

Three-Twenty-Seven-Ought-Five

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From the moment they met, my mother adored my new girlfriend Maddy. It didn't take long for Maddy to be granted my ex-girlfriend Kim's mantle of "daughter my mother never had." My mother had *me*, of course, but I'm a male-to-female transsexual. I was less than a year out of the closet, and she was still adjusting to the fact that I was no longer her son.

After a spectacularly rough few years, Maddy and I became domestic partners in 2002. We stood with dozens of other couples in a big gay ceremony in the middle of the big Gay Pride festivities. It wasn't marriage, but it was close.

Closer still was when the Mayor of San Francisco famously legalized same-sex matrimony in 2004, and we were among the thousands of couples who literally queued up for the fleeting privilege. In truth, I only married Maddy so we could have the same rights as opposite-sex couples. I knew getting married didn't guarantee we were going to stay together, or that we would even stay together longer. I didn't want to stay in the relationship at that point, but I couldn't see any way out. For practical reasons, getting married seemed like the right thing to do.

Maddy was very happy about marrying me, though, and my mother couldn't have been more proud. Though she was never especially conservative to begin with, my mother had taken a hard left turn over the past few years, and queer rights was among her pet causes. That she had a tranny daughter helped, but I think she would have gone that political direction anyway.

While I hadn't had Sexual Reassignment Surgery, both my Social Security card and my driver license said "Sherilyn Connelly," and the latter listed my gender as female. (Social Security cards don't make the distinction.) This was enough for

the City of San Francisco to consider me female and for the marriage to be gay. Philosophically, I knew a lot of people east of the 415 Area Code didn't understand and/or refused to accept that I identified as female, regardless of how I dressed or wore my hair or what it said on the cards in my wallet.

This is why if I was talking to someone I'd just met, I usually referred to Maddy as my girlfriend rather than my wife. Not because they might say, "How can you have a wife? You're a woman!" Rather, they might think to themselves, "A-ha! You have a wife! You are really a man!"

It became moot that August when the Supreme Court declared all gay marriages to be "void and of no legal effect."

It became even mooter one Sunday in late March of 2005 when I broke up with Maddy. This was the start of a busy week.

On Monday, Maddy started looking for a new place to live. On Tuesday she had a walkthrough of a promising apartment. On Wednesday, I called my mother to tell her the news.

Much like when I broke up with Kim, my mother's tone was all recrimination and blame through tears, with what I considered a distinct lack of sympathy for her youngest child during what some might consider a very difficult period.

My mother tried every tack she could to get me to change my mind about leaving Maddy: "What about the sanctity of marriage? It's a sacrament!" She was very much aware of both my atheism and my skepticism about betrothal, but she figured it was worth a shot.

Just to make things worse, the news had recently hit that one of my nieces had a drug problem. I had nothing to do with it, but the lousy timing made my mother all the more upset, prompting her to ask: "How can you do this to me?"

I tried to explain why I had done this horrible, hurtful thing, but she didn't want to know the details. Maddy was in the room with me, loudly agreeing that I had done what was necessary and that it was for the best. It made no difference. I broke my mother's heart. There could be no defense, no justification.

Having fulfilled my self-assigned obligation to tell my mother on the phone, I informed the rest of my family via email. The typical response was "We're sorry to hear that, we liked Maddy." Nobody followed this up with "How are you? Are you okay?"

This was not a surprise. When I broke up with Kim in early '99, one of my brothers told me that he wasn't going to take sides. I hadn't asked him to take sides, but I guess you can't fault him for putting fair play ahead of familial obligation. To the best of my knowledge he never talked to Kim again, but the important part was that I didn't think he was on my side.

Presently, Maddy signed the lease for her new apartment on Thursday of the breakup week. She had a day job and I did not, so I helped her pack and move. I literally did most of the heavy lifting myself, making dozens of trips, even spending a day waiting at her apartment for the plumber.

I kept the car, and Maddy got just about everyone else, including the cats and the bed. She brought the cats with her from Kansas, and the bed was a hand-me-down from my mother. I could have claimed that the bed was my property, much as Kim did with the bed we got from her parents, but I refused to squabble with Maddy over possessions. After all, I was keeping the car and the apartment, so it wasn't like I was getting ripped off.

Two weeks after we broke up—or, as she requested I phrase it so nobody thought it was consensual, I broke up with her—Maddy was fully moved into her new home.

Considering that I had broken her heart and kicked her out of her home and destroyed her life and all that, Maddy and I were the picture of civility. She even asked me to help decorate her new apartment and to spend the first few nights with her. Tempers occasionally flared, then died down almost as quickly, perhaps since there was no longer as much at stake. As she observed, we were getting along better than we had in months. (Our periods of meltdown and estrangement wouldn't happen until later.)

Breaking up with Kim in 1999 had been one aspect of an overall reboot of my life. I had just started a new job and I began going to goth clubs and met a whole new set of people, all while transitioning to female. By the end of that year, pretty much everything was different except for my DNA.

Breaking up with Maddy in 2005 wasn't a reboot so much as a thinning of the herd. Though it was known we were on fairly good terms and that I'd never been abusive to Maddy or laid an unkind finger on her, I was the villain in the breakup. Sure, there wasn't anything empirically black-and-white to damn me, no moral high ground from which to judge—not even the fact that I had wanted to date other people, since most of our friends at the time were proudly kinky/progressive/queer/non-monogamous, or at least accepting of it. But I broke Maddy's heart, and that was enough.

The backlash was an acceleration of a fall from grace which had begun the year before. I lost friends because they either disagreed with emotions I expressed in my online diary, or I disobeyed their demands that I not write about certain events in my life. Some severed their social connection to me in formally

worded emails (*perhaps we can work together in some professional capacity in the distant future, if some semblance of good will is made, such as an apology*) and others merely grew cold. When I broke up with Maddy, they happily indulged their grudges. A few even admitted to Maddy that they were glad they could finally k'vetch openly about me to her.

Another lightning rod of controversy was my involvement with a girl named Collette. We had dated when Maddy and I made our brief, ill-fated attempt at an open relationship. (Coincidentally, this non-monogamy experiment began at my insistence around the time that our marriage was ruled invalid. As always, my timing was stellar.) Maddy now begged me not to date Collette, or at least wait six months to give Maddy time to "adjust" to the idea. While I refused to let her dictate my post-breakup dating life, I tried to be conscious of Maddy's feelings and keep my relationship with Collette discreet.

Unfortunately, the rumor mill had other ideas. Practically every time Collette and I went into public, Maddy knew. She didn't want to know, and she specifically requested not to be told, but her friends told her anyway. They evidently figured that helping Maddy feel safe and comfortable during this difficult time was not as important as making sure she knew how hurtful I was being.

I was not surprised that all these grown-up adult people in their twenties and thirties and forties reverted to a level of gossip and backstabbing which most teenagers would have found immature. It was frustrating at times, but mostly it made me laugh. What else could I do?

For much of the previous year, I'd been mostly unemployed. The few jobs I was able to find never lasted, and Maddy kept track of how much I owed her for bills and rent and so forth. In the end, it was just over a thousand dollars.

A few months after the breakup, I began looking into the mechanics of dissolving our domestic partnership, which survived the whole gay marriage explosion like the legal cockroach it was. The more I read, the less I was comfortable with the debt, especially since the law considered us to have been functionally married via the partnership. Heck, Maddy kept calling me her wife even after the marriage had been voided, and wasn't that the whole point of the "for richer or for poorer" thing?

Granted, my own issues made me wary of the word "wife" at all, and every time I lost a job I felt more trapped and dependant on Maddy, so for me to now invoke the law or the philosophical sanctity of marriage (hi, Mom!) was either hypocritical, disingenuous or both. But I'd never aspired to sainthood, and I was already cast as the villain. Why not play the part?

So one Saturday morning, I told Maddy I was having serious doubts about whether it was right that I should have to pay her back. I didn't say I wasn't going to pay her back. Just that I was having doubts about how fair it was.

She had always been a bundle of raw nerves, but this struck ones I hadn't realized existed. In addition to my suggestion simply being mean and cruel (her immediate response was "Please don't do this to me"), it conflicted with the type of person she thought I was. It made her wonder if she'd ever really known me and whether she could trust my stated desire for us to remain friends. She said members of my loyal opposition had predicted I might change my mind about repaying the debt, but she had defended me to them, considering it an issue which spoke to the very core of my character.

If she could be so very, very wrong about *that*, Maddy couldn't help but wonder what else she was wrong about, what other charges she'd mistakenly defended me against—like, when somebody suggested that I kept dating Collette on the sly after Maddy and I ended the non-monogamy experiment. If I was capable of

even *considering* not paying her back the money I rightfully owed her, Maddy reasoned, then perhaps I was capable of infidelity. (For the record, though Collette and I had kept in touch against Maddy's wishes, we had not been seeing each other on the sly, and we didn't start dating again until a few weeks after the breakup.)

That night, Collette and I attended a party. It was at the house of someone who had openly taken Maddy's side—the same person who had helpfully suggested that I'd cheated on her with Collette, no less—but it felt safe because I knew Maddy wasn't going. My old friend Leigh was there, however.

We hadn't talked for over a year, ever since she'd gotten angry about something I wrote in which I showed feelings of an almost human nature. (*this will not do!*) According to the never-wrong grapevine, Leigh was also a founding member of the chorus which disapproved of me dating Collette. Perhaps unsurprisingly, she was one of Maddy's main sources of support.

At the party, I took my best guess as to the direction of the high road: I approached and Leigh and said hello.

Without saying a word, she turned on her heel and walked away.

To confirm that I hadn't just imagined the snub—I can get paranoid, I fully admit it—I emailed Leigh the next morning to ask if she had intentionally not acknowledged my presence. She responded that she "felt it was preferable to a party-inappropriate confrontation."

It stung because I'm human and my skin is nowhere near as thick as I'd like to believe, but it was also funny. I'd never done any harm to Leigh, yet my infamy was such that she couldn't be in my presence for fear of losing her cool. I was

just that bad. Presumably Leigh had never broken anyone's heart, let alone acted less than perfectly in the course of a breakup. I admired her clean slate.

I lost more friends when I broke up with Collette a few months later, mostly the contrarians who had openly supported our verboten relationship. Indeed, by breaking up with both Maddy and Collette in a span of six months, I seemed to alienate half of San Francisco. Heaven knows I got invited to far fewer parties.

Though I did repay my debt, and my breakup with Collette eased some tension, our civility occasionally disintegrated as Maddy and I tried to figure out the parameters of our post-marriage relationship. It probably would have been easier if we hated each other, but annoying truth was that while we didn't work as a couple, we still loved each other as friends. This made the meltdowns all the gnarlier.

The gnarliest was when I got persnickety about her newfound interest in boys. Rediscovered interest, rather, since she'd only been with boys before me. (I can't possibly emphasize this enough: though I was born male, I do not identify as a boy in any way.) While we were together, Maddy identified as lesbian and swore off the male of the species. Now that she single, she was a tad boy-crazy. I referred to her as "playing for the blue team," which she took as a direct attack on her queer identity. She wasn't wrong.

Who Maddy dated was no more my business than it was her business who I dated (such as, say, Collette), but that didn't stop me from taking it personally. Much like being reluctant to refer to her as my wife for fear of being considered her husband, I was worried that Maddy now being into boys would affect how people thought of me, especially those who had difficulty accepting me as female in the first place. If they thought I was an asshole, no problem. In classic

Nitschean style, being disliked had made me stronger. I just didn't want them to think I was a male asshole.

As I write this, ~~Maddy and I broke up~~ I broke up with Maddy three years ago. We're good friends now, and can even laugh about the breakup. There are those who still hold it against me, but she doesn't, and she matters more than them.

That may account for why we've never gotten around to squashing that legal cockroach, the domestic partnership. The fact that we haven't lived together for three years doesn't make it go away. I know I should look into the paperwork, and it'll probably bite us on our collective hindquarters someday in the future if we don't. But for now we're at peace, I want to leave well enough alone.



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