

WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE  
BY BRITNEY KING

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Water Under The Bridge

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For the Lovers—for there are few things as easy or as hard as loving.

There's a girl long dead who rests down by the water's edge.

Her final words were, "No. Don't. Please. I'm sorr—."

She never did get the second half of her apology out.

I made sure she never will.

Some things are best left unsaid, I think.

In the end, it didn't matter.

I knew she was sorry.

And she knew it too.



There's a girl who rests down by the water's edge.

She was beautiful, but you and the water washed it all away.

You think I don't know what you've done, but I do.

I know that you visit on occasion, and I know other things too.





# ONE

Jude

After

YOUR FACE CRUMBLES as the judge hands down our sentence. I am fascinated by the way your expression changes, as slowly, recognition takes over that unlike the rest of your affairs, this one isn't going to be a one-and-done deal. Turns out, lucky us, the great State of Texas is having a go at a pilot program designed to drop the state's divorce rate.

But you aren't feeling very lucky. Not at all. I can tell by the way you pinch the bridge of your nose. You've always hated not getting your way. It doesn't matter anyway. I want to tell you—whatever political agenda bullshit this latest program entails—I can assure you and the rest of Texas, it won't save us. Even if I were the kind of man who believed in miracles, you and me, we'd need a miracle plus a Hail Mary. You've said it yourself, where we are concerned, there is no hope. And this is why you plead.

"Excuse me, your Honor—," you start, and you pause for effect, always the performer.

"This really isn't necessary," you profess and then you swallow, and I like it when you're unsure. You go on. "My hus—Jude and I—," you tell him, and you look over at me, and my god, Kate, you've always done indifference so well. "I think we can both agree we're ready to get on with our lives."

You refer to me as your husband—or almost, anyway—and for a moment, I recall what it felt like before your words were laced with poison, back when there was nothing but hope. I listen to you say your piece, and this time is no different than all the times before, only this time, we have witnesses, and you know how I've always hated that. You must know this because you sink back in your chair, proud.

Your pride doesn't last long because when the judge lists out the terms of our captivity, you glare at your attorney, willing her to save you, but she won't—she can't. You almost choke when he orders six months of marriage counseling, which includes weekly appointments.

Your hand flies to your throat, and I remember what that's like, holding you in place, having it all in the palm of my hand. I'd give anything—maybe even your life—to know what that feels like again.

The good news here is the judge and I seem to be on the same page as he informs the two of us that a therapist of our choosing must sign off before the court will grant our divorce. You hold your breath as he speaks, and I remember what that felt like too.

I try, for you, though... I do. I wait for him to finish, and then I tell him that you're right, we've made our decision, and as I speak, you sulk, but isn't this what you've always wanted, to be right? It's hard to look at you, sulking or otherwise, and it never used to be this way. You're tanner than the last time I saw you. But then, I guess time away did you good. You said you needed your space, and I let you have it. But you have to know, Kate, it was hard not to follow. Maybe I should have. But it was all the same to you—you made up your mind, and your decision settled mine.

Nevertheless, if there is such a thing as a clean break for you and me, it isn't looking good, and it certainly won't be handed down today. This judge does not cease his interminable vendetta against your freedom. He does not relent. You aren't happy, and I can't recall the last time you were, even though I try. It'll come to me, the memory of you, but this courtroom is too stuffy, and you know how I've always hated an audience.

The judge looks away, and you look on, defeated; it's clear, even if you refuse to let it show. As he jots something down, you bite your lip, a tell—you still believe there's hope. But I know better. When he looks up, holding a pen and our future in his hands, you tell him you'd be better off dead, and he looks surprised, as though he's missed something. He has. A lot of somethings. He asks if there's a history of violence. No, you tell him, it was just an expression. Although a part of me wonders if you're right about that too. Maybe there's truth in what you say. Maybe you would be better off dead, and I can't help but wonder if I have it in me.



YOU TEXT, AND there's something about seeing your name light up my phone that still

gets me even after all this time. You're all business with your words, and I remember how much I've always liked this side of you. You write that our first therapy session is on Tuesday, and it's so like you to take control, so like you to try and set the pace. But you are mistaken, Kate. Our first therapy session is Monday, and you seem to forget that I'm always one step ahead. You cease with the texting and ring me instead because you like to be the one calling the shots. You're ready to pounce when I offer formalities I don't mean—meanwhile, I'm just happy to hear your voice. You sound exasperated, and I wish I could see your face. No one tells you how much you can miss a person's face. You rattle off instructions, but we don't talk about things, not really, and I wonder when we stopped talking.

We're talking now, that's what you'd say. But I won't—because no one's really saying anything. Nothing worth saying, anyway. Eventually, after I've refused to take the bait because I won't give you my anger as freely as you give yours, you relent, and you agree to the Monday appointment. You'd never admit it, but you like it when I put you in your place. Better to get it over with, you tell me with an edge. The sooner to see you, my dear, I think. But I don't say this. I give you what you want. I always have.



YOU SIT CROSS-LEGGED with your hands folded neatly in your lap, and I hate how pretty you look. Your hair is up, neat and orderly, different, and I study that spot on your neck, the one I know so well. It's your weak spot, and given the chance, I'd dive right in. But we're here, not there, in more ways than one, and I hate that this middle-aged doctor is checking you out. I don't know why you had to wear such a low-cut top, and I recognize the look he gives you. He has a weakness too. But he thinks he's the one in charge here—I can tell by the way he wears it via the chip on his shoulder—when, in reality, he lacks a real MD behind his name. He'd better watch himself. I'll kill him if I have to. He isn't old, the way I'd imagined, and I silently curse myself for not doing more research on something so important.

“Dr. C.” That's how he introduces himself, and it's clear he's the kind of fellow who believes in make-believe. What a joke this is—what a joke he is. We would laugh about this, you and



I, if things were different. If now were before. But it isn't, and no one's laughing.

"So...why don't you tell me where things went wrong...?" he urges, and I want to hate him, and I almost do, but I admire his directness. I, too, am eager to get to the point.

You shrug, and then I do the same because I'm well-versed in the art of mirroring, but mostly because I want to know your answer. I'm glad he starts here because he doesn't know us, Kate, this fake doctor. He doesn't know that other doctors (both real and fake) have told us we're not capable of love. But we were capable, you and I. We were. We weren't make-believe like this guy. We didn't pretend we were something we weren't until we did—and that is the real reason we're here, but I don't say this. I let you lead the way.

"Is there really any way to know, Doc—" you start and then you stop. You don't call him 'doctor,' but you let him think he's in charge, and I like that you're on to him, too. You know his ability to ask a good question doesn't make him a real doctor, and this is a good start. Already, we're getting somewhere, you and I, and I'm starting to feel something that looks a lot like hope.

You are right, I tell him. There's really no way of knowing where things went bad, no way to pinpoint exactly who's at fault, and yet here we are, sitting in these chairs, talking to him instead of each other, both wanting nothing more than to be anywhere else, getting on with our lives.

You nod, and we're on the same page again, and all of a sudden the world seems less bleak. He asks how we met, and you crinkle your nose.

"Does it really matter?" I ask. "It's over," I say. "Isn't it best to let it be?" I add for good measure, showing that I, too, can ask good questions. You sit up a little straighter, but you drop your guard.

"Perhaps," he says, even though he and I both know he doesn't mean it. *Perhaps*. Give me a break. He doesn't know how much I hate that word, but you do, and I see the corners of your lips turn upward as he says it. It doesn't matter, though. He isn't fooling me with his half-hearted response. 'Dr. C' is a man used to being right. He likes control, he likes being in charge, he gets off on toying with people's emotions, and perhaps I could show him the error of his ways.

"And yet—," he adds, as though he's exasperated when he hardly knows what it means to lift a finger, "I want to go back to where it began." He speaks to me as he looks at you, and I can't blame him. They say living well is the best form of revenge. They are right, and in this

case, it's pretty apparent—I am bad at revenge.

“I think it would be a good idea for the two of you to tell each other the story of your coming together—in writing,” he says, looking from you to me and back, and I can't be mad at him for staring at your tits when he has such good ideas. “I find writing helps clients come to terms with the dissolution of their marriage in a way that merely talking doesn't...” he continues, pausing for added effect, and you cross your arms. “Writing can be reflective. I find it helps my clients to move on, and more importantly, it leads to healthier relationships in the future.”

“I don't write,” you tell him, as you shift in your seat—you little liar, you. You write all the time.

“You wrote the text you sent me about this very appointment,” I say because he needs to know those tits he's staring at are *my* tits and that we still talk. You give me that look, the one I know so well, and perhaps you are onto me.

“Just give it a try,” the fake doctor insists, adjusting his glasses on his nose, and I'd pay money to prove they aren't even prescription. “Trust me,” he says, and I don't. I hope you don't either. “It'll save the two of you time talking to me,” he adds. It's a small offer of condolence, and thankfully, he says something I like. Only this guy doesn't know you like I do. He may have me convinced, but he hasn't convinced you, and you are not soothed. I can tell by the way you check your phone every two and a half seconds. You're distracted, and you don't trust him. You don't want to talk to him, and I hate that phone for getting more of you than you give to us.

“What happens if I just don't come back?” you ask, and this isn't a threat—you genuinely want to know. You, always the stubborn one, always the one to test the limits, until suddenly, you just don't.

“Well—” he says, and I can tell you've tested him. He's intrigued by your defiance, and I will squash him if he gets any ideas...just like I will squash that phone of yours if you don't stop staring at it. “It's mandatory if you want to wrap up your divorce,” he tells you, and I like the direction he's going. I like that he plays hardball, so I don't have to. “Furthermore, you'd be violating a court order, and of course, that's not something I'd advise.”

You look over at me, and I smile, and you are so clever. You're not the kind of girl who enjoys being backed against the wall—until you are, and that's exactly what I'm imagining doing right now. I think he is too, and perhaps I'll let it slide, but only because I can tell by

your expression you understand he's forcing you to come back here, back to me.

"Fine," you say, and it's too bad you're not a mind reader.

"I'll give it a try," you tell him, and you sigh. You check your phone again, and this is a new one, but then, you've always surprised me with your intelligence. You look up, only this time not at me, and I get that familiar pain in my chest I know all too well. "Now, can I go?" you ask, raising your brow, and you're ready to pounce if the answer that comes isn't the one you want.

"Yes," he says, and you stand. You're about to bolt when he stops you with the flick of a wrist, and I remember when I could do that. "That is—if you agree, Jude. I need a commitment here that you'll both come prepared with something in hand by our next appointment," he adds, and there's authority in his voice when he speaks. You wait, and you listen, and this isn't the girl I know. He's looking at me now as though he and I are on the same team. We aren't, and he can't know how much you both love and hate authority, and maybe this is the answer to his question about where it all went wrong.

"Sure," I tell him, offering my best smile. "I'll come up with something for you, Doc," I offer as though I'm his star student, when in fact, I'm full of shit. But he buys it, and you are antsy because you know I've won. "I'll write you a whole book, if that's what it takes," I add for good measure. He smiles. "I'll call it *Water Under the Bridge*," I say, fucking with you. You shake your head at me. Then you roll your eyes and start for the door. I'm pretty sure you know he's checking out your ass, and he'd better watch himself. There was a time when this wouldn't have bothered me, a time when I believed in you... when I believed in us. Now is not that time.





## TWO

Lydia

Before

### Somewhere, South America

IT'S 8:07 A.M. ON a Wednesday when I see you, a day I'm sure is nondescript to the rest of the world, but not for us. You don't know it yet, but you're my future. I, on the other hand, sense it immediately.

You, with your crisp white shirt and too-clean khaki shorts, you look like a tourist. But there's something in the way you hold yourself, and I can tell you're the kind of person who couldn't care less. Personally, I like the way you blend. You don't belong here. You know it, and I know it—but I am here and so are you. You kick a bit of sand, dig your foot in, and I can tell you're the kind of guy who's in it for the long haul. You seem surprised by the lack of effort it takes to make the sand and the earth move, and you remove your ball cap and scratch your head. Your hair is the color of coal, and the way it sits atop your head, it's as though it has been tousled just for me. I watch you take a few steps toward me, toward our future, and I thank someone somewhere for delivering to me exactly the kind of birthday gift I've been waiting for all my life.

You haven't seen me looking at you. Not yet. But you will. I want to make things easy for us, always. So I make my move. We pass each other, but you do not look up, you do not make eye contact, and I love that you're secure enough in yourself that you don't bother with pleasantries even though you sense the other person expects it.

I'm imaging our first conversation, and later, our wedding, when you plop down in the sand and make a home for us. You pull a pair of sunglasses from your pocket and slide them on. They're designer shades. It's cloudy, and already, you surprise me.

You watch a little girl out in the surf, bobbing and bouncing, thrilled more and more as each wave comes crashing into her, and she looks so familiar that, for a moment, I wonder

whether I'm really seeing her at all. But you make her real. I want to go to her—in my daydream, we scoop her up and make her ours. I don't go to her, though, and I don't scoop her up because I know these things have to happen organically. Her mother calls to her, and I find it funny how people sense things. Her name is Sarah, and you smile because you sense things, too.



YOU'RE SO CLOSE and yet so far away. Even still, it's almost impossible to believe my good fortune. You've checked into the bungalow next door. I have five days with you according to the landlord, an old man with just about three teeth left in his head. You have come to me—despite the shenanigans of the past year, I've woken up here next to you, even if not exactly. It's my thirty-fourth birthday, and you have arrived in paradise where the sun shines and the water beckons, and we are free.

You haven't spoken to me yet—although today is the day—the day we will meet officially. You'll suggest coffee, I'll agree, and I will tell you all the stories of my life. I won't lead with the fact that I've gotten away, free and clear, with kidnapping and murder and a whole plethora of charges—even though you seem like the kind of guy who might be impressed by such things. I won't tell you about the voices. I won't have to because the voices have stopped.

Also, because you don't need to know everything. Not yet. We have time. You and I... we have forever. In the meantime, I'll tell you about leaving the States, because you're American, I can tell from the start. You'll listen intently as I share the details of how I've set myself up here, in this tiny little touristy coastal village deep in South America, where the people are kind, and for the most part, keep to themselves. We will always have this place in common, and I like that idea. We are our own compasses. We're different and yet already we like the same places, the same things. It's all very nice, as my father used to say. You will agree when I say we shouldn't give away our location, not to family, not to friends, not to anyone, because you know what else my father always said? Build it and they will come. He was right, and you have come, and you are the kind of person who knows the best secrets

are those that are kept.



WE DIDN'T MEET today. Not officially. Instead, you will now officially go down in my book as the guy who ruined my birthday. Which is too bad, really. We're supposed to be together, we were supposed to meet via a staged run-in. I had it all planned. Our chance encounter would lead to a long walk on the beach and from there, to the rest of our lives. But you don't leave your bungalow for the rest of the day, and so there is no run in. I knock, but you don't answer, and I'm not sure where you could've possibly gone. This town is small, and you are a mystery. I like this about you, but I hate it too. I grill the landlord, and I study the lines around his eyes as he says you've come alone. They disappear when he tells me he thinks you mentioned meeting a friend, and I don't like the way he uses this word friend. It's clear—he knows as well as I do that most people don't travel to exotic locales to meet friends of the same sex, and I hope I am wrong about this, about you. The next morning, the landlord tells me you've checked out. But how can it be that you are gone? How can we be over when we've only just begun? This is how I know it's time to make a change.

I have to find you.

You need to know the only friend you need is me.

