though this may have been what she was thinking when she married me. That somehow this life with me would be better even if it wasn't what she wanted. I push the sight of her with that man deep inside.

Sick of myself, I go into the living room. I sit on the couch and keep my eyes remained on the ticking clock even though the game is on right in front of me. I keep me head forward and just breath. When Melody comes through the door around two in the morning, I keep my gaze fixed on the clock. Without so much as a glance toward me, she stumbles up the stairs and heads straight to bed. And I sit on the couch like I always do, not saying a word, letting my stomach remain unraveled.

This house was meant to be the dream home. Now, it's just walls and floors and windows with a single closed door.



I wake early in the morning before the sun has a chance to rise. I turn the radio on whatever station it feels like playing. Some singer strums a guitar and hums something to the fact of what he can imagine Heaven to be like. A Christian station? I'm too lazy to change it, besides, it's a little peaceful.

I work hard on the air conditioner until I feel the cool air trickling out of the vent, drying the sweat on my back. I put the TV remote in a drawer, determined to leave my baseball games in there for now too. I gather the beach bag and prepare a small breakfast in a cooler.

Finally, when I start to see the orange glow against the waterline outside, I march outside, ready to face the wrath of Melody as I wake her only hours after she got home, surely recovering from a hangover. With some effort, I shake her awake.

"What are you doing?" she growls angrily.

"Just come with me," I say, still trying to hold my anger in.

"What? No way! Leave me be!"

She turns over, pulling the blankets further up her head. I decide to take a rash move and pick her up in her blankets. She twists and fights but eventually realizes it's not worth the exhaustion and collapses in my arms. I grab the cooler and beach bag and carry her down to the sand.

"What in the world are you thinking?" she argues.

With a deep breath and shaky hands I get in the position I got so long ago: on one knee. With a tear in my eye, I look into her tired, beautiful face, mascara streaked on her cheeks from tears the night before.

"Melody, start over with me," I tell her.

"Wh--what are you doing, Taren?" she begins.

"Neither of us are happy and neither of us are helping that. I read your journal from college..."

"You what?"

I put a hand out stopping her. "I know, I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry... Please... Do you love me at all? Have you ever loved me?" I let the tears flow now despite me supposing to be the man.

"What? Of...of course I love you..." She lets herself cry now too, apparently opening some floodgate that has been locked for too many years. "I've been so lost," she reveals.

"Me too... Melody?"

"Yes?"

"Marry me again? Let's start over..."

"I don't know if it's that easy."

"I didn't say it would be," I say.

Seeing her wrapped in the bed sheets on the beach with tired eyes and messy hair makes my heart lurch. She's beautiful and I'm a lucky, foolish man that hasn't treated her as such...

I continue, "Take the chance with me, won't you?"

Slowly, she nods. I embrace her in my arms and we kiss like we have never kissed before...

A short story by Nicolle Caputa

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