

The Butt Call

A short story by Chava Hudson

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Even though she was pretty sure it was just another telemarketer, Sarah swallowed a mouthful of omelet and answered the phone. But it was Jonathan's number that flashed on her caller ID, and she answered, happy to hear from him after what had been a long, lonely day.

"Hello," she said, her mood instantly soaring.

But there was no answer, only the thrashing sound of Jonathan's butt, shifting on the cell phone that he kept in his back pocket. Sometimes when he shifted his weight to just the right angle, his butt cheek would speed dial Sarah's number. She knew it was a butt call when all she could hear was Jonathan settling his weight on the phone. If nothing else, his butt was thinking about her, she lamented.

Sarah wasn't surprised, since this happened every once in a while, and she just yelled "hello, hello?" into the receiver, hoping her voice would reach his ears, as it had on one occasion, but after a few minutes, she realized that he couldn't hear her at all. She was about to hang up but suddenly the thrashing noises stopped as Jonathan settled his position, and she could hear his voice, deep in conversation with someone. Sarah remembered that he was having dinner with Stew, who she'd never met, she decided to listen. Maybe she could learn something.

Jonathan was discussing his divorce! It was almost like some divine force wanted her to hear this. She had to listen. She was only following celestial guidance.

"The thing with Anne," Jonathan was saying, "was that she always wanted to be traveling. She had this thing with the orphans in Africa and she was just always gone. That's the real reason we're getting divorced."

Sarah mulled over this news, which certainly wasn't the reason Jonathan had told *her* that he and his wife had drifted apart. In fact, he'd said *he* had been the cause of their demise, never really having cared about Anne at all, but now it sounded like he was this poor little orphan, abandoned by the wife whom he adored. She gripped the phone tighter to her ear, bracing herself for what might come next. She

was wondering if he would mention her, the very catalyst for Jonathan's separation. But the conversation had already morphed into something else. He never mentioned her at all.

Then it became hard to hear them over what must have been Jonathan's shifting positions again, and Sarah missed some parts, but when it quieted, someone, who still sounded like Jonathan, was saying something else. "And the thing is that she has this really angry seven year old. It makes it hard and I don't know if we can work through it."

Sarah, who certainly didn't have an angry seven year old or any seven year old for that matter, thought she knew about everyone in Jonathan's life. No, maybe it was Stew talking, not Jonathan. She listened hard. It *sounded* just like Jonathan, but she couldn't be sure. She remembered how Jonathan was sometimes was unavailable on weekends. Maybe this was the reason. No, stop. It's probably just Stew, but still, she could hear her heart pound like a marching band. Maybe she should hang up. She knew eavesdropping wasn't right, and even though she felt a sickly dark guilt, she couldn't loosen her grip on the receiver, her instrument of truth. When she looked at the cold omelet on her plate, she felt a nauseated.

Each word validated her worst fears. Her knuckles, clenched around the phone extruded like tiny white pebbles, and although she thought again that she shouldn't be listening, the phone did call *her* after all, and just at the right part, too. She sat unmoving, trying to decide what this new information meant. Her two years with Jonathan had caused her to become a borderline nymphomaniac with him as well as a borderline neurotic. Her decline into this sensual abyss was a quick progression from meeting him to his bed, where he had artfully been leading her ever since. And when Sarah wasn't wrapped in his arms, feeling a delicious chill as he'd trace his finger from her nose, all the way down to her most tender core, a path soon to be followed by his lips, she was still with him in her mind, imagining their next tryst. The ideas didn't stop, but even with that, she had felt that even with their love, she was alone when they weren't romping under the covers. She became as watchful of Jonathan as a cat observing an aquarium, assessing nuances of what he said and did, studying his behavior for signs that he would ultimately disappear.

At first, she had been in love with his obsession with her, or maybe his obsession in suddenly having sex beyond his wildest dreams, escaping from a stale marriage, but either way, she found it so powerful, so irresistible, that she was swept away, and lived for the cocoon of his arms. She was in love with the dinners they would cook together and eat by candlelight, and especially adored what came

afterwards; unprecedented loving of every part of her body. But after some months of his stalling on his divorce, waffling on the summer vacation he'd planned with Sarah, she began to see that perhaps Jonathan wasn't as sure about her as she had thought, and after the glow of the night's love had faded, Sarah would lie awake worrying while Jonathan slept.

Evidently this was how Jonathan saw his marriage and he hadn't even mentioned her. The story he told to someone else was his truth, not just a ploy to get her to bed, but the full story with the missing parts that she had never heard. And what should she do with about this remote, second hand unraveling of their love, by simple omission? She could of course ignore it, and wait for other signs, gathering evidence like a detective until her case was iron clad that he simply did not love her, never loved her, and only used her as a way out of his marriage. Then she would unceremoniously dump him. She would write him a letter, or call him, since she didn't think she could bear to make the break in person.

Or, she would tell him what she'd heard, allowing him to explain. He would tell her that he only told Stew half the story, not wanting to make himself appear the cad, or cavalier by admitting to Stew that he had left his wife and was having a wild affair, and that of course he loved her. Wasn't she his kitten? Wasn't she the one he called every day when they couldn't be together? She knew exactly what he would say.

And what about the seven year old? Why weren't they together more on weekends? She would ask him. Yes, what good was a relationship with secrets? If she was upset, she should be able to tell him. Yes, when he called later as she knew he would, she would simply laugh about the butt call and ask him. Sarah looked at her watch. Jonathan would probably be home in an hour and he would call.

What was that he was saying now? She could clearly hear Jonathan. "I don't know. I think I need a good long time before I get involved with anyone."

Sarah grew faint and thought she might be sick. She would never speak to him again. The room vanished and a tornado swirled acid in her stomach. It was gathering fury, spiraling up her lungs, her throat, to her face, that grew hot with rage. She sat, unable to move, unwilling to hear another word, and hung up the phone. She didn't know how long she sat there. It had grown dark, and still she sat with her unfinished omelet before her, forgotten. She didn't notice anything, but the night had grown cool, and finally the

goose bumps on her arms made her move to close the window, only to take her seat at the table again, not even bothering to turn on the lights.

As she sat down, the phone rang. "Hi kitten," said Jonathan.

The liar! The creep. Still, he sounded so sweet, and part of her melted slightly, but only a bit. He better have a good explanation.

"What have you been up to?" he asked.

"Not much," said Sarah. "How about you?" She forced herself to sound as normal as possible, until she figured out what to say.

"I had a great night. I went out with Stew on his boat. Remember, I told you about him? He's got quite a situation with this woman. She's got this crazy kid and he doesn't know what to do about it. He's in kind of a mess and wanted to talk about it. He just wants out and wants to be by himself and doesn't know how to go about it."

Sarah's breathing came back. "Oh really?" she said, slumping into her chair with relief. She reached to turn on the lamp on the sideboard. That was Stew talking, all of it. It wasn't Jonathan at all! "That must be hard," she said.

"Yeah, not like us, kitten. Not like us." said Jonathan.