

I Ghosted My Best Friend Nearly 30 Years Ago and It Still Haunts Me



by KiKi Walter

“Please give me just five minutes of your time and I’ll never bother you again,” the message pleaded.

I stared at it scoffing in disbelief. She doesn’t give up, I thought. She’s obsessed. Words not originally belonging to me, but drilled into my psyche enough that I now believed them. It was just easier this way.

We had just been set up with our computers at CNN and as far as I knew, we weren’t supposed to be emailing outside of the bureau, but I had gamed the system right off the bat like I was wont to do, and Zelda knew how to find me.

I left work at 3:30, walking the four miles home from Hollywood to the Miracle Mile. I quickly dropped my “east coast weight” that way and found myself becoming embraced by Los Angeles’ warm limelight not long after I landed in Oz. I clicked play on my Walkman and began my fast walk to the Pulp Fiction soundtrack.

This was the mood of the week.

I’LL NEVER
FORGIVE
MYSELF
FOR WHAT
I DID AND
WHAT I
LOST

As I drowned out the passing cars and people on the street, my mind raced about the situation at hand. Jason wasn't having any of this business with Zelda, and I supposed he wasn't wrong. She was acting weird and she hadn't been supportive of my divorce or move across the country. What kind of best friend is that? I needed someone who was going to be supportive no matter what, right?

Right?

Zelda and I met as young girls through mutual friends, but it wasn't until late high school that we bonded over our friendly competitive streak as the school's theatrical ingenues.

She was a year older and seemed so much more sophisticated and worldly. She was definitely infinitely more book-smart whereas I was more of a streetwise social butterfly if there is such a thing in a farm town. She even began dating an ex-boyfriend of mine who broke up with me because apparently he thought I drank too much. They ended up in a much more long-term and meaningful relationship, but the point is, we had a lot in common.

When she went off to college, she wrote me letters and visited me on trips home, giving me the scoop about college life. As we grew older, we grew even closer. We were the best of friends. We spoke our own language. We had the same passion for something bigger out there — something better. Something grander.

When fate scooped me up into a whirlwind of PTSD resulting from a car accident she was there. Even when I began to make decisions that weren't in my character. I had gone from being a young vivacious broad with moxie to a fearful girl desperate for someone to save her. Save her from what? I don't know. But she was there and once I became a young wife, she lived close enough to help me make sense of it all. She even bought me a crock pot.

Owning a crockpot is how you know you're grown up, you see.

I lived in a ritzy picturesque Connecticut town just over the New York border. She lived in a tiny apartment in the Bronx. In a way, we were a bit like the Parent Trap twins. I believe I longed for what she had while she longed for what I had. Although she lived in a sweet little neighborhood, I was envious that she was so close to Manhattan and it all seemed so glamorous. I would spend weekends with her and we would go into the Village to go shopping at street fairs and have cappuccinos. Because that's what you did in the Village.

"I'm coming to Los Angeles for business. I would like to see you and talk. Thank you." Her messages were becoming curt. But...now she's coming to Los Angeles? Perhaps Jason's whispers in my ear were working on me, I don't know, but I was starting to feel uncomfortable. I was beginning to feel as if my space was being invaded and I thought back on her previous visit. It was weird from the get-go. She was shocked by my weight loss and new look and passively aggressively made snide comments comparing me to a Beverly Hills 90210 wannabe. When we took her to Canter's Deli, one of our favorite go-to restaurants, she wouldn't eat a thing. She only ordered tea and made a big dramatic scene about feeling faint. She made backhanded comments throughout her stay and was quite rude to Jason, who was my everything at that time.

She did not agree with my choice to move to Los Angeles. The plan, if I was to leave my marriage, was that I would move to the Bronx as well and start over. Everyone had a plan for me. In fact, there were so many plans suggested to me that it made it that much easier to run away in the middle of the night to Chicago. It was that choice that eventually led me back to Jason and to Los Angeles.

And she did not like it. She did not like the new me. At least that was my perception of the situation. It sure as sugar felt like this new me made her feel terrifically insecure. Jason said so. He said she was weird. She was stalking me. That I'd be better off cutting her out of my life.



Jason said so.

And so...I did.

One day when we were in the Village, we decided to take a walk in a section of Union Square Park, near the little cafe where we had our cappuccinos. It was a lovely spring day with a clear sky, colorful buds on the trees, and birds singing — and as we started meandering down the path we began to feel a rumble underfoot. An earthquake? And then the sound. And then...we saw it.

Hundreds of people ran toward us wildly followed by a low white cloud. In fear of being trampled, we began to run for our lives. The crowd drew closer and we could hear the galloping of police horses behind us, whistles, and bangs. The police were shooting tear gas into the crowd.

Zelda grabbed my hand and we raced as hard as we could. We crossed the street

"If your high school years are the best years of your life, you've done something wrong."

and ducked into the archway of an old building and watched in horror as people ran by us gagging and screaming.

Turns out we got caught up in a pro-marijuana demonstration. We laughed so hard all the way back to her place, where we poured ourselves a glass of Almaden.

I ignored her messages. I gave her no response. No answers. I just...faded away. At the time, I thought it was better that way. No unnecessary dialogue. Just stop it in its tracks.

My best friend of several years and I took the scissors and broke the tie.

True to her threat, she indeed came to Los Angeles. And we hid from her. To Jason, it was a game. To me, I was making Jason happy — and that's what mattered. We had our friends. His



friends. And this was my life now. Zelda was gaslighting me and making snide remarks, acting weird, and not supportive of my actions, so I had no other recourse.

Yeah. I had to do what I had to do.

But in hindsight, who was gaslighting who?

Here's what I learned after ghosting my best friend.

I hated what I did. And I've regretted it every day since.

She could have been going through something, and I was engrossed in my own situation. She could have just been worried about me, and I didn't care. She could have sensed that Jason was controlling and was concerned that I was blinded by infatuation. And instead of giving her the love and respect of having a conversation with her, I abandoned her.

Because of my actions, she was not there to see me get married, have my babies, or provide a shoulder during my difficult divorce. She was not there to age with me. I was not there to see her get married, begin her own business, or provide a shoulder during a loved one's death. I abandoned her.

Our days of wild laughter and carefree dramatic abandon were extinguished. By my hand. And for what? I'm not even sure.

I've written so many drafts of letters to her, but they always come off as self-serving and about what I lost. I don't want to ask for forgiveness because what I did was unforgivable. Apology letters only seem to look as if I'm trying to ease my guilty conscious rather than reach out because I've grown and I understand what I did was wrong.

I could easily point to my mental health issues and struggles with depression. Or I could easily say that I was in an extremely controlling relationship. It wasn't long before I had limited contact with even my family.

And when I did, I was instructed on how to talk to them. What to say. Much like I was the time Zelda visited us. But I had agency. I should have been stronger.

But I wasn't. And a part of Zerbet's life has been empty without Zelda.

And I still miss her. And I am deeply sorry.***