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### **“Best Friends”**

When I was a child, my best friend was Tommy. It was a little unusual, a boy and girl being best friends. But we were. We were inseparable.

We'd run around outside for hours, playing Cops and Robbers. I was always the cop, and he always got arrested.

During Hide and Seek, he closed his eyes and counted to a hundred. I always got to hide.

When we set up the Monopoly game, I took Boardwalk and Park Place; he was always the shoe.

In high school we dated other people but stayed best friends. I didn't mind Tommy's girlfriends.

Not, at least, until Jeannette. She was everything I wasn't. She was nice. I hated her and pretended I liked her.

Tommy told me he was in love with Jeannette. That she made him feel good about himself and that he'd never felt that way before. He told me he wanted to marry her.

So I started planting ideas in Jeannette's head. It didn't take much. I told her, “Tommy seems so sweet. But he isn't what he seems.” Then I'd give her a look suggesting there was much more to the story than I dared tell.

I knew Tommy so well that I knew what he was going to do before he did it. I used this to my advantage.

I told Jeannette that Tommy only bought popcorn when he was depressed. So, he took her out to the movies...and bought some popcorn. I knew, of course, that Tommy always bought popcorn at the movies.

For Valentine's Day, he bought Jeannette a dozen roses. But I'd already told her the reason he didn't buy her chocolate was because he thought she was getting fat.

He bought Jeannette a bracelet; I'd already warned her about his predilection for handcuffs.

After Jeannette broke up with Tommy, he never fully recovered. He was broken. He went on with life, of course. But he never married, never fell in love again, never really made much of himself.

Me? I got married. Had my kids. I live my life.

I still see Tommy around town from time to time. We always stop to chat about the old days. He tries to be cheerful. But he can't keep it up for long. The cheer he had in life was wiped away when Jeannette left him. She left and took his happiness.

And he never knew why.