

Keep Your Enemies Close

I've heard people say that you should keep your friends close and your enemies closer, but I think it should be the other way around.

It was the later part of summer, you know just about that time when you feel you've really gotten to know the guy you met after Valentines Day. He's had just enough time to impress you but not enough to earn the panties. Now I didn't say he didn't get any, but he certainly hadn't earned it. I mean being handsome does earn some points doesn't it?

Anyway, his name is Anthony but everyone calls him Tony for short. He works out on a regular at Equinox. The guy's got biceps a woman would die for and his six pack—I don't mean beer—definitely is refreshing. Can you believe after all this time, 5 months; I still don't know where this guy works? He's cute as hell though and I would do just about anything to keep him—at least I thought I would.

“What's up girl?” I called out to my girl Rosie. That's how I met Tony. She and I were out driving one night; Rosie started flirting with two guys who were passing by in a 2002 Mercedes. After we all introduced ourselves, I drove away with a card with nothing but a name and number printed on it—Tony—917-942-6248 along with a mental picture of the guy who handed it to me.

“Hey Connie, How's Tony?” She called back.

She later realized that Tony was the one with the car.

“What are you guys doing today?” She asked approaching with her seductive gate. Her hips were full and proportionate with her large thighs and fluffy breasts. She was wearing her favorite yellow dress that clung perfectly to her body.

“I guess you're on a stroll tonight?”

“You know that's right girl. I've got to find me a man. Someone to do me right.”

“What happened to Duane?”

“Too pretentious. I just can't stand perpetrators.”

“Why would you think he's a perpetrator? Because he didn't own the Mercedes he was driving?”

“Well yeah, but you didn't have to make it sound so cold did you?”

“It's the truth. You've got to be looking for more than just superficial things. What if the man loses his job and he treats you really good, would you still leave him?”

“He didn’t have a job. He just wanted to freeload off of me. He got me for five hundred bucks and that’s far more than I would ever give a man!”

“What did he need it for?”

“He claimed he was looking for a job and needed a couple of outfits for an interview. I found out that he had two other women besides me.”

Tony had trouble hiding that awkward look he had on his face. He obviously knew that his friend was nothing but a gigolo. He quickly gave me a quick kiss on the cheek and said he had to get moving.

“Baby I’ll catch up with you later. I can see you and Rosie have a lot to talk about.”

“What time?”

“Let’s say about eight.”

“Perfect. I’ll see you then.”

Rosie and I went to the Green Acres Mall in Valley Stream. Although we were doing her favorite pass time—buying shoes, her mind was still on the five hundred dollars Duane took from her. I didn’t know which bothered her most, the fact that he conned her out of her money or that she felt she paid a high-priced whore for a good time.

“You know Connie, I feel like killing that bastard.”

“Rosie, it’s only five hundred dollars. You want to go to jail for a mere five hundred dollars? That’s ridiculous! Now come on and stop talking like that. It’s not like you don’t do it all the time. Sometimes our sins return to us. Just laugh it off and learn to keep your money in your pocket.”

“I don’t know what came over me. I really thought this guy was special. He filled my head up with nothing but lies. I actually trusted him. He used the Love word.”

“No he didn’t. He told you he loved you? And you believed him?” I don’t know why, but I let out a hardy laugh and before I knew it, I felt a sting on my cheek. “Why did you slap me?” I asked holding my hand to my cheek. I could feel the tingle beneath my fingers as I attempted to massage the insult away. My reflexes must be slow because she certainly deserved a return for that. When my eyes finally focused, I realized that people were whispering and staring at me.

“How could you make fun of me? I am Rosemarie Cruz and no one treats me like that. Not anybody. He’ll pay for that.”

“That still doesn’t explain why you slapped me.” I mumbled still holding my cheek.

“I’m sorry, come on, let’s go into Nine West.”

It was getting pretty late. Rosie and I had shopped like crazy. I found two outfits and finally found some slings to match my bronze and gold dress. Black just didn’t cut it. Rosie bought three pairs of shoes and some jeans that complimented her shape. My shape wasn’t bad. I mean I must admit, that I was really put together, but everything seemed to be made just for her. Anyway, it was six o’clock and we really needed to get back. Tony was quite punctual and I didn’t want to disappoint him.

I dropped Rosie off at her house on Lincoln Place and I lived a few blocks up on St. John’s Place.

“You gonna be all right?”

“I’m fine. Thanks for not kicking my ass. I’m sorry for tripping.”

“Don’t sweat it. I understand. Now I’ve got to get home now, so don’t you go killing anybody okay? I don’t want to read about you in tomorrow’s paper.”

“Go ahead, I’m fine now.”

“What are you going to do for the rest of the night?”

She sighed. “Just watch television and throw a couple of hot dogs on the Forman.”

“We’ll hang out tomorrow. I’ll tell Tony that tomorrow’s the girl’s night out.”

We hugged and parted. When I arrived home, I hung up my outfits and put my shoes in the closet along with all the rest. I pulled a banana floral, spaghetti-strapped nightgown from my closet and a pair of white Goose-feather pumps to wear around the house. I prepared my bath and slid into the creamy bubble surface down into the warm welcoming water. I felt good, relaxed. Afterwards, I towel dried and oiled myself with Relaxing Moments body oil. Just as I slid my gown over my body, I heard the doorbell ring.

“Coming,” I called out as I made my way to the door. I checked myself in the mirror before pulling the door open.

“Rosie?” I said disappointed. “Tomorrow is girl’s night out. Not tonight. You’re confused.” I said pushing the door closed without inviting her in.

“Stop it silly. He’s dead!” She said breaking into a sob.

“Who’s dead Rosie? What are you talking about?”

“Duane’s dead.”

My face contorted into a ghastly look of surprise and fear. “You killed him?” I started toward the living room to pick up the phone when she came up behind me. Her hand rested on top of mine preventing me from lifting the receiver.

“I didn’t kill him!”

Her hand still pressed atop mine. I could feel her hand trembling. She was scared. This was certainly a characteristic I was accustomed to seeing from her. I realized that she was distraught and probably going through a denial state. I feared what she would do next, so I pulled my hand away from the phone.

“Let’s sit down. Tell me what happened.”

“I turned on the TV and started grilling hotdogs just as planned, but I just couldn’t get the thought out of my head that I let a stupid man get over on me. I just couldn’t shake it. I tried to calm myself down, but I just couldn’t. I got so angry. I started drinking and before I knew it, I was at his door banging and screaming. I was furious—so furious at him that when he opened the door, I charged him.”

She paused and broke into a wail.

“Rosie you’ve got to calm down. What happened next?”

“There was blood every where—over my clothes, my hands, the floor, every where. He was bleeding so badly. I didn’t know what to do.”

“Why was he bleeding Rosie? What did you hit him with?”

“There was blood all over the place. It just didn’t make sense. I didn’t understand. How could something like this happen? I’m in trouble aren’t I Connie. Tell the truth.”

“Rosie. What did you do?”

“I wasn’t thinking. I had to get away, so I snatched the knife from his chest and I ran as fast as I could. I had to hide. I was covered in blood and...Connie, I don’t want to go to jail over five hundred dollars.”

“You stabbed him, Rosie? Why did you do that? I told you to forget about it.” She was so scared I held her close. I wanted to help her, but what could I do? She had committed murder. I can’t hide it. That would make me an accessory. “Rosie, I’m going to call the police and you have got to explain to them what happened.”

“You’re turning me in?”

“I’ve got to.”

“I didn’t kill him.”

“Rosie, I know you’re afraid, but you’ve got to deal with this.” She pulled away from me.

“I thought I could trust you; that you would help me. I guess I was wrong.”

“Help you do what? Get away with murder.” She got up from her seat and started for the door. I was definitely not going to hinder her.

“I brought the knife home. It’s in a bag along with my bloody clothes. You can help me if you want to. If not, then stay out of my way.”

“Help you do what? Cover up the crime?”

“No. Find out who really killed him!”

Just as she opened the door, Tony walked in. I had forgotten about our intimate date. He was handsome as ever.

“Hey, Rosie,” he greeted her. She didn’t respond only continued out the door without saying a word. “What’s up with her?”

“She’s having a really hard time right now.”

“She’s not still mad about Duane is she?”

“Yeah, in fact, I think I should get dressed and try to catch up with her. She really doesn’t need to be alone right now.”

“People get cheated on all the time Connie, but it is survivable.”

“She killed Duane.” He laughed.

“That’s silly, I was just at Duane’s house and he’s perfectly fine. Your girlfriend is a trip. That’s what she told you? That she killed Duane?”

“What are you laughing at? Your friend is dead! Why would she tell me something like that if it weren’t true?”

“Perhaps to get you all upset or to play a prank on you. You’re not falling for it, are you?”

“Did she look like she was pranking? I’m getting dressed.” I told him snatching my hand from him. I hurried into my bedroom and pulled a pair of dark blue jeans from the closet and a neon green tee shirt. Once I pulled the shirt over my head, I realized that Tony was

standing at the door. He didn't believe any of this. His expression said exactly what was on his mind—you can't be serious.

"I really don't care if you believe me or not, I know my friend and she wouldn't lie about a thing like this. She's in denial and I've got to do all that I can to help her."

"How will you help her? By turning her over to the police? What kind of friend is that?"

"Look, you can either come with me or you can get out of my way, but I'm going to my friend."

"Fine! You can do what you want, but I am not going to be a part of this. When you feel like having a real relationship, you can give me a call." Tony turned and walked away. His response was so fast, that I didn't have a chance to respond.

I grabbed my purse and hurried out the door. Tony was already gone. When I reached outside, I got into my car and for some reason; I was inclined to go to Duane's house first. I needed to confirm that Duane was actually dead and that this was not some hoax or sick joke.

Duane lived about twenty minutes from me. He lived on Crescent Street in East New York. I pulled in front of his house. There was nothing out of the ordinary. People were sitting on their stoops talking and laughing. Duane's lights were on in his house. I saw someone's shadow pass by the window. They didn't look out. The person descended out of sight then reappeared carrying something.

I figured it was Duane. He and Rosie are trying to play a trick on me for sure and Tony is in on it. Why else would he have disappeared like that so fast? They knew that I would come here first. They are all waiting for me upstairs. I then realized that my birthday was only a couple of days away. This is probably a surprise birthday party. *Really slick Rosie*, I told myself as I ascended the steps.

When I reached out to knock on the door, it opened. I quietly entered the house wanting to surprise them instead of the other way around so I crept up the steps to the living room. Duane lives in a two-family house and he has the upstairs apartment. When I reached the top of the steps, no one was there and nothing seemed unusual. The furniture was still in tact, nothing was broken or disarray. Slowly, I crept toward the rear of the house.

Duane's room was the last room all the way to the back so I bypassed the other two without opening the doors. I stood not even three feet from his room door when a horrible odor, stench filled my nostrils. I cupped my mouth and nose. I reached out for the doorknob and a sudden chill raced up my spine—*was Rosie telling the truth? Had she actually killed Duane?* After swallowing, I slowly turned the knob and without further hesitation, I forced the door open. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It was far worse than anything I could have imagined was. I moved closer in disbelief. I wanted to scream but I fought the urge, I only watched. When I had seen enough, I backed out the room and pulled the door shut, leaving it ajar. I backed myself all the way through the

apartment until I was back down the stairs and on my way to my car. I started it and drove off. I didn't know what to do. It's one thing to have someone tell you that they killed someone, but it's another to see it for yourself. I had to go to the police. I didn't want to get any more involved than I had to. Sometimes stupidity kicks in when you're trying to do the right thing so needless to say; I rushed over to Rosie's house. I had to find out what she planned on doing.

I pulled in front of her house, shut off my engine and rushed right up her stairs. I rang the bell. After waiting a few minutes, she opened it. She appeared wild and crazy. She was still crying. She was wearing latex gloves that were stained with blood. In her other hand, she was holding a bloody knife.

"Rosie, what are you doing? Are you okay? Why do you have that knife in your hand?"

"I'm going to find out who killed Duane."

"You killed Duane, Rosie." She screamed at me swinging the knife while reiterating that she did not kill him that someone was trying to set her up. "Just give me the knife Rosie, and then we can talk about whatever you want to."

"I don't trust you. Why should I hand the knife to you?"

"Because, I want to help you and I don't want to get hurt in the process."

She handed me the knife carefully. The blood was wet and gooey. I didn't want to hold it, but it was the only way I would feel safe talking to her considering that she was distraught. "Let's go to the living room and talk."

"I think you talk too much." She said angrily while pulling the latex gloves from her hands. She went to the bathroom and washed her hands. She put the gloves into the toilet and flushed them down.

"You're not thinking Rosie. You just flushed a pair of rubber gloves down the toilet. I'm surprised it didn't flood the toilet."

Her personality changed so quickly, she seemed really angry about something. She returned to the living room and picked up the phone. She dialed the police.

"You're going to turn yourself in?" I asked in amazement. I guessed that she had decided to face the music.

I left her to discuss matters with the police. I would stand by her side for as long as she needed me. I went into the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror. I think what I was really looking for was reassurance. So much was happening so fast.

“The police will be here soon.” She told me. Her tone was bitter. It didn’t seem right considering all I had done to help her.

“You know, before all this is over, I want you to know how I really feel about you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, you have always thought that you were better than me, you took all the nice looking guys and for once, I had hoped that you would be a friend and not some straight arrow.”

“I’ve never taken anyone from you. Who have I taken from you? Why are you so angry with me? You’re my best friend.”

The police arrived. I could hear the sirens from outside. She would be gone from my life very soon. I needed to straighten things out before she was gone from me forever.

“Rosie, I had no idea that you felt that way about me. Tell me, exactly what I did to hurt you.”

There was a knock on the door and she opened it. The police entered and started toward the living room. She looked at me with all the loathing she could muster up.

“You killed my boyfriend!”

I was in shock, before I could say anything, the police was grabbing my arm and pulling a bloody knife from my hand and taking pictures of me. I was escorted to a patrol car and Rosie was left behind to talk to the police. My lips couldn’t even sum up the words to explain how the knife got into my hand. Cleverly so, her fingerprints would not be on the knife nor would they be at the apartment. She probably planned all of this just for me.

I had a legal aid attorney to defend me and she recommended that I take a plea. She said that it’s better to admit to the crime than to give the judge the impression that I’m trying to make a mockery of the court. I took one look at the judge and knew that she was right.

I received a lesser sentence of 20 years with 10 being the minimum served. After being locked up for 7 years, the only thing I can remember is Tony sitting in court with his arms wrapped around someone I once called my best friend. The two of them had set me up. Tony had killed his friend and he and Rosie plotted to make me the fall guy. Needless to say, it worked. I had no proof and certainly no alibi.

“Keep your enemies close and your friends even closer.” I told my new cellmate. I’ve told this story to eleven people since I’ve been here and not one of them got my point. I looked out the window and uttered another cliché...

“Revenge is bliss. See you on the outside!”

