

WHAT
WOULD
I DO
WITHOUT
YOU?

*A Collection of
Short Stories About Friendships*

MARGO T KRASNE

What Would I Do Without You? is a collection of short stories about friendships and how they can both sustain and devastate. It is a book about attachment, separation and loss.

What Would I Do Without You?
A collection of short stories about friendships
By Margo T Krasne

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Like Sisters

They knew each other's likes, dislikes. Admired each other's strong points and accepted the other's weaknesses. Their friendship made all the more fluid due to the one's compulsion to lead, and the other's proclivity to leaving the decision making to her friend.

They spoke almost daily. Saw each other at a minimum twice a month. Would go with the other to a worrisome doctor's appointment taking notes as the doctor explained the diagnosis or discussed a procedure. And they would sit together in wait for a veterinarian's pronouncement as to whether the one's dog or the other's cat would live. Whatever the verdict they would be there for each other whether to console or to celebrate. Sisters. Always.

There were differences of course. One was married. Had been twice. The other single with a stream of affairs in her wake. And like sisters they didn't always agree. One preferred to attend pop concerts or the latest hit movie, the other obscure foreign films and experimental off-Broadway plays. But the differences only made the friendship more interesting. And while one took enormous pleasure in shopping and acquiring items that delighted her eyes—"I earned it; I can spend it!"—the other worried about spending even a penny over her unnece-

essarily strict budget. Her disapproval as to her friend's spreading habits often more than apparent by her hard to miss roll of the eyes.

Of course, over time, hurt feelings were unavoidable. *"You had no right telling them what I said."* *"You never said it was a secret."* *"Anything I tell you is a secret unless I say otherwise!"*

And because they knew each other so well, too well some would say, they knew just where to find the other's weak spots. *"Oh, for God's sake. Stop complaining about your weight and get thee to a gym!"* *"Well, maybe if you'd stop judging me with your own eating disordered mind, I'd be able to."*

Still, for years, twelve to be exact, after sometimes brief, sometimes unbearably long separations—the time it could take for a wound to heal—they would find a way back. To their friendship. Their sisterhood. They found their way back after a raucous, even slightly ridiculous political debate over whether or not there'd been WMDs. *"It was idiotic to believe they existed."* *"Are you calling me an idiot?"* They found their way back after Ms. Frugal quipped *"No, I didn't understand how you could spend thousands of dollars on your dog just to give him a few more months."* *"I spent it because if there was an outside chance that he'd have a few more years, I wanted him to have them. Or is it that you're so damn tight you'd let Mischmisch die?"*

They even found their way back after, *“Hey you two, please stop bickering, please. It’s painful to watch.”* *“Then leave! You know nothing about relationships— your longest being what? A few months?”*

They kept finding their way back until the day one called to say she needed company while she looked for a pair of boots, and the other said, *“I don’t think you need me for that.”* A benign interaction so weighty that neither woman had the strength to pick up the phone and call the other ever again.

After Thirty Years?

From: Sframton6@aol.com

To: Lori@BrandonArt.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . Really?

Dear Lori:

I have apologized once and will apologize again though I truly don't understand why you're so aggrieved. You told us that if we didn't take the triptych, it would most likely end up on the street. I thought it extremely generous of Paul to offer to house it. Besides, we assumed the panels were a gift and as we had no one to whom we could regift them, what were we to do? I think you should be grateful that they hung on our wall for the ten years they did. I told you we were planning on renovating and I am sorry we couldn't build our home around your work. (A 9'8" triptych takes up a lot of wall space.) If you hadn't asked where we'd hung it, you wouldn't have known we threw it out. It's not as if you visit. When was the last time? Nine years ago? And then I am certain it was only to see your piece on somebody else's wall.

By the way, you were the one who told me to get over my mother giving away my Barbie Doll Collection and I did.

Perhaps you should take your own advice and do the same.

Susan

From: Lori@BrandonArt.com

To: Sframton6@aol.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . Yes really!

Dear Susan:

Do you really consider that an email comparing an artist's work to a collection of Barbie dolls an apology? And yes, I said I was desperate to find homes for "my work," and I probably said I feared some of it might end up out on the street, but I never said that if "you" didn't take that particular piece, that's where it would land. I said if "someone" didn't. If you recall, I had a few more weeks before I was to be evicted—still time to find it a permanent home. (Please notice the underline under permanent.)

To be clear, it was Paul who professed his desire to have it and I distinctly remember questioning him as to whether he was certain. I was quite aware that a large work rendered in shades of white, grey and black could be difficult to live with. Thinking of it lying on top of a landfill with a crow attempting to pluck out Eve's eyes is more than a little painful. At least your mother had the decency to give your dolls to another child to enjoy!

Lori

After Thirty Years?

From: Sframton6@aol.com

To: Lori@BrandonArt.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . Shame on you!

My dear Lori:

I should have learned by now that self-absorption is the hallmark of the artist personality. You know all too well my Barbies and the loss of them epitomized the extremely conflicted relationship I had with my mother (may she finally rest in peace.) I think it's downright hypocritical of you to take exception to the comparison. Wasn't it you who said it should have been my decision as to whom and where my dolls went, if they should have gone at all? Not to mention how much they would be worth today. I am quite certain your art has not appreciated in value half as much as they have.

Susan

From: Lori@BrandonArt.com

To: Sframton6@aol.com

Subject: After thirty years. . . Shame on me?

Susan!

How the hell would you know what my art is selling for? You sat at lunch going into every detail of your renovation. While

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you babbled on I played a game with myself as to when and if you would inquire as to my well-being and only when you finally took a bite of the blackened tuna on the bed of Goma Wakame which I made myself, schlepping to an Asian market across town in order to get the right ingredients, did I get an opening to ask where you'd hung the piece. I was so stunned by your "We threw it out" (a direct quote) that all I could think of was how to get the meal over and done with so I could get you the hell out of my home. (By the way you didn't even acknowledge what it took to come up with a meal free of gluten, lactose, eggs, nuts and whatever else was on your goddamn list. I might be an artist, but I'm not a sorcerer.)

Lori

And oh! I had made a dessert—just decided not to serve it.

From: Sframton6@aol.com

To: Lori@BrandonArt.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . Yes, you!

Lori:

For your information, I kept talking to avoid having to eat what you served. I hate HATE raw fish. The only reason I hadn't added it to my list of what I cannot consume—something I always do out of consideration for my host—was that I knew

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what a tight budget you live on. It never dawned on me you would splurge on tuna. It took all my strength to take that first bite. I wanted to throw up. So, when you asked about what we did with your work, out came the past tense of “throw” instead of something more benign.

And, as long as I’m being totally honest, I never liked the piece to begin with and didn’t know what to do when Paul said he’d take it, so I bit my tongue. At that point in time we were discussing marriage and I didn’t want to put a wedge between us. As it is, your piece has caused considerable consternation. You and your sexual imaging.

Susan

By the way, you can order Japanese seaweed on-line at Amazon.

From: Lori@BrandonArt.com

To: Sframton6@aol.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . You’re kidding?

Susan! You entered into a marriage in which you weren’t comfortable sharing your opinion? What were all those years of group therapy about? All those sessions during which we had to point out how manipulative you were being by professing you were too frightened to express yourself so we would focus on

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you. Well clearly, you've come a long way since you're letting me know you never liked the piece. That's as direct as it comes. Makes me wonder if you ever liked any of my work.

And just so you know, you are not being considerate by giving a host a list of what you can and cannot eat. Nor did you have to make such a huge thing about climbing four flights of stairs arriving as if you'd taken your last breath. Perhaps you should consider going to a gym.

L-

P.S. I was taught that when you're a guest, you eat what the host prepares. And if you're so afraid you'll starve, bring your own bloody sandwich.

From: Sframton6@aol.com

To: Lori@BrandonArt.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . Clearly, we were brought up differently.

I was taught that it was rude to leave food on your plate when someone has gone to the trouble to cook for you. (And I do go to a gym. Twice a week.)

As to my not liking your work. Please! Now who's being manipulative? You always needed the group to tell you how good you were. And we all did. We supported you through

After Thirty Years?

session after session, rant after rant about the art world and how cruel it was—listening ad nauseum to your crying poverty and exhaustion. As to our “tossing” your work. You threw out plenty during your so-called artistic slumps. At least that’s what you told the group. If you didn’t value your work, why should we have to? S-

By the way, if you were so poor, how could you afford therapy?

From: Lori@BrandonArt.com

To: Sframton6@aol.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . She had a sliding scale.

Oh, for heaven’s sake. All serious artists destroy work that is not coming to fruition or that doesn’t coalesce. We only keep work we believe worthy of a life. And that triptych was that and much more. I’m glad that my work caused problems in your marriage—it means it was controversial and probing. Though how an abstraction can render destruction to a supposedly solid relationship is beyond me. Abstract paintings are like Rorschach test—it’s what the viewer sees not what the artist intends. What did you imagine you saw? Did you cover what disturbed you with fig leaves? You always were a puritan at heart.

What Would I Do Without You?

From: Sframton6@aol.com

To: Lori@BrandonArt.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . You don't have to be snide.

The title alone was a sexual road map. Besides, it was not what I saw, it's what Paul did. Said Adam's gyrations were an inspiration. He wanted it hung across from our bed. My bedroom was pale pink with touches of mint and fuchsia and I'd be damned if I'd let it ruin my décor. Not to mention my sleep. And it would have. Paul being sexually inventive requires me to turn into a Cirque de Soleil contortionist. And while I understand the importance of keeping sex alive in a marriage, having to limber up before going to bed after downing half a bottle of wine is not my idea of fun. But then you would have no idea of what it takes to keep a marriage going—your idea of a relationship is a quickie in a plane bathroom. So, don't question me on what damage an abstract painting can cause.

From: Lori@BrandonArt.com

To: Sframton6@aol.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . talk about being snide.

If you want to start pulling up personal divulges offered up in the sanctity of a group therapy session, please feel free. And I will feel free to include Paul in my next email. I wonder if he

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would be interested in knowing that your desire to be married superseded your desire for any particular man.

From: Sframton6@aol.com

To: Lori@BrandonArt.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . Enough!

I think we have said all we need to. Your insatiable desire to wreak vengeance upon an innocent act of what we considered a kindness—sparing you the pain of knowing we could no longer keep the piece—means you haven't changed one iota from the days when you fantasized about annihilating various gallery owners. Obviously, you only got out of therapy what you paid for—which according to you was next to nothing. Too bad.

From: Lori@BrandonArt.com

To: Sframton6@aol.com

Subject: After thirty years . . . Enough is right!

And you, my dear Susan, obviously still cannot get past yourself. I was the one who supported your claim that your mother should have asked you what to do with your beloved Barbies. Did it even once dawn on you to pick up the phone and give me the same consideration? If you had, I would have told you what

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I had planned to tell you at lunch. That I have been taken on by a major gallery! My first one-woman show is set for the fall. If your announcement hadn't sickened me to the core, I would also have told you that upon seeing the photos of the piece I had trusted you to preserve, the gallery owner had wanted to include it in the show. It's size alone would have made it one of the major works shown. As it no longer exists, what I've decided to do is to create a framed montage from the photos of the piece and hang it in the show. I will title it: Adam and Eve Descending into Hell destroyed by Susan Framton. Like mother like daughter.

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