

Frank & Gail

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Frank Jacobs knelt down to pull the cactus needles from the deflated tire of the tandem bicycle him and his wife, Gail, had rented. Gail sat on a bench near Frank, watching boats sail on McFarland Lake. Men, women, boys and girls walked, ran, skated and bicycled in both directions along the street that circled the lake. Gail had never seen so many families there at once. The street separated the cottages from about 50 feet of lawn; both the street and the lawn wrapped eight miles all the way around the lake, giving the vacationers full access to the entire shore. They had just been about to round the west end of the lake, when Gail accidentally steered them into a cactus, which was in a pot at the end of one of the cottages driveways.

“Where do you think they’re sailing to?” Gail asked.

“Who the hell puts a cactus in their yard? What would make somebody say, ‘*Yes, a cactus is what we need here?*’?” Frank said.

“Some people like them.” She looked down at Frank.

“Then those people are morons.”

“I said I was sorry.”

“I’m not mad at you. It’s the morons who felt the need to put a cactus here that I’m mad at.”

“I was distracted,” Gail said.

“I know.”

“It was quite a site.”

“I know it was.”

“How often do you see a little girl and a puppy wearing the same outfit?”

“I’m not blaming you,” Frank said, trying to pinch a firm grip on the cactus needle.

He pricked his finger. “Damnit!”

“Who else is there to blame?”

“The damn cactus morons! This is pointless,” Frank said, looking at the tire.

“Be serious.”

“I am. Gail, I don’t blame anyone. Let it go.”

“Then why are you so mad?”

“I’m not,” Frank said and was given a pathetic look. “Fine. I blame the parents for making the dog and kid look stupid enough to distract you... and the cactus morons.

That’s who I blame.”

“Why do children annoy you so much? Admit it. You think they were adorable.”

Frank stood up. “Fine. Can we go return this thing now?”

“Admit they were cute.”

“Gail, why are you doing this?”

“Doing what?”

“I thought we finished this subject.”

“I can still think they’re cute, can’t I? Is that not allowed either? Or should I completely forget about them as a species as well?”

“Gail,” Frank said.

“You should steer from now on. I’d be perfectly happy on the backseat.”

“Thanks but I won’t be steering. I’ll be pushing.” He wiped the sweat from his brow.

Gail looked back to the sailboats. “Where do you think they’re going?” she said.

“What...the boats?”

“Yes.”

“They’re in the lake.”

“So.”

“They’re not going anywhere. They’re just cruising around. Let’s go.” He began walking the bicycle down the street.

Gail stood up and hurried to catch up with Frank. “What about those big sailboats we saw in San Diego? Do you think they were on an adventure up the coast? Wouldn’t that be exciting? To take a year off and just go for an adventure?”

“Honey, I really don’t know.”

“Yes, but wouldn’t that be fun? It’s not like we have anything tying us down. We could just go for an adventure.”

“You might be able to go off for a year, Gail, but I have a job,” Frank said, pushing the maimed bicycle by the front handle bars. “I sure as hell don’t think it would go over well if I took year off.”

Gail watched a young girl with an older man sail close to the shore. “Let’s go sailing. I’d really like to”

“*Sailing?* How do you know you’d like it?”

“Frank, we come here every year and do the same old things. We’ve not gone sailing once.”

“Gail, I really don’t want to go sailing.”

“How do you know if you’ve never done it?”

“I just know.”

“It really is amazing how much you just know,” she said.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“Just an observation.”

“We’re not sailing.”

“You’re so boring.”

“We don’t even know how.”

“I do too. I know how.”

They stopped and looked at each other. “You do not.”

“My Dad used to take me sailing every summer.”

“So that makes you an expert?”

“No, but I could sail a little boat like that.” Gail pointed to a 14-foot sailboat near them on the bay.

“I just don’t want to.”

“You never want to.”

“Gail, you sound like a child.”

“And that is so terrible?”

“What?”

“To sound like a child?”

“Stop.”

“If you won’t go sailing with me I’ll go by myself.”

Frank said, "Fine. We'll go sailing."

"Really! Oh, you'll love it. You'll see. You'll really love it."

They could see their inn about a half mile away.

"Can we rent one from the inn, or do we have to go someplace else?"

"I'm not sure. I suppose we'll see when we get there." She placed her hand on his hand, which was on the bicycle seat. "Would you like me to push the bike for a while?"

"I'm fine," he said, staring at the destination. "It'd be nice if we could rent the boat from the same kid at the inn."

She took her hand from his and agreed, "That would be convenient."

"How much do you think it will cost to rent one of those?" He nodded to a sailboat in the bay.

"I'm sure there's room in the vacation budget, Frank."

"I hope so."

"Do you?"

"Why wouldn't I?" he said sarcastically.

"Now you're just being spiteful. You blame me, don't you?"

"For what?"

"The cactus."

"I don't blame you for the damn cactus. I just really hope you know what you're doing."

"I told you, I know enough."

"I'm sure you thought you knew *enough* about steering a bicycle, too."

"I knew it," she said loudly.

“It would just be horrible to be stranded out there someplace with a sunken boat. Or what if we run into somebody? I really hope you know what you’re doing,” he said.

She looked out toward the inn. “Sometimes, Frank, you really exhaust me.”

“Then maybe we shouldn’t go sailing.”

She looked out over the bay. “I don’t think you’ve listened to me ever. Not once. We’ve been married eight years, and I don’t think you have ever really listened to me.”

“If you would make sense, maybe I would.”

“So you admit it?”

“How can I admit it if I have no clue what you are talking about?”

“Do you think I’m happy?”

“Why are you doing this again?”

“Do you?”

“Yes, I told you I do. Maybe you are upset now, but, yes, I know that in the big picture of things you are happy.”

“Why?”

“What do you mean, *why*?”

“Why do you *just know* I am happy? What makes me happy?”

“I’m not talking about this again. I’m just not.”

“I’m almost 35 years old, Frank,” she said. “Why am I happy?”

“Gail.”

“Frank.”

“Why wouldn’t you be happy? We have a gorgeous home. We go out to restaurants, plays, movies, parties. We have great friends. We go on vacations all the

time. We are very financially stable. And Gail, we have each other. Why can't that be enough?"

"What a lovely package."

"Why now, Gail? Why all this now?"

"Why do you think, Frank?"

"You know what? I don't have a clue."

She looked at him and said, "Well, that's a first."

They were about 100 yards from the inn and the little hut they had rented the tandem bicycle from.

"If you're not happy now, you'll never be happy. What more can I possibly do?"

"I'm pregnant, Frank."

He stopped walking. She took another step and then turned to face him.

"What?"

"You heard me."

"That's impossible."

"Obviously it's not."

"We use your diaphragm every time. You know that's impossible."

"Those things aren't 100%."

"Are you cheating on me?"

She turned, and then started walking again. He followed, pushing the bicycle.

"You're pathetic, Frank."

"Are you?"

"Why would you even think that?"

“You said you weren’t happy.”

“So you think I’m unhappy because I don’t get enough sex? You know why I’m unhappy”

“We talked about this. We made a decision.”

“You made a decision.”

“It was the right decision.”

“Was it?” They stopped walking again and faced each other. “Was it the right decision? I’m pregnant with our child, Frank. How does that make you feel?”

“What did you do?” Frank said.

Gail covered her face with her hands, and then started walking toward the inn crying. He followed her with the bike.

“What...” Frank said again. “What did you do? Did you damage your diaphragm? Is that what you did?”

“I’m not pregnant, Frank,” she said through her hands.

“What did you say?”

She dropped her hands from her face and yelled, “I’m not pregnant.”

“Gail.”

“Frank,” she yelled.

“What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Why don’t you give a shit about my happiness?” She walked faster.

“Obviously I do. I wouldn’t bust my ass every damn day so you could just sit at home on yours,” Frank said. He followed close behind her. “Do everything I can to make you happy, and this is what I get? You lie to me, and trick me. Happiness!”

Happiness! You know you're not the only one in this marriage. I like to be happy too. Do you give a shit about that?"

"I do, Frank. All I do is try to make you happy."

"Then what is all this about?"

"Me."

"Fine, we'll have a kid. If that is the only thing in the world that will make you happy, then we'll have a damn kid."

"I hate you."

"See that? You don't know what you want. I try to give you the one thing you want and you throw it in my face."

"I do too. I know what I want."

"Then what is it? What do you want right now?"

"I'm going sailing with or without you. Maybe I'll crash, maybe I'll sink the boat, or maybe I'll just go around in circles for hours."

They stopped walking when they were right next to the bike rental hut. "You want to drown us out there? Is what you want?"

"Go to hell. I'll go by myself."

"Like hell you will."

"Stay here."

"Why?"

"So I can go get you what you want." Frank leaned the bike against the hut and then went inside. Gail wiped the tears from her face, watching all the different boats on the bay. She turned back to look at the door Frank had just walked through. Next to it was

a sign telling guests where they could rent sail boats. All the locations were on the other side of the lake. Rather than wait for Frank to come out and tell her they could not go sailing, Gail decided to leave him there alone, and go take a nap in their hotel room. She was exhausted.

the end