

James Patrick Kelly: Faith

Faith was about to cross Congress Street with an armload of overdue library books when she was run over by a divorce. There was no mistaking Chuck's cranberry BMW 325i idling at the light -- except that Chuck was supposed to be in Hartford. The woman next him had enough blonde hair to stuff a pillow. The light changed and the BMW accelerated through the intersection. Chuck was crazy if he thought he could get away with hit and run. The blonde looked suddenly ill; she folded down in her seat like a Barbie doll in a microwave. Without thinking, Faith hurled the top book in her stack. *Whump!* It was the first time she had ever appreciated Stephen King's wordiness; *The Tommyknockers* bounced off the passenger door, denting it nicely. Chuck raced up Islington and out of her life. The book lay open next to the curb. Its pages fluttered in the wind, waving good-bye to fifteen years of marriage.

She had a long convalescence, during which Kleenex sales reached an all-time high. Chuck got the Beemer, the bimbo and the freedom to be himself -- poor bastard. She got the cape on Moffat Street and their teenager, Flip. By the time the divorce was final, she had lost her illusions about love, half of her friends and twenty-three pounds.

She realized she was healing one day during her lunch hour. She was in a dressing room at Marshalls and had just wriggled into a size 10 bikini.

"Maybe I should write a book," she said. In the next stall her best friend Betty grunted in frustration. "*The Divorce Diet*, what do you think?" Faith spread her fingers across her tummy. Her mother's bulge had receded until it no longer resembled the front bumper of a pickup. "You too can cry those extra pounds off." She turned and eyed her backside in the mirror. "Stress: the key to tighter buns."

"Hell of a way to lose weight." Betty remained behind the curtain; she usually avoided mirrors like a vampire. "Liposuction is cheaper. Jesus, my thighs look like water balloons." She stuck her head out to admire Faith in the bikini. "You look great, Faith, you really do. When are you going to do something about it?"

The question nagged at Faith. What was she waiting for? Women were supposed to take what they wanted these days, not wait for men to offer it. At least, that was what the cigarette ads said. All her friends wanted to fix her up -- Betty, in particular. Betty was hungry for vicarious thrills; she was married to Dave, who spent too much time on the road selling excavation equipment. As Faith rebuttoned her blouse, she wondered if she was ready now to go out.

But not with friends of friends. Not yet. Better to start with something she could abandon, if necessary, without making too much of a mess. She had been following the personals in *Portsmouth Magazine*; she thought she might run an ad.

She wrote it that afternoon at work, where it was easier to see herself objectively. After all, writing ad copy was her business. **DWF**. Faith hated that acronym. In her mind she could not help but hear DWF as dwarf. Who wanted to go out with Sneezzy? Or Dopey? **DWF 35**. Now she needed some adjectives. **Attractive professional**. Okay, but there should be more. **Attractive, slender, witty, secure professional**. No, no, overkill. Delete slender. Now she needed something about her interests. What were her interests? Napping came immediately to mind. After working all day at the agency and then coming home to cook and clean and vacuum and do laundry and scrub toilets, she did not exactly have the energy to train for the decathlon or plow through *The New York Review of Books*. She made herself concentrate; there had to be something. My favorites: **the flowers at Prescott Park, jazz, the beach in the winter, candlelit dinners anywhere**. Yes, she liked that; it reeked of romance. Last came specifications for her ideal date. The problem was that she was not exactly sure what she wanted.

