

# DOUBLE SHIFT

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## DOUBLE SHIFT

"A double shift on Valentine's Day?"

Frederico sounded furious.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I can't help it," Kathy begged.

They stood arguing in the dark, in the deserted playground across the street from Kathy's house.

"Of course you can help it! They can't make you work a double shift if you don't want to!"

"But I asked for it, Freddy! I asked for it!"

Kathy was crying now. She couldn't keep the tears down.

"You asked for it?"

She could feel his anger rising.

"I need the money, Freddy. You know I need the money. I make a lot of money on Valentine's Day, especially on the evening shift."

"I'm paying for the flowers, for the night out. You can take off the shift."

"But my mom says she won't be able to make the rent."

"So tell your dad to get off his can and go to work! He's off disability."

"He can't work, Freddy. You know that."

"The hell he can't! The state doctor says he can, the social worker even found him a job!"

Kathy covered her eyes and cried into her hands. This was so hard, so hard! Why couldn't

Frederico be more understanding?

"You know what you are, Kathy?" Frederico yelled at her through her hands.

Kathy shook her head, unable to speak.

"You're an enabler. You enable your father to sit home and do nothing, even when the whole world says he can work. That doesn't do him any good, and it doesn't do you any good."

Kathy just shrugged, her eyes still covered, still too upset to speak.

"And that means I have to spend Valentine's Day alone," he concluded. "You want to sacrifice yourself to enable your father to sit on his butt, that's your little problem. But don't sacrifice me!"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, you're right," Kathy said. "I'll talk to him. I promise I'll talk to him."

"You look him straight in the eye and tell him the truth. That's all there is to it. The main thing is you don't budge when he pushes back."

"I'll try, Freddy. I promise I'll try."

"So it's a go for Valentine's Day? You're going to tell Manolis you're not taking the double shift?"

Kathy shook her head. "I can't, Freddy. Even if my father goes to work, it'll be a while before he gets a full check. How are we going to make the rent?"

"Then get yourself another boyfriend!"

Frederico snarled.

And off he went, leaving her alone in the darkness.

After about ten minutes of crying, Kathy decided that she still should do what Frederico had suggested. He was right. She was an enabler.

It wasn't just Valentine's Day that was at stake here. It was her life. She gave up going to college to make the money her father should have been making. She was letting herself be used by her own parents.

But it was hard, so hard just to say what she had to say. Days went by, and the right time never came.

After about a week of waiting, Kathy went over to her father while he was watching a hockey game and said she had to talk to him.

"After the game," he said.

"It'll be too late," she answered. "I've got to be at the diner tomorrow morning at eight."

"After the game," he repeated.

She decided to do exactly as Frederico had suggested.

"Papa," she said, standing over him and looking straight at his averted eyes. "I have to talk to you. It's not something that can wait."

She kept looking straight at him, determined this time not to waver, and to her amazement, it worked! Under the steadiness of her gaze, he glanced over towards her uncomfortably once or twice, then turned to her and asked her what she wanted to talk about.

"I can't talk about this with the television on," she said firmly.

He gave a last glance at the skaters, sighed, and turned it off.

"What is it?" he asked irritably.

Kathy took a deep breath. She was going to do this.

"Papa," she began. "I don't mind helping out like I am, and I'm going to continue to help out. But you've got to help, too."

She sensed him disintegrating inside, as though he had been waiting for a long time in fear of those exact words, and now they had come.

He stared wordlessly at the blank television screen, then down at the couch. She saw that he was shaking.

"It's not good for me or for you to go on this way," she continued. "You've got to try. Ms. Rodriguez said she had a job for you –"

"Making baskets!" her father cut in bitterly. "I'm not making baskets!"

" – a job for you!" Kathy kept on, remembering what Frederico had said: *The main thing is you don't budge when he pushes back.* "Whatever it is, if it pays, you take it! I'm not going to be working double shifts so you can sit around the house!"

They were both shaking, and Kathy wanted desperately to end it, to let both of them out of the torture chamber, but she grimly pushed herself forward.

"Now tell me you're going to call Ms. Rodriguez in the morning," she said firmly. "Tell me!"

"Don't talk to me that way!" her father snarled.  
"Have some respect!"

"Then you'll call?" Kathy said more gently.  
"Papa? You'll call Ms. Rodriguez in the morning?"

He nodded and clicked the television back on. The crowd was roaring as the home team tried to tie the game before the last seconds of the first half ticked away.

"Thank you, Papa," Kathy said, kissing him on the cheek.

He nodded again, eyes glued to the screen.

As she left the room she said to herself, Thank you, Freddy! Thank you!

By Valentine's Day she hadn't heard from Frederico in two weeks. That was it, she thought sadly. Another casualty of her father's troubles.

Her father had gone to work, and now, a week into it, seemed actually to enjoy having a place to go during the day. He was looking forward to his first paycheck.

But Kathy kept the double shift for Valentine's Day. Her family still needed the money, and, anyway, she didn't have a date.

Late into the evening shift, when the crowd came in after the last movie, Kathy saw Frederico and some friends waiting for a table.

Damn! she thought. He had to come here! What was his game?

She prayed she wouldn't have to serve them, but there it was. Manolis seated them at Table 15. She came over to take the drink order.

"Hi, Kathy!" Frederico said, smiling as though they were best friends. "This is Mona. You know Mona."

Kathy nodded as Frederico put his arm around Mona and gave her a squeeze.

"What you want to drink?" Kathy asked the whole table – three couples, some of whom she recognized but hadn't known well at school.

She took the drink order and went over to the counter quivering with anger.

Bastard! she thought. He didn't have to come here! There were three diners in town, if they had to come to a diner after the movies. He was putting his dirty finger right into her eye!

All through the meal he kept putting his arm around Mona, stroking Mona's shoulder, laughing and flirting with her, looking into her eyes. It seemed to Kathy that the activity picked up whenever she approached the table.

But she served them professionally, just as she would any other table, and when they left she just nodded her goodbye.

Frederico left the tip – 5% of the check. Just one last ugly thumb print.

She heard them laughing as they sauntered down the short flight of stairs to the parking lot.

Bastard! she thought again. Good riddance!

She finished work after midnight and had to be back at eight for the daytime shift, so she didn't have much time or energy to think about Frederico. But when she finished her next shift at four, she



decided she was going to confront him.

*You look him straight in the eye and tell him the truth*, he had said. OK, Kathy thought. What was good for my father is also good for you!

Frederico's mother answered the door.

"Hi, Kathy!" she said with what looked like a tight smile. "Come in, come in! Is Frederico expecting you?"

"I don't think so," Kathy said. She wondered how much Frederico's mother knew.

"I'll go get him," she said, leaving Kathy in the living room alone.

Just two weeks ago she would have expected Kathy to go upstairs to his room.

Frederico came downstairs with the identical tight smile. "What's up?" he asked.

"You don't say hello?" Kathy stared right into his eyes, determined not to let go.

"Hello," he grumbled.

"Was there any special reason you had to show up at The Starlight last night?"

"It's a good diner," he said. "Were we supposed to go to a bad one?"

"Is that why you left me a 5% tip?"

"We weren't crazy about the service."

He stared back at her with a cool ferocity equal to her own.

"What you did was ugly."

He shrugged and finally looked at the floor.

"That's all I wanted to say," she concluded.

There was a long, uncomfortable silence that each waited for the other to fill.

"What?" Federico finally said.

Kathy didn't answer.

"You waiting for me to apologize?"

"That would be nice."

More silence. Excruciating silence. But Kathy was determined to wait it out.

"OK," Federico finally said. "You're right. I was angry at you and wanted to make you jealous."

Kathy waited some more.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Thank you."

"Friends?" he asked with a smile.

"Friends," she said, turning to go.

"You want to come up to my room for a little while?"

She turned back. "Are you kidding?"

"No," he said.

"What about Mona?"

"What about Mona."

"You just use her to make me jealous?"

He blushed and looked away.

"So long, Freddy," Kathy said. "I'll see you around."

As she walked down the steps to Federico's house, Kathy smiled and thought, for the second time, Thank you, Freddy! Thank you!