

Gary's Story

The woman sat in the waiting room, looking at a map she held in her hands. As she looked at it, she seemed to be talking to herself, even smiling and nodding her head occasionally. The waiting room was located in the Port Authority, in Manhattan. It was where travelers from everywhere boarded busses and headed to cities and towns all over America.

I had come here earlier that morning, after leaving my wife and two teenage daughters sobbing at the front door of our home, a few miles away.

After walking out of our house, I had called for a taxi to the railroad station, where I got on a train heading into New York City. Once there, I walked a few blocks to the Port Authority Bus Terminal, carrying a duffle bag filled with clothes and a few of my favorite books and some toiletries.

I wasn't sure why I had come to the bus terminal, but I knew that I had to leave home. The day before, I had found out that Susan, my wife of almost fifteen years, had been involved with another man for most of the past year, and she had, as she put it, "very strong feelings" for him.

We spent most of the previous night talking (arguing/ screaming?) about this situation, and I finally told Susan that I had to leave, and that I was crushed by what she had revealed to me. Of course, she said she was sorry that it had happened -that she didn't plan it, but that she (and this was the crusher), had never been so happy as she was with this guy (she wouldn't tell me his name).

Our daughters, twelve and fourteen, heard us, obviously, and they were very upset, but I did have the idea that they may have known what was going on.

Now, I am sitting on a bench in the Port Authority, wondering why I am here, and what I am going to do now. Before my wife told me what she had been doing, I would have told anyone that we were very happy, and that we had a terrific marriage. How wrong I was! I must have been living in a kind of dream world. How could I have been so blind? How could I have not known that my wife was in love with someone else?

I am frightened and angry and so sad. I sit here looking around at the hundreds of other potential travelers. Where are they going? Why? What are their stories? What is my story? In one day -overnight-I have gone from a happily married man, deeply in love with his wife- to a man who has just learned that his life was not what he thought it was. He has suddenly changed from being part of a loving family of four, to being a man alone and unloved. At least by his wife. I told myself that I would continue loving, and being loved, by my two wonderful daughters, but I also realized that it wasn't going to be the same again. What would I do now?

As I'm sitting here, feeling sorry for myself, and very worried, I look over at the woman studying the maps. She still seems busy with her task, and I find myself

wondering what her plans might be. Just why is she sitting in a bus terminal, studying maps? Does her story compare with mine?

Just as I am watching her, she looks up, sees me looking at her and gives me what appears to be, a small smile. It was so small that I wasn't sure whether she was smiling at me, or if I just thought that she was smiling.

I was both surprised and confused. Why would this woman, sitting a few rows from me, smile at me, or was my imagination seeing something that was not there? Here I sit, waiting for a bus to who knows where, and there she sits, looking at maps also to who knows where.

I think that there is something about her that reminds me of Susan, my wife, and I begin to feel very sad. How could Susan have done something like this to us, to our marriage, to our long and loving relationship? Didn't the fifteen years we were together mean anything to her., and how could she do this to our two daughters. What must they feel, and did they somehow know what their mother was doing?

Susan and I had first met when I was tending bar at a local Friday's restaurant, and she had come in with a friend of hers. I remember that they sat at the bar, separated from everyone else and seemed to be having a pretty serious discussion, so I tried not to bother them, unless they wanted refills. But I remember that I couldn't stop looking at the woman who seemed to be the one listening and not the one doing most of the talking. She was very attractive, with long very dark hair and a great smile. And every once in a while, she seemed to be giving me a small smile, just as the woman in the bus terminal had done.

After a while – they had had three glasses of wine each – the one who was doing most of the talking, and was obviously very upset about something, asked me for the check, they got their things together, and left the bar. That was all that happened, except that was the first time I ever saw the woman whose name, I later found out, was Susan. I also thought that she gave me a little smile, as they were leaving. After they left, I continued working, and I soon put my thoughts of these two women in the back of my mind – but not for long.

A few weeks later, I was back behind the bar at Friday's, and the woman that I thought (imagined?) had smiled at me, walked into the restaurant, looked over toward the bar, and walked over and sat on one of the stools. I was surprised to see her, but to be honest, I don't remember thinking about her or looking for her. I was usually pretty busy when I was bartending, and almost every day, interesting people come, drink for a while, chat with me, and then leave, so when I last saw this woman, she had not made a particularly strong impression on me.

But here she was, sitting on a stool looking at me, and smiling. "Hi," she said. "You probably don't remember me, right? I was in here a couple of weeks ago, with my girlfriend. We were sitting right about here, I think, and she was having a pretty bad time of it. Do you remember seeing us?"

As she sat there, looking up at me, I remember thinking, “Wow! She is gorgeous, but why did she come back here? Is it possible that she was hoping to see me again?” So, I told her, “Yes, I do remember you – and your friend. She seemed to be very upset about something, and I had the idea that you were trying to help her, but, of course, I certainly didn’t want you two to think that I was overly curious, so I kind of left you alone, but to answer your question, I remember something else, too. I seem to remember that you gave me a small smile as you were leaving. I hope that I’m not going too far, but I do remember that, too.

“Oh, my god,” she said. “I didn’t realize that you might have noticed that, Now, I’m embarrassed! Here I was, sitting in bar, trying to be a good friend, and you caught me flirting with you. I just hope that Fiona -she’s my best friend- didn’t notice what I was doing. Just to tell you why she was so upset, she had just found out that her husband had been cheating on her, and she was devastated. You know the old story, I’m sure.”

“I’m not sure what you’re talking about. What old story do you mean?”

“You know, we find out that our husband -or wife_ is having an affair, and say to ourselves – what happened? Why? We were so happy. I thought that we had a perfect marriage.”

“Yes, I know what you’re talking about. I do have a friend who, just recently, went through this experience. The only catch is, though, I knew them both. We actually went out together a few times, and I never had the slightest idea that his girlfriend was so two-faced. They seemed happy – to me, at least. They broke up a few weeks ago, and my friend is still taking it pretty hard.”

“Anyway, let’s change the subject. First, what’s your name? I don’t think we’ve been properly introduced.”

“You’re right! I’m Susan, I’m not married – or even with anyone. I’m not working right now, sort of between jobs (but hoping that something good comes up soon), and I live alone.”

“I’m Gary, I’m not married either, and I don’t have even close to a regular girlfriend. I work here a few nights a week– and I enjoy it. I get to meet and talk to some pretty interesting people, and I’m very glad that you stopped in today. Oh, and this is not what I call my real job. I’m also a high school English teacher, over in Cutchoguei

“Wow! That’s great! English was my favorite subject! I’m lying – I hated English, but I do like you. Maybe we could go out some time?”

“I’d love to! I’m off tomorrow night. Would that be good for you?”

“Yes! I don’t even have to check my social calendar, because I know it’s empty!”

“So, that’s how Susan and I got together – two lonely people looking for some fun, and we found it with each other. We began to go out, pretty regularly -one thing led to another, we began to spend nights in each other’s apartments, and about six months later, I asked her to marry me. She said Yes, and it looked as if we were on our way to a

long and happy life together – until she fell in love with someone else and told me – this hurts so much – that she had “never been happier.”

And now, here I sit, in the Port Authority Bus Terminal, watching a woman looking through a book of maps, while I wonder what I’m going to do now.

I don’t think I’ll ever understand what went wrong. Oh, I know I wasn’t home as much as I should have been, but I took the bartending job to make some extra money. Susan had a job but it didn’t pay very much. She was a receptionist in a very busy doctors’ office; it was the kind of job that didn’t even offer a pension of any kind and only two weeks a year, paid vacations. Susan had dropped out of the community college she was attending when we met, and she never went back to school. She told me, on more than one occasion, that she never really liked school. But I loved her so much that I told her that I understood (but I really didn’t).

Even though we never really had extra money, we managed. I always had some kind of a part-time job, and, at school. I coached as much as I had time for. This included the track team, and, my favorite, the varsity golf team. I had started playing golf in high school, and I became a pretty good golfer, caddying and playing in high school, and then making my college golf team. Even though I was a good high school baseball player, golf became the sport I liked best. So, when I was given the opportunity to coach golf where I was teaching, I jumped at the chance. Between my coaching, teaching summer school, and bartending, I was able to bring some needed money into our house

With my extra jobs, and Susan’s money from the doctor’s office, we managed pretty well, but I did worry, sometimes, about our future expenses. How would our daughters be able to go to college, for example? Susan didn’t seem to think very much about matters like these, and she even, kidding, referred to me as her “worry wart.” I guess I did think about these things too much, and now I find myself wondering if, perhaps, this was one of the reasons for her doing what she had done.

I just don’t know why it happened. I really don’t, after fifteen years of what I considered a very happy marriage, she falls in love with someone else – and then tells me that she’s “never been happier.” To say that I was shocked is a huge understatement. She must be one of the world’s greatest actresses, to have kept her love affair a secret from me.

We had, several times, gone on short weekend vacations together – to Montauk, the the Poconos, and even to Manhattan a couple of times. We made it a point to be affectionate with each other, even using the words “I love you’ fairly regularly. And I would say that we had a damned good sex life – no complaints in that area!

So, what went wrong? Who is this guy that is replacing me? Why does Susan love him so much – how does he compare with me? At first, I didn’t think I wanted to know anything about this interloper, but the more I think of it, the more I want to know about this guy. Where did they meet? How did their affair get started? How often do they see each other, and – I hate to think about it _ what do they do when they do see each other? And I also wonder where they see each other. Is he also married – with kids? If so, does his wife know?

So many questions! I'm not ready to have my life changed so drastically. How will this affect Claire and Madeline? How often will I see them, and most importantly, what do I do now? This has happened to friends of mine – not too many of them – I've read books and seen shows in which marriages break up, but that was fiction, pretend. This is real!

Right now, I'm wondering if I'm over-reacting. Could we still put this thing behind us? Is there a chance that Susan will realize just what is at stake, and change her mind? Right now, I can't answer these questions

I've always considered myself a pretty rational person, someone who doesn't panic in the face of an emergency, but that's not how I feel now. I actually have shortness of breath and wonder what's going on. Am I having a heart attack? Why am I having difficulty breathing normally? Does Susan have any idea how this has affected me? Up to yesterday, I assumed that she really cared for me – we had been through so much together: when we got the call that Claire had to be taken to the hospital because she was running a high temperature, when I was told that I was being excessed from my teaching job for budgetary reasons, or when Susan suffered a miscarriage during her first pregnancy, when we were waiting anxiously for our little girl to be born.

Of course, there were others, too, but we managed to get through them, because, I thought, we loved each other so much and our love would be enough to solve any problem that came up between us.

But I guess I was wrong. Apparently, our love wasn't as strong as I thought it was. If it were, then how could she tell me that she "had never been happier"?

As I sit here in the Port Authority, I have absolutely no idea what I should do now - or why Susan did this to us. Is she really as happy as she says she is? How can that be? To me, it looks as if the fifteen years we were married did not mean very much to her. It's almost as if this woman that I've been living with for so long has become a stranger, someone else. I think that before I do something crazy, I have to talk to Susan. Maybe she will realize what she is doing and what a huge mistake it is, and maybe she will come to her senses. So, before I do anything I'll regret later, I have to go back home and talk to Susan. I love her so much, and I have to fight to keep her from making a big mistake.

So, I get up from my bench, look over at the woman with the maps, and begin my walk back to Penn Station. The LIRR trains out to the North Fork run pretty regularly, all day. If I'm lucky, and don't have to wait too long for a train, I should be home in less than two hours. It's the end of summer, summer school ended last week so I'm on vacation, except for my bartending gig, which I'm not scheduled for until tomorrow.

I get to Penn Station in about twenty minutes -it's a pretty short walk from the Bus Terminal, and I get on the escalator down to the waiting room. When I get down there, I see that the train I need isn't scheduled for an hour, so I walk to the waiting room, pretty empty at this time of the day, but, first, I head over to Starbuck's and purchase a medium-sized coffee and an orange scone. I hadn't eaten anything today, and I realized I was hungry. I was very nervous, too. What would I find when I got home? Would Susan even be there? I didn't think she was scheduled to work today, but

maybe she was, or maybe (I hope not!) she was with this new love of hers. Our girls shouldn't be home; they both work as babysitters down at the town beach, at the end of our street.

But I knew that Susan realized how upset I was, and she obviously knew that I had left our house, but she also knew that I had my cell phone with me. She knows that I always have it in my pocket, and she has even kidded me, saying things like, "Why do you always have your phone? Do you get that many calls? I didn't know you were so popular!" All kidding, of course, but considering what happened last night, and knowing how angry I was, I would think (hope?) that she might call me – just to see if I was all right. But, no call, no checking up on me. It looks as if she has other things on her mind than worrying about me. I hated to think about what she might be doing right now

I brought my coffee and scpne over to the waiting room and began my wait for the next train to Cutchogue. We had purchased our house almost seven years ago. It was a Cape Cod on a quiet street just south of the small village of Cutchogue, about half-way between the main street and the small bay beach at the end of the road. That's where both of our girls worked as babysitters during the summer months. As I thought of going home, I wondered how Claire and Madeline were doing, after the events of last night.

I wondered if they might have had any knowledge of what their mother was doing, but as I thought about it, I found myself doubting they knew anything. They would have been to upset, and angry, if they had known. The four of us were very close, and I can't imagine their knowing what their mother was doing and not, somehow, revealing it.

As I said earlier, we had had a particularly close family, and there was simply no way that Susan would have let them know what she was doing. But, now that I think about it, how could Susan have done this to us – not just me, but, us. Does she realize what she is doing? Has she thought about how her actions will affect our daughters? I simply cannot comprehend why Susan has done this to us, and that's why I have to go back home. *I need to talk to her, with no one else around. Claire and Madeline won't be home, and I hope that Susan and I can straighten out this horrible situation, and I'm hoping that Susan will remember who I am and how much we have loved each other. I pray that she'll come to her senses, but I can't say that I'm very confident.*

I look at the clock on the wall and see that my train has just been listed on the big board outside the waiting room. It's time for me to head for gate #16 and get on my train. Because of the time -it's still morning- the train shouldn't be very crowded, so I won't have difficulty finding a seat. The ride to Cutchogue will take about an hour and a half. I have walked to the station many times, from our house- it's less than a mile – so when I get to Cutchogue, I'll walk back home and, hopefully find that Susan is home.

I dozed a little, as the train raced out to the east end of Long Island. There were only ten other people in my car, and most of them spent their time either reading, or dozing like me, so our ride was peaceful and quiet. I tried calling Susan, after I woke up from my nap, but she did not pick up.

I was not sure how to interpret this. Was she not home? That shouldn't make any difference, because I was calling her cell phone, which she would probably have with her, even if she were out of the house. Or, did she not pick up because she didn't want to talk to me? She probably would feel uncomfortable talking to me after what she told me last night. Think about it. You've told your husband (or wife) that this new person has made you happier than you ever have been before – and then the person that you no longer love calls you. Would you be in a hurry to talk to this person on his phone?

Or, a different scenario also is possible, and this is the one that I have a very hard time imagining. Suppose you were somewhere, with this new person of yours, and the two of you were doing something that a phone call would interrupt. would you stop doing whatever you were doing and answer this phone call?

I'm sure that there are many other reasons why Susan is not answering my phone call. it really does not matter. All that matters is that I need to talk to my wife, and I am almost home, and, eventually, we will get together and talk about what Susan told me last night.

Then I heard the train's whistle indicating that we were pulling into Cutchogue. I got my things together, my backpack containing the belongings I had brought with me the night before, my cell phone, and the scone which I had not even bitten into.

The train began to slow down, and I stood up and walked toward the doors. Then the squeal of the brakes told me that we were stopping, and I got ready to get off.

When I left the train and glanced at my watch, I saw that it was only one PM. I was surprised that it was so early; I had been up most of the night, sitting in the Port Authority Bus Terminal, and now I find myself back in Cutchogue, , ready to walk home, wondering what is going to happen. I am nervous and worried, and I can feel my heart pounding in my chest.

The walk is a short one, and soon I am walking down Track Avenue, where we live. I approach our house and see Susan's car in the driveway: I'm glad that she is home. We need to talk. I walk up the three steps that take me to our front door. I reach out and find that the door is unlocked, so I open the door and begin to enter our house. But, as I am walking into our living room, I hear Susan say, to someone, "I've got to hang up. I think someone is here. See you later. I love you."

She had been talking to her "new friend," had told him that she loved him, and I felt like turning around and walking out of the house. This was obviously not a very good start to our talking about things. But I did not walk out of the house. I needed to stay and talk to the woman that I have loved for fifteen years. I only hoped that she was, at least, willing to have this talk.

So, I walked into the kitchen where Susan was. She was sitting at the table, her cell phone in front of her, and she looked up as I walked into the room. She looked beautiful, as she always does, and she looked up as I walked into the room. "Hi", she said. "I wasn't sure whether I would see you, or talk to you, today. Where have you been? The girls were very upset when you walked out of the house last night."

“What did you expect me to do, after hearing you say the things that you said last night. How could you have told me that you ‘have never been happier?’ How do you think that made me feel?”

“I know, Gary. I should not have said that. I just felt that I had to give you a reason for doing what I was doing. I’m sorry that I said that, but that doesn’t change anything. I’ve become involved with someone else. I certainly didn’t plan for this to happen. I’ve never done anything like this before. It just happened. We became friends -one thing led to another – and I began to have feelings for this person that I don’t think I’ve ever had before, and now, as I told you last night, I want to be with him. I’m sorry, Gary.”

Susan's Story

I had never liked school; it bored me, and I didn't like being there at all. Oh, I somehow managed to graduate from high school, barely, but going to college was not an option for me. All I wanted to do, after graduation, was to get a job and enjoy my life.

I didn't come from a college-educated family – my father was a long-distance truck driver, and my mother worked as a cashier in the local Shoprite super market. I also have a brother and a sister, who feel the same way I do about school.

In my senior year, some of my friends talked about going to Suffolk Community College, and I said I'd give it a try after they told me that they had heard that there were a lot of good-looking guys from all over Long Island going there.

But I didn't stay at Suffolk very long. I was bored by the professors and the stuff they were trying to teach us, and I hated the homework and all the reading they expected us to do, so I stopped going to classes a few weeks into the semester – and never went back.

Almost immediately, I found a job at Macys, worked there a couple of years, and then found the job I have now, receptionist at a very busy doctors' office over in Greenport. It doesn't pay a lot, but I've made some pretty good friends there, and even went out with two of the doctors, which, by the way, is frowned upon by the guy who runs the office. He calls it "fraternizing," and it is strictly forbidden, so when I went out with the doctors, we had to keep it a big secret. I never got caught doing this, and then I met, Gary, and my life changed. I liked him from the first time I saw him, when I was in the bar where he worked. I was there, trying to help my friend, Fiona, who was having marital problems.

Gary just happened to be our bartender the night that Fiona asked me to meet her. She is my best friend, and we have always talked about whatever might be bothering us, so when Fiona said that she needed help, of course I said yes. As soon as we got to the red Rooster, we sat at the end of the bar and Fiona started talking.

I was totally shocked at what she told me. She said that she had just found out that her husband, Tim, had been seen coming out of a motel, holding hand with a "very attractive woman." Fiona said that when she confronted Tim, he admitted that, yes, he did have a relationship with this woman, and it had been going on for several months. Of course, Fiona was horrified, and she asked Tim what he was going to do. Did he love this woman? Who is she? Where did you meet her? How did this thing get started?

Tim told her that he did love her, but he refused to tell Fiona her name. He also said that he intended to keep seeing her, and he thought he should probably move out.

Fiona was devastated. She told me that she had had no idea that Tim was doing this. She said that she thought that they had a pretty good marriage.

I did all that I could do, but I felt pretty helpless. Fiona was crying, and all I could do was just sit there and try to comfort her, which didn't help her at all. I was shocked, too. Gary and I had been out with Fiona and Tim, and we had always thought that they got along pretty well. How wrong we were!

I remember when I was talking, or listening, to Fiona, at the bar, I kept noticing Gary, who was very good-looking, and was giving us a lot of space, because he probably could tell we were having a pretty serious conversation.

I also remember that, as Fiona and I were walking out of the bar, I looked over at Gary and smiled at him. I then decided to go back to that bar, a few weeks later, to see if Gary still worked there, and I found out that not only was he working there, but he also remembered that I had smiled at him when Fiona and I were leaving the bar.

I was a little embarrassed that he had caught me flirting, but it all worked out because Gary and I talked for a while and decided to go out. He seemed to be a great guy, a teacher who tended bar to make a little extra money, but also a man with no 9 attachments or involvements. He told me that he would love to go out with me. That night, after he finished working, we went out for the first time. I remember that we went to a place in Greenport, Lucharitos, and ended up the last ones in the restaurant. We sat at the bar and did a lot of talking and laughing. When he took me home, we kissed for a while, and I think that we both wanted a little more. We began seeing each other regularly, and within a short time, we began to have sex. Soon after that, I moved into Gary's apartment in Riverhead, after breaking up with the two guys I had been seeing. They didn't take it very well, but I was so happy with Gary that these guys did not mean anything to me. Six months later, Gary asked me to marry him, and I said yes. I was very happy and began to look forward to a long and happy life with this terrific guy,

I had gone out with quite a few guys before Gary, but none of them compared with him. We had a pretty small wedding; only our families and a few close friends were there, and afterward, we went to Montauk for a few days. It was almost Labor Day, and Gary had to get back to his job, teaching English at Cutchogue High School.

I kept my job at the medical office, Gary coached the school golf team, and we began living our life together. We were happy, did a lot of fun things together. We took trips to Lake George and Lake Placid, went on a Caribbean cruise to St. Lucia, and even stayed in Manhattan a couple of times.

So, life was good for us. Two years after we were married, we had our first daughter, Madelaine, and eighteen months later, our second daughter, Claire, came along. Now we had out two little girls-what could be better? After Claire was born, we decided that our family was complete.

We loved our life We were happy living on the North Fork, and Gary was enjoying his teaching and coaching. As our girls got older and began branching out, with clubs and teams at school and their summer jobs baby-sitting at the town beach at the end of our street, Gary and I had more time to be together, but we did find that our jobs got in our way, sometimes.

Gary still tended bar a few nights a week, usually making pretty good money, and he also coached the golf team in the fall and was an assistant baseball coach in the spring.

I was still working in the medical office in Greenport. I had been there over ten years, and my salary had been raised a few times, so I was pretty happy to have this job.

.Because I had been there so long, I had made a few good friends along the way, mostly other front desk workers and some nurses. We had a very pleasant working environment, and all things considered, I enjoyed my job very much.

So, for quite a while, life was good. Gary and I were doing well together, our daughters were growing up to be terrific young women, and we didn't seem to have any major problems. I remember wondering what kind of grandparents we would be. Of course, the answer to that question is pretty far into the future (I hope!). Although our girls were still teenagers, I could see the time when they would be out of school, thinking about marriage, and then having their own children. I know that I'm doing a lot of projecting, but that's what moms do (and dads, too). I remember that I didn't even talk to Gary about these thoughts of mine, but then something happened that turned our world upside down.

A new doctor started working in our office. His name was Rob, he's a pediatrician, and he had come from working in Nassau County, in a practice in Rockville Centre. From the first day that we met each other, we seemed to connect. At first we just talked to each other when we were in our conference room. But soon, I was looking forward to seeing him. He was the kind of man who is very easy to talk to, and what I especially liked about him was that, when you talked to him, he actually listened to you and even asked questions if he wanted to know more about what you were saying. It's amazing how few people do that! He said that he had changed jobs because the doctor who had hired him was retiring, and the one who would now become Rob's boss was not someone that Rob respected. He's been here only a few months, and, already, the patients and their parents like him a lot. He's the kind of guy that people seem to feel comfortable with, and from the start, I felt that way, too. But, a short time later, I began to think differently about Rob.

For a month or so, Rob and I were just friends, people who happened to work together. We enjoyed talking to each other, but I liked talking to plenty of other people, too. As our talks increased and we began sharing information about our lives, I began to think more and more about Rob. Yes, he was very good-looking and he was a doctor, but there was a lot more to him. I found it very easy to talk with him, and we both admitted that we weren't really as happy as we wanted to be. As I have said, Gary was a very nice guy, a caring husband, a loving father to our girls, and even a decent lover, but I realized that I no longer felt the way I had felt in our early days. I didn't look forward to seeing him – or being with him at night. I no longer felt close to him, not the way I used to feel. It's sad to admit, but I liked being with Rob much more than being with Gary.

This had all happened gradually, so gradual that I don't think that I was fully aware of what was happening. Oh, I still loved Gary, I told myself, but I was no longer in love with him. As I said earlier, Gary is a great guy – most people like him a lot- but sometimes I get the idea that he feels the same way that I do. He has a busy outside life, with his teaching, his coaching, and his bartending. Sometimes I think that he would rather be doing those things, than being at home with me. After all, I'm not the big reader that he is, I'm not thrilled at hanging around in bars, and I couldn't care less about golf.

I know I'm doing a lot of rationalizing here, but I do know that I'm starting to think about Bob way too often, and that has me worried, but also excited. I shouldn't be having these thoughts about Gary, and I also know that I should put an end to what is threatening to happen – but I have no choice. Once you meet someone who is perfect for you, regardless of the complications or problems you might experience, you have to act on your feelings and desires -you literally have no choice. I now feel that I have to be with Rob, regardless of what might happen. For the next few weeks, we continued to be just friends, talking and laughing in the conference room, sometimes walking together out to the parking lot after work, just kidding around, but I was thinking too much about Rob – and then we crossed the line.

It is ironic that I met Gary because my best friend's husband was cheating on her. I remember how shocked I was when Fiona told me what Tim had done, and I also remember what she said to me that day. "Susan," she said. "I couldn't believe it. I thought that Tim and I had such a good marriage."

Now I'm the one who is thinking about cheating. I hate myself for what I want to do, but I can't help it. Gary is a good man, a good father to our girls, and he always treats me with love and tenderness, but I just don't love him anymore. I love Rob and want to be with him all the time. This has been coming for a long time, and I think that Gary feels it, too. When we first got married, we were very different together. We talked a lot, laughed and kidded around, and, yes, we made love regularly. Life was good in those days, but they don't exist anymore. Now we barely communicate with each other. Gary seems impatient with me too often. He still tends bar, and I think he'd rather be there than home with me. He's not the kind of person who finds it easy to talk about his feelings, so I don't really know what the problem might be

I have to admit that I have found myself thinking about other guys, but up to now, that's all that I have done, think about them. I say that Gary seems impatient with me, but he doesn't tell me why. I'm still young enough to want to have a better, happier life, but it doesn't look like that's going to happen with Gary. But I do think that Rob is the kind of man I would be very happy with. He's great-looking, has a fantastic job, loves me a lot, and is a wonderful lover. It's like I told Gary, I've never been happier. Now, all I have to do is separate from Gary, and that is not going to be easy.

Gary and I had a good marriage, two wonderful daughters, everything seemed to be fine – until I started thinking too much about Rob. I tried to convince myself that it meant nothing, that it was just a harmless feeling that anyone might have for another person. I'm sure that it has happened to many other people, with no harm done. But the attraction that Rob and I had for each other kept growing stronger. This had never happened to me before, but I knew I couldn't allow it to go any further – until I did. Rob and I had met for lunch about a month ago. We were in that park I mentioned earlier. We enjoyed talking and kidding around, but this day turned out to be something different. Rob was unusually quiet, different from the way he usually was. I wondered why he was behaving this way. As soon as we were sitting together, in his car, he looked at me and said, "Susan, I think we should cut down on our lunch dates from now

on ." I immediately asked him why he was saying this. I told him that I didn't think we were doing anything wrong – why should we stop having lunch together?

"Susan," he began, " I just don't feel right doing this. I like you so much, and I'm just afraid that we're going to cross the line eventually. Even now, I want to touch you so badly. I want to kiss you! I have to constantly remind myself that you are married, and I don't want to be responsible for breaking up your marriage. As long as we keep having these wonderful lunches together, away from everyone, you know we're going to go too far. Don't misunderstand me! I want to go "too far," but we just can't. I hate to say this, but I think we should go back to just being friends, OK?"

'Rob," I told him, "No, my answer to your question is No. I can't imagine not seeing you anymore. I need to be with you. I actually think I'm falling in love with you. I don't say these words lightly. Before Gary, I had never spoken them to anyone. I want us to continue exploring what is happening here. I'm definitely not ready to give it all up. I want us to find out whether this is real – or not. I agree that we have to be careful, and I can make sure that Gary does not suspect anything, but please tell me that nothing will change, that we'll continue to get to know each other, until we have to make a decision, OK?"

Rob agreed with me, but he said that he was still worried. He said that he would continue to see me, in our office, and also outside of it. He said he was struggling with his feelings, but admitted that he wanted to continue being with me. "All right," he said. "We'll just have to see what happens." We returned to the office, and I was very happy at how our problem was solved.

I feel very comfortable with Rob. He's different from Gary. He has a great sense of humor, he loves talking to people, and he is very confident. As I said earlier, he's the kind of person people enjoy being with, He doesn't seem stressed out all the time, and he definitely enjoys life. I enjoyed being with him from the start, but I certainly never thought that we would grow as close as we did. I still care for Gary, of course. He's a great guy and we've had a good marriage, but, with Rob, it's a totally different thing. I never knew that I could feel the way that I do with him. Last night, I told Gary that I've never been happier. I shouldn't have said that, but It's true. It's just not the same as it is with Rob, and now that I know what love can be, I don't want to let it get away. I literally need to be with Rob.

We kept returning to the place where we had lunch the first time. It's close to the water, the Long Island Sound, and it's very private, especially during the day when the kids are in school and the small playground is quiet, except for the moms who bring their young kids here during the week. It was here that Rob and I first crosse4d the line. We had just finished our lunch, and I checked the time to see how much time we had before we had to go back to work. I saw that we had a half hour, and I told Rob. He looked at me, very intently, and said, "I know it's wrong but I want to kiss you."

"Oh, my God," I thought. Yes, I wanted Rob to kiss me, but I'm married! What should I do? I knew that we shouldn't do this, but I so wanted him to kiss me. What should I do? I wanted Rob to kiss me, so I looked at him and said, "OK – just one kiss – a

friends only kiss, OK? And he leaned over and kissed me, and I kissed him. Once we started, we couldn't stop. It was as if all of our pent-up desires and feelings were suddenly released. We kissed for a long time and then separated from each other.

I looked at Rob and said, "What did we do?! I can't believe that this happened. I've never done anything like this, Rob. I like you so much. I think about you all the time, but we can't let this go any further. Let's go back to just being friends; we won't go out for lunch any more. I'll miss you so much, but I have to get myself under control, OK, Rob? Will you help me? I don't want to jeopardize my marriage. I've got to think of Gary and our daughters. I don't want him ever to find out what I did. I'm not sorry that we kissed each other – I'm sure it's happened to many other people -but I can't let it go any farther. OK, Rob? Will you help me?"

"Of course, Susan. I should never have started it. I'm so sorry. It won't happen again. Please forgive me. Let's go back to the office, now. It's getting late."

And we did go back to work. I'm sure that no one knew what had happened between us, and for the next few weeks we avoided each other at work, we didn't go out for lunch at all, and I made a real effort not even to look at – or talk to – Rob.

But, despite all of my efforts to put Rob out of my mind, I had a hard time doing it, and I also had a hard time being my usual self with Gary. I hardly spoke to him -he was very busy at work and coaching, so I hoped that he didn't notice how I was behaving. But the one place I couldn't pretend was in our bedroom. We had always had a pretty good sex life. We usually made love at least once or twice a week, but now, because of my feelings for Rob, I just didn't want to have sex with Gary, and whenever he brought it up, I made an excuse for not doing it. I said I had a headache, I'm too tired, maybe tomorrow, OK? We got to the point where we had not been intimate for over a month, and I was having a difficult time putting Gary off. He began questioning me about why we weren't making love. One night, after our long time of no sex, I told Gary that I was ready again.

That night, we watched Netflix, as usual, and when our girls said they were going out for a little while, Gary and I walked upstairs to our bedroom. I could see that Gary was excited and looking forward to our date. When we were both in bed, I told Gary that I'd like the lights out. He was surprised; we had usually enjoyed leaving the lights on, so we could see each other, but I told him that making love in the dark could be very sexy, and he agreed to turn out the lights.

As soon as we began kissing and caressing and touching each other, I found that I was imagining that Gary was Bob. Throughout the whole experience, I fantasied that I was making love with Rob, and it was all that I could do not to call Gary Rob, as we made love. When we finished, both breathing hard and exhausted, Gary asked me how it was. I told him "Great!" but he did not know why I said that.

As I was falling asleep next to Gary, I told myself that at least I had satisfied Gary for a while, but I wondered how much longer I could keep up this charade. It wasn't fair to Gary, and I wasn't it wasn't fair to me, either.

If I thought that Gary would now be satisfied because we had done it again, I was so wrong. I should have realized that Gary would now expect us to resume our past habits, making love on a much more regular schedule, which I certainly was not ready to do.

I had to admit to myself that what I really wanted to do was to make love with Rob, but I knew that that was not going to happen. I knew that I had to think of my marriage and our children first, before I allowed myself to do something that I knew I would regret, and, so, I tried to be a good wife and a good mother, but seeing Rob every day at work was getting to be very difficult.

Oh, we didn't do anything stupid, but I was having a very hard time hiding my feelings for Rob. We hardly talked – just a little small talk once in a while. Sometimes, at lunchtime, a few of us would order out and then enjoy our food in our conference room, and sometimes Rob would join us, along with a few other doctors.

On those occasions, we all talked and laughed together, and Rob and I worked hard not to make it obvious what we were both thinking, while we were in the same room.

Then something happened that brought us back to where we were before. Rob told me that he was thinking about finding another position, in another doctors' office. He told me this in the parking lot, after work. We had both walked outside and were heading toward our cars, when Rob walked over to me and told me what he was thinking. He said that he had to do something, because he thought about me all the time. And he knew that if he didn't leave, that he would put me in a very serious position, perhaps even asking me to make a decision that I did not want to make.

He told me that he loved me very much, but he did not want to be the person who broke up a marriage, especially one where there were children involved. Then he said that he had gotten a feeler from an office in Massachusetts, and that he was thinking of going up there to learn more about it.

I was shocked. "Rob, I don't want you to leave," I told him. "We can work it out! Please don't do anything drastic! I love you, too, and I want to be with you. You make me so happy. What will I do without seeing you every day?"

"Susan, I feel the same way, but I can't see how we are going to continue seeing each other and feeling the way that we do, without something happening. I want to be with you and touch you and kiss you, but I can't. You are a married woman, and you have two daughters. How can we be together? I do think that you'll be better off if I just leave, and that's what I'm going to do. I love you, Susan, but this is the best decision for us."

I was stunned. I couldn't believe what Rob was saying to me. I had never felt this way about anyone. "Rob, I don't want you to leave. I just want to be with you all the time. We can't separate now. We need to give our feelings for each other a chance. Yes, I agree with you. I am a married woman, and I do have two wonderful daughters, but I'm not ready to say good-bye to the man who has made me happier than I have ever been before. I think we should continue to see each other, but even more often than we have

before. Gary works, at the bar, a few nights a week, and I can figure out a way to keep seeing you when he is working. If we see each other more often, we can learn what we should do. Let's at least give our love for each other a chance. Are you willing to do this, Rob.?"

His words made me so happy. He said that, yes, we should see what happens, but we'd have to be very careful. He said that he felt the same way, and he did not want to stop seeing me, but he said that he still had questions about where we would end up. He told me to be honest and to think about our future. Basically, he said to me, "Do we have a future, or would you not be able to do what you would have to do if we were going to have a life together?"

So, we made our decision. We would continue to see each other whenever we could. I would tell Gary that I was going to the gym, or seeing a friend, or doing other things, while he was working. Maybe I would even say that I might sign up for some kind of a course, at Suffolk Community, or adult education. Actually, I think that Gary would be happy about that. He had wanted me to go back to school, but I had always resisted. Now, I could use the school story as a reason for my being out at night.

I had to be very careful that Gary wouldn't figure out what I was doing, but I had never given him reason to suspect me of anything, so I wasn't worried about being found out, and, to tell you the truth, I was very excited at the thought that Rob and I would be able to be with each other more often. Of course, I knew that we would have to be very careful. The towns out here, on the North Fork, are pretty small and close to each other, and we had to be careful not to go anywhere where someone would recognize us

The more I thought about what we were planning, the more I realized how dangerous it was going to be. Yes, dangerous, but also exciting. One good thing was that Gary's apartment was quite a few miles from Cutchogue, where I lived, and Greenport, where our medical office was. He lived in Riverhead, one of the largest towns at the east end of Long Island, and at least a forty-five-minute drive from Cutchogue, and then there were also several motels on the North Fork, where we could go if we wanted to be alone. Yes, what we were planning to do was risky, but at least it would give us the chance to be alone with each other.

For the next few weeks, I very carefully prepared the ground work for our plan. We continued to work together, studiously avoiding each other in the office but a few times sneaking out, for lunch, separately, and meeting in our special place, but now, we didn't have to avoid contact with each other. Instead, we moved to the back of Rob's SUV, and had the best sex I have ever experienced. We learned that we were extremely compatible and simply could not stop touching each other. When we finally separated and drove back to work, I had a hard time not smiling, even though what we had done had made want to just lie down and rest for a while.

So, we put our plan into effect, and it seemed to be working perfectly...with one or two exceptions. One time was we were about to enter Rob's apartment, in Riverhead. Just as we were about to get out of Rob's car, he saw a man he knew from medical school coming our way. Rob immediately turned his head away from the

sidewalk, and the man walked by without noticing us. As he was passing by, Rob said to me," Even if he saw me, he would have no idea who you are. We haven't seen each other since school."

But another time was different. We came very close to getting seen. We had just walked into a very nice restaurant down in Southampton, The Lobster Inn, and Rob noticed one of the nurses who works in our office, being led to her table toward the rear of the restaurant. He told me whom he had seen, and we turned around and walked swiftly to our car. The funny thing is that as we were driving out of the parking lot, Rob turned to me and said, "I don't think that was her husband she was with. Maybe, we almost caught her."

This secret, but exciting, life lasted almost two months, until I couldn't stand it any longer. Rob and I were seeing each other three or four times a week, growing closer all the time. We loved each other and knew that we had to be together. I was growing more and more careless about how often, and how long, I would be out at night, and yet, surprisingly, Gary didn't seem to notice what I was doing. In fact, I actually wondered if he, perhaps, had a secret he was keeping from me.

Then, I could wait no longer. Gary had found out that I was not attending classes at Suffolk Community, when a letter arrived saying that the school was sorry that I had decided not to attend classes this semester but hoped that I would be back next semester.

When I walked into our house, last night, at nearly eleven o'clock, after being with Rob, in his apartment, all night, Gary greeted me by waving the letter in my face and saying, "Susan, what does this mean? You are not going to school at Suffolk? Why not? What the hell is going on?"

I knew that it was all over, finally, and I was almost glad. I had gotten so tired of sneaking around and lying to Gary. He has to know the truth. He has to know that I'm in love with someone else, and I said to him, "Gary, I have to tell you something. I'm so sorry to say this, but I'm in love with someone else. I didn't mean for this to happen, but it did. We've been seeing each other for a long time now, and we love each other. In fact, Gary, and I hate to tell you this. I've never been happier."

Well, Gary asked me a lot of questions, we argued, we yelled, and we even cried, but I felt relief. I could finally go back to living an honest, open life. I knew that it was not going to be easy, and I especially worried about how it would affect our girls, but I knew I had to do it. I had to be with Rob. I could not allow this opportunity for happiness and a better life to pass me by.

At the end of the evening, with our girls sitting on the steps and crying, Gary walked out of the house. I had no idea where he was going, but now I knew I would have to tell Rob what had happened.

Rob's Story

Let's face it – I certainly never expected this to happen! Six months ago, I began working in a highly-recommended office on the North Fork of Long Island. I had been practicing in Nassau County, but when the doctor who had hired me decided to retire, I began looking for a new placement.

Don't get me wrong. I had been happy at this office, but when I found out who would be taking over, I knew that if I did not leave, I would be very unhappy, so I began putting out inquiries about available positions, somewhere on Long Island.

Then, I got a call from an old friend of mine, a guy I had known from my undergraduate days at Hofstra. We were pretty good friends, and he told me about an office, out in Greenport, which had just lost their pediatrician and were looking for a replacement who could begin as soon as possible. My friend, whose name is Felipe, told me that the office was what he called, a "family friendly" office, offering the services of a family-practice physician, a gynecologist, and a pediatrician.

Felipe gave me the info I would need, and I immediately mailed off my letter of application and my resume. Within two weeks, I was contacted and asked to come in for an interview, I did, and, believe it or not, I was hired on the spot. All that remained for them to do was verify the information I had given them.

That was accomplished pretty quickly, and I had a new job. I had graduated from medical school, at Stony Brook, ten years before, and I had done my residency in pediatrics immediately afterward at NYU, and then I began working at the office I had just left.

I had been happy there, until the man who had hired me and whom I respected very much decided to retire, and I was left feeling that I had to move on, too. Now, here I am, working in a totally new and different office out in the middle of the North fork of Long Island.

I liked it immediately. There was an atmosphere of friendliness and congeniality that I noticed almost immediately. In the office, there were three other doctors, three registered nurses, one nurse practitioner, and an office staff of, I think, four women.

What I noticed immediately was that the people in the office -most of them, at least- seemed to like each other. Even though, there was a separate doctors' conference room, I noticed that most of the people in the office sat in the larger conference room for lunches or breaks.

Although it was unusual, I noticed that doctors, nurses, and office workers often sat and talked and laughed together all in this same room. I liked that idea; I have always been a person who likes people – I think that's why I became a pediatrician-and, right from the beginning, I spent much of my free time in that bigger room, getting to know the people I would now be spending so much time with.

At the time that I started working in this new office, I had rented an apartment in Riverhead, in a condominium complex right on the Peconic Bay. It had two bedrooms and a beautiful view of the water. I had been single, or unattached for almost three

years, having finally separating from a woman I had met in my first job, an anesthesiologist I had lived with for almost two years. At first, we were very close, very compatible, but as time passed, we began to move in different directions, until, finally, we saw that we had to do something, and we decided to separate. Although we still cared for each other, and remained friends, working in the same office with her turned out to be not a good idea, and, I have to admit, that was certainly part of why I needed to change jobs, I haven't seen her now in several years, I've heard that she's now with a different person, and, so, I feel very "unattached" now.

I didn't meet Susan until my second week in my new office. She had been on vacation the week before, so by the time she came back to work, I knew most of the people I was working with, and she was just another face that I would get to know, in my new job.

She worked at the front desk, as a receptionist and office aide, and I learned that she had worked here over ten years. On that first day that I met her, she seemed very nice, trying to make me feel comfortable, telling me a little about herself, and gently asking me about myself. What I liked about her immediately, was that she actually seemed to listen when I talked to her. I've met too many people who don't listen and seem to be in a rush to resume their own stories while I was telling mine.

I found out that she was married to an English teacher who was also a part-time bartender, and she had two early teen daughters, who worked at the bay beach at the end of her street in Cutchogue.

I liked her immediately and couldn't help but notice what she looked like. Her hair was dark, she was not tall but not short either, and she was very attractive. In fact, I feel guilty saying this because she was a married woman and a mother of two daughters. I know that it's not appropriate for me to talk about how a married woman looks, but I'm being honest here. In fact, I should mention one other thing I couldn't help noticing Susan's eyes. They were green! I swear to God they were green -I kid you not!

I remember that after meeting and talking with Susan, on that first day, I was flustered. I have to admit -when I went back to my condo, after work, I thought about Susan and felt very guilty, but I gave myself a pep talk about good behavior and bad behavior, heated up some leftovers from earlier in the week, watched a ballgame on TV, and got into bed – but with Susan still on my mind.

The next day, at work, I talked to some of the other people who worked with me and did my best not to pay too much attention to Susan. Oh, of course, I said Good Morning to her and the other women at the desk, but I didn't spend an undue amount of time there and walked quickly into the area where the examining rooms are located.

I was busy for most of the morning, got to know some terrific children and also some very nice mothers, and even one father – and the good part is that I did not see Susan except when I was near the front of the office.

Even though I had been working in this office a short time, I found that I liked it a lot. I was very fortunate to find this job – the other doctors are great, the man who

manages us all seems to know what he is doing, and (I must admit, even though I know I shouldn't), Susan is very pleasant to look at every day.

I was enjoying my apartment in Riverhead. It was right on the water and not far from a very nice large town, filled with good restaurants and a busy downtown area. The only problem I have is that I am a little lonely sometimes. I haven't had any kind of a relationship for about three years now, and that one ended abruptly.

Nadia and I had been living together for about two years. I met her when I was doing my residency at Stony Brook, we dated for a while, and then we decided to live together.

That was working out pretty well – until it wasn't. As we got to know each other, we began to see that we did not have a lot in common. I liked the theater and a good book. She had never read a book she liked – and plays “bored her.” I love sports, both playing and watching; Nadia said that these things also bored her. But I think the biggest difference we had was in the bedroom.

She told me that she liked me a lot, but she also liked women. I found out that she had had several different relationships with women when she was in college, but when I first showed an interest in her, she was flattered and liked me a lot, but then, after we had been together for several months, she told me that she was attracted to a woman she worked with. Then she said that she thought that we should “take a break” from each other. She knew that she was bisexual but thought she could be happy with me – but she wasn't.

I was both surprised and very upset. I loved Nadia and thought that we would end up doing well together. She moved out not long after she told me about herself. I don't mind living alone now, and I'm confident that I'll eventually find someone out there, but, for now, I'll concentrate on my work.

But I am embarrassed by my behavior after Nadia told me she was leaving. I had stopped at a bar, on the way back to our apartment, and I had had too much to drink. When I saw Nadia packing her bags and acting as if nothing was wrong, I guess I lost it. I started shouting at her, accusing her of deceiving me, and, in general, acting like a complete A-Hole. She screamed back at me, walked toward me pointing her finger at me, and I shoved her against the wall. She crashed into it, hit her head pretty hard, and just slumped against the wall, crying uncontrollably.

“You pushed me,” she screamed. “I don't believe it. You assaulted me! I'm calling the police,” and she started to get up.

I didn't know what to do. I couldn't believe that I had acted like such a jerk. I felt terrible. How could I have lost my temper that way? How could I hurt someone that I had cared for just a few days ago? And, also, what would happen if Nadia called the police?

If she reported me, I would be in very deep trouble. Who would want to hire a doctor who assaulted women? Who would want such a person to treat her children? I had to apologize to Nadia and beg her not to call the police.

Well. I was successful, but it took a long time to convince her how sorry I was. Finally, she said that she would not report me, but she wanted me to know that she certainly would not ever forgive me – and she left the next day.

We haven't seen each other since, and I only hope that what I had done, on this terrible night, would never be revealed to anyone. Nadia had told me that she would not tell anyone, but I couldn't help hoping that she would keep her word.

Growing up, I had never thought of becoming a doctor. In fact, what I really wanted was to play professional sports, baseball or football. I had been a pretty good athlete in high school, but when I went on to college, I no longer thought of being an athlete. I don't know why. I went to a New York State college, with an excellent science department, and I found myself looking forward to going to my science classes more so than my other classes.

In high school I had done well in my science classes, including a 5 in AP Biology, which, according to my Bio teacher, was pretty rare. Now that I was in college, and enjoying my science classes so much, I began to think about maybe looking into medical school.

Two years after graduating from college, not having any idea what kind of work I wanted to do, I took the M-Cat, the test many medical schools use to evaluate an applicant's readiness for medical school, and a few weeks after taking the test, I got the results in the mail – I had done well, scoring in the top 20% of all who took it with me.

My score plus my grades in college, along with some glowing recommendations, enabled me to apply to medical, and, happily I got into Stony Brook's Medical School. I was on my way to becoming a doctor!

When I told Susan, at work, that I had gone to medical school at Stony Brook, she seemed very impressed and I remember that I was happy that I had impressed her, but I'm not sure why I felt this way.

We had started talking to each other, in the lunch/conference room, a couple of times a week. As I said earlier, one of the things I liked about working here is the opportunity to meet and talk to the other people who worked in our office, whether they be doctors, nurses, or front desk workers. I liked the idea that we could all get to know each other, instead of keeping the doctors separated from the other workers. So, with this practice in mind, I began to spend more and more time in the conference room, and that is how Susan and I became friends – and then- more than friends.

From the first, we seemed to have a lot in common, both philosophically and personally. We both tended to be liberal in our political views, neither of us was particularly religious, and, surprisingly, we both leaned toward a vegan, or vegetarian, diet.

I found Susan to be both interesting and very personable. She liked to talk to people and had a terrific sense of humor. She often made me laugh as we enjoyed increasingly frequent lunch times together.

And – I have to say this _ I loved to look at her. Her hair was long and dark, her eyes were a vivid green, and her body was – fantastic. She’s not tall, but neither is she short, Her weight is perfect, and she walks with a confidence that is instantly noticeable.

I found myself thinking more and more about her, while at the same time, reminding myself that she is married and has two teenage daughters. But I did a good job of rationalizing my thoughts. Why couldn’t we become friends? At this point, I had no intention of anything else. Yes, she is attractive and funny and interesting, but so are many other women, and I certainly don’t find myself lusting after them, so what was I worried about?

I continued enjoying our lunches and our talks without worrying. We all continued to enjoy our lunches together, until the day, about three week later, when Susan said to me, “Rob, I notice that sometimes you don’t join us at lunch. I hope I’m not prying, but I was wondering, “Are you going out for lunch sometimes? I’m just asking because we miss you. In fact, my friend Tricia said to me the other day, “I wonder why Rob doesn’t have lunch with us sometimes. I wonder if he’s meeting a secret girlfriend.”

When Susan looked at me and asked me if I had a secret girlfriend, I have to admit that I thought about Susan being ,my secret girlfriend, but I quickly erased that thought from my mind. I looked at Susan and told her that, “No, I don’t have a secret girlfriend. In fact, I don’t have any girlfriends at all.” Then I told her what turned out to be very important in our lives.

“What I do, sometimes, is bring my take-out lunch to this beautiful, quiet spot a couple of miles from here, overlooking the Long Island Sound.

I’ll never forget what Susan said next. “Oh, Rob, that sounds very nice I’d love to see it! Do you think that one day I could come with you , when you go to this place?” I was, of course, very happy to hear Susan say that she wanted to come with me, but I was surprised that she would agree to such a thing. It’s not that I thought it was wrong for us to go out for a private lunch, and it’s not that we had anything to feel guilty about. My concern was -how would it look, if the two of us announced that we were going out for lunch together. So, I told Susan that I would love for her to come with me for lunch, but maybe we shouldn’t advertise it. Some of our friends, in the office, might get the wrong idea, so we agreed to be as discreet as we possibly could.

We agreed to ‘do our thing’ the following week, and then we headed for the lunch room to join the others. I have to admit that I was both nervous and excited as our upcoming date, but I reminded myself not to take it too seriously. After all, we were just friends who enjoyed each other’s company. That’s all there was to it. Yes, I liked Susan a lot, and I even admit that I found her pretty attractive, but so what? Why couldn’t men and women just be friends. Are we so out of touch with today’s world that we still hold on to that old idea that men and women simply cannot be “just friends,”

In the lunch room that day, Susan and I did not sit near each other -or even talk to each other. I remember that we all laughed and kidded a lot, and someone even

asked me about my love life. “Rob,” one of the nurses asked me, “you’ve been with us for a long time now. What’s going on in the dating department? I hope you don’t mind me asking.”

“Of course not, Sally. At this time, I have nothing to report. I have had a few dates with some women I’ve met in the bar near my apartment, but not much has developed from any of these dates. But I have to tell you, it’s not a big deal to me. I’m pretty busy here at work, and I was in quite a long and serious relationship just before I left my last job, so I’m kind of enjoying the single life right now. OK, let’s move on to someone else. My personal life is pretty boring.” And that’s what we did. I don’t mind talking about myself, but, at this stage of my life, I’d prefer not to.

Susan did talk to me later that day, saying that she was wondering whether or not I was dating anyone, too. I guess because I’m the new guy and fairly young, people are wondering what I’m doing after work. The truth is – not much! I’m sure that I’ll meet someone, one of these days, but I’m not worrying about it. The truth is that I am pretty happy with the way my life is going now, and I’m confident that when it changes, it will change and I’ll change with it.

The following week, on Monday, Susan and I arrived at work at the same time, and when she saw me, she walked over to me and said, “Rob, what do you say that we go to that lunch place you mentioned. I’d love to see it. It sounds so nice.

I was both surprised and happy that Susan was still interested in joining me for lunch, so, of course, I said “Sure, but we probably should leave the office separately, and I’ll meet you at a deli on the way. We can get some lunch there, and then you can follow me – OK?”

“Yes,” she said, but how will I know which deli to stop at?”

“That’s easy. It’s the deli about a half mile from here, on the corner of Main Street and Rooster Road. You can’t miss it.”

“OK, good! I can’t wait – see you later.”

Well, that day turned out to be a day I’ll probably never forget. Everything worked out perfectly. We met at the deli but tried to be as discreet as we could. After buying our stuff to eat, I got into my car and headed west, and Susan followed me

My secret lunch spot was only a short way from the deli, and we both pulled into the narrow driveway on Main Street and headed toward the water. We seemed to be the only ones there, and when we reached the end of the road, we parked next to each other and Susan got into my car, carrying her lunch bag gingerly.

She looked good, very pretty, and she was wearing a dress I don’t remember seeing before. As she sat down next to me, she looked up and said, “This is exciting, but I feel that I’m doing something wrong. Do you feel that way?”

“Not really! I don’t think we’re doing anything wrong, but I do think if some of our co-workers saw us, they might get the wrong idea. What do say we just enjoy ourselves and have a little lunch. What did you end up getting?”

After that, we enjoyed our lunch and had a good time just talking and looking out at the Peconic Bay. Susan told me a little about Gary, her husband, and their two daughters, and I told her about Nadia but not, obviously, what had happened when I lost my temper with her,

We had an hour for lunch, and after we had been there about a half hour, we stopped talking and I could feel the tension between us. She looked at me and said, "Rob, this is really nice. We should do it again."

"I agree, Susan, I enjoy being with you and talking to you and even -I shouldn't say this- and even looking at you. Please don't get the wrong idea, Susan, but I just feel that I can be honest with you, OK?"

"OK? Rob, I like compliments as much as any woman does, and I'm glad you find me attractive. After all, we are friends, aren't we?"

We were quiet again, after that, and I finally I said to Susan, "I think we better get back to work. Why don't you leave first, and I'll wait five minutes and then head out, too, OK?"

So, that's what we did, and we continued coming to our secret lunch place every week or so. About a month or six weeks later, we were sitting in my car, looking out at the water, when something came over me, and I looked at Susan and said, "I want to kiss you."

She seemed startled and didn't respond for a couple of minutes. Then she looked at me and said, "I feel the same way, but we shouldn't. I'm married I love my husband, and I wouldn't feel right doing something like that."

She was quiet for a few minutes, and then she said to me, "All right, maybe just a friend's kiss would be all right. What do you think?"

I looked at her and responded the only way that I could. "OK, only a friend's kiss - that would be all right, and we kissed. It started out as a friend's kiss, but then it accelerated into more than that."

We didn't want it to stop. Our tongues touched, and so did our bodies, even as we sat in two bucket seats in the front of my car. If we didn't have to go back to work, I'm not sure how far we would have gone, but, finally, the kiss ended and that is when I began to fall in love with Susan.

Finally, we broke apart and looked at each other. "Oh, my God," Susan said. "What did we do? This can't happen. I don't want it to happen. For God's sake, I'm a married woman! I can't let this go on. Rob, we can't do this again, OK?"

Of course, I agreed with her. "Susan, I told her. "I'm so sorry! It's all my fault. I never should have said what I did. It won't happen again!"

Then, Susan got into her car, and we went back to work. I made sure that I arrived a few minutes after she did, and we both returned to our jobs. I had a busy

afternoon scheduled, and I heard Susan talking and laughing with her friends out at the reception desk.

For the next few weeks, we avoided each other, but I have to admit, I couldn't forget that kiss. It was wonderful, and, at the time, I wanted to go beyond it, but I knew that we couldn't do it again.

But, it did. Three weeks later, Susan stopped me in the parking lot and said to me that she would like to have lunch with me again, at our "secret spot."

I was very surprised, but also very excited. I had been having a hard time getting her out of my mind, and seeing her every day did not make it any easier, so when she said that she wanted to have lunch with me, I readily agreed. We made plans to do it the next day, and since Susan now knew where we would be meeting, she said that she would meet me there.

When I pulled into the driveway leading to the bay, I could see her car already there. I parked next to it, and Susan jumped out of her car and got into mine.

"Rob," she said. "I had to see you. I can't stop thinking about what happened last time, and I keep thinking that we never finished what we started."

"Was she saying what I thought she was saying?" I wondered, so I looked at her and asked her what she meant.

"Rob, you know what I meant. I want to be with you. I don't want us to stop this time. I think about you all the time, and I want us to be closer. I'm sorry if this shocks you, and I fully realize that I am married, and all that, but I told myself that I deserve more from life than I am getting. Gary and I are simply not close any more, and I told myself that I want more out of life," and she leaned toward me and kissed me passionately.

We then got into the back set of my SUV, lowered the second seat, and reached for each other. We made love, we kissed, we made strange noises, and we laughed. Then we lay next to each other, in the back of my car, breathing heavily and looking at each other.

"Well," I said, "we did it. How do you feel? Are you sorry?" She looked so beautiful, lying next to me, and I wanted to know if she was sorry that we made love, but her next words cleared up any uncertainty I might have had.

"Sorry? Absolutely not. I've wanted to do this since we first kissed, and I have no regrets at all. I'm a big girl, you know, and I have the right to be happy, and, Rob, I'm very happy to be with you. Yes, this is going to complicate my life, but I'll have to figure out how to handle it. All I know right now is I don't want to stop seeing you. I hope that you feel the same way."

"Susan, you don't have to worry about that! Of course, I want to keep seeing you. I'm crazy about you, and I'm looking forward to the next time we're together."

From that point on, our lives began to change drastically. At work, we made sure that no one would guess what was happening with us. We had lunch at different times, we made sure we weren't seen talking to each other, and we stopped going to our secret place for lunch.

But we continued to see each other anyway. Gary, Susan's husband, still bartended and was also coaching junior high basketball several afternoons a week. Her daughters, Madeline and Clare, were often busy after school with clubs or teams or seeing friends. At 13 and 15, they could come and go as they pleased as long as they always had their cell phones with them.

Susan and I began seeing each other more often. A couple of days a week I got off work at four o'clock Susan signed up for a gym, with a personal trainer (she told Gary), and occasionally she went into Riverhead to do a little shopping.

She became very skillful at telling Gary she was going to do one thing but then doing something quite different, like seeing me. We went to various locations, including my apartment and even a motel, sometimes.

We were becoming very close, enjoying each other's company, and making sure that no one at work had any idea what we were doing.

Susan was dealing with the Gary question as well as she could, and then she told him about us. He said that he had had no idea she was seeing someone else, and he was devastated. I think what really broke his heart, though, was that she told him, "I've never been happier than I am now."

The next day, he left their house, and he hasn't come back. I don't know where he is living or what they plan to do. After he left, we continued to see each other for another month. Then I got the call that changed my life completely. It was Nadia; we hadn't talked since we broke up, and I hadn't heard anything about her at all. I was very surprised to hear from her.

I've always been sorry about what happened the last time we saw each other. I was so awful; I can't believe that I behaved that way. I wondered why she was calling.

I looked at my phone and saw that she had left a message: "Gary, please call me. It's important."

I tried calling her, but she didn't pick up, and, a little later, my phone rang and it was Nadia. I picked it up and said, "Hi. What's up?"

She said, "Hi, Rob. We haven't talked in such a long time. How are you? How's your new job?"

"Good! Everything is going well. What about you? How are you doing?"

"That's why I'm calling, Gary. I'm really not doing so well. Do you think we could get together and talk? There are a couple of things that I need to talk to you about."

To say that I was surprised would be a major understatement. After the way that we had parted and considering how I had behaved, I certainly never expected to hear

from Nadia again. But, for some reason, I said, “Sure, that would be fine. When and where?”

She asked me if tomorrow would be too soon – maybe for lunch, and I agreed to meet her. She mentioned a diner in Mattituck, and I agreed to meet her the next day and I did.

I had already sat down in a booth, in the diner, when she walked in. She looked good, very pretty. She had always been a very attractive woman, and I was glad to see her.

“Hi, Rob,” she said. “I’ll bet you were surprised to hear from me. How have you been? Do you like your new job?” “Hi, Nadia, yes, you are right. I didn’t expect to ever hear from you again, especially after what I did to you the last time we saw each other. But what did you mean when you said you weren’t doing so well? What’s going on?”

“Oh, Rob, I’ve put that behind me now. I know how sorry you were, and I certainly know that what happened was not who you are. You were very shocked and upset, and you let your temper fog up your judgement, It happens. I asked you to see me, because I have something very important to talk to you about.”

“Wow, Nadia, what do you want to talk to me about? You know that I still care for you very much, and I would be very happy to do whatever I can for you.”

“Rob, what I want -this is so hard for me- what I want is for you to love me again. I’m so sorry that I left you when I did. It was, by far, the biggest mistake I’ve ever made. I’ve missed you so much I realize now that you are the best person I’ve ever been with, and what I want is for you to give me another chance,”

“Nadia, you know how close we were and how much I loved you, and when you told me what you did, I was as surprised as I have ever been. What has happened?”

“I really don’t know. I thought that I was making a mistake and that I would be happier with someone else, so when this other person came on to me, I was both flattered and excited. You know that in college, I had been somewhat of a bisexual, and I, stupidly, decided to leave you and go with this other person, and, of course, I was very angry with you for what happened between us just before I left.

“I was OK, at first, when we separated, but, as time passed, I began to miss you and have second thoughts, a lot of them. I did nothing for a while. Then I decided that I wanted to talk to you, to find out if we had any chance of getting back together again. I really want that to happen, but I have no idea how you feel about it – or even if you are with someone else now.”

“Yes, Nadia, I am with someone else now, but seeing you and talking to you has made me realize that I still care for you very much. I certainly never expected this to happen, and I have to admit that I’m still kind of shocked. Let’s meet again a week from now and see where we stand. Just seeing you has brought back so many memories of what we had, but my life is a little complicated right now, so I need a little time before we make a decision, OK?”

“Of course, Rob. We’ll meet here, one week from today. This was so hard for me, but I’m glad that, maybe, we have a chance. I still love you, you know. See you next week”

And she got up and walked out of the diner, and I sat there, for a few minutes, thinking about what she had said – and also what I would tell Susan if I decided that I wanted to be with Nadia, again, and right now, that’s the way that I was leaning.

Susan had already told Gary about us – and that she “had never been happier,” – and he had moved out of their house the next day, hurt and very angry. She was now in her house with her two daughters. We have been seeing each other regularly, and have become very close. She’s a wonderful woman, and I have deep feelings for her, but I feel the same way toward Nadia, so what am I going to do? I know how lucky I am to have two such wonderful women interested in me, but that doesn’t make my decision any easier. Right now, I have no idea what I’m going to do.

I had mixed feelings about seeing Susan, but I have to do it. I have two women I love very much, and who feel the same towards me. Both of them are beautiful, smart. Funny, and great to be with. But each has her own problems, too. Nadia left me because she was attracted to a woman, while Susan has a husband and two daughters in her life. How did life get so complicated?

Do I want to say good-bye to Susan, especially after she has left her husband for me? And if I do decide to leave Susan, I’ll probably also have to leave my job, too. How could I stay there and see her every day?

But, if I do decide to go back with Nadia, will she find herself, someday, attracted to women again. How can I be sure that she no longer has those feelings?

But, as someone far wiser than I am said, “You cannot predict what will happen in life. There are no guarantees.” And, as one of my best friends has often said to me, “Life is a crap shoot.”

So, I took out my phone and dialed Susan’s number. When she picked up, I said, “Hi, want to get together?” She quickly said, “Sure!” and we agreed to meet at the bar at the Soundview Inn, just outside of Greenport.

I was looking forward to seeing her, but wasn’t sure what I would say to her. An hour later, I pulled into the parking lot of the Soundview. Susan’s car was already here, and I headed for the bar and sat down on the stool next to Susan. She looked gorgeous, as she always does, and very happy to see me. I pulled her close to me, kissed her, and told her how wonderful she looked.

We ordered drinks, a Heineken for me and a mimosa for her, and began talking. We hadn’t seen each other for a few days, and we told each other what we had been doing. Obviously, I didn’t say anything about seeing Nadia.

Then I brought the conversation to Gary, Susan's husband. I asked her how he was doing, has she seen him, how are the girls doing without him living at home, and then the firecracker question, "Do you ever miss him?"

Her response was immediate and angry. "Rob, what are you talking about? How can you ask me such a question? Of course, I don't miss him! You're my guy now. I love you! Do I ever ask you if you miss Nadia?"

Well, it looked as if I had made a big mistake asking that particular question, but I managed to change the subject. We ordered a second round of drinks, and some snacks, and ended up sitting at that bar for a couple of hours. But, when we were leaving, Susan looked at me and asked. "When can we get together? I really miss you."

Her question was so hard for me. Of course, I wanted to "get together" with her, but I felt as if it would be wrong, considering what I was thinking of doing with Nadia, so I told her "Soon. I'll call you in a couple of days. I'm ridiculously busy at work this week, and, to make it even more difficult, I think I'm coming down with something, but I'll be in touch."

She seemed OK with my excuse and we kissed each other and went our separate ways. I had a lot of thinking to do. I still wasn't sure what I was going to do. I know that I am a very lucky man. I have two wonderful women who want to be with me – I can't imagine why! – and now I have to make a very big decision, and I don't know what I am going to do.

One thing I plan to do is call my best friend, from medical school. He's helped me in the past with difficult decisions I've had to make. Maybe he can help me get through this.

Four days later, I called Nadia and asked her to meet me at "our" diner again. Our talk didn't last very long. I told her how much I cared for her, but I just did not think that it would be a good idea for us to get back together again. I said that what had happened before could possibly happen again, and that I would probably wonder what you were thinking (and feeling) all the time.

She wasn't happy but she accepted my thinking. I told her that I hoped that we would always be friends, and she said the same thing, and we parted;

I planned to see Susan the next day, after work, and when I called her to set up our date, she seemed pleased. We went back to the bar at the Soundview, sat close to where we had sat the last time we were here, and ordered our drinks, a gin n tonic for me, ad a margarita for her.

We hadn't seen each other for a week or so, and so we had a lot to talk about, and then I changed the subject.

"Susan," I said. "Are you glad that we did what we did, and Gary is no longer living with you and the girls?"

"Rob," she exclaimed, "Of course I am! I told you that I love you, that you are my guy! Why are you asking me such a thing?"

“Susan, you know I love you, but I keep thinking that if it weren’t for me, you would still be with Gary again. It bothers me very much to have those thoughts.”

“Rob, I told you that I know what I am doing. Gary is fine and he probably is seeing someone already, so please stop freaking me out!”

“OK, Susan, you make it seem a lot simpler than it is. Come here and give me a kiss. We need to spend some quality time together.” And we did, but when we parted, later that day, I still had questions about what we were doing. I knew that I loved Susan, and wanted to be with her, but I also knew that I felt very guilty about what we were doing. We agreed to meet later that day, and we did. I told her what I felt I had to do, she argued with me – and cried a lot – and we went home.

I didn’t go to work the next day, I couldn’t bear seeing her, after we agreed to end our relationship. I began immediately looking for another job, and I never talked to Susan again. I’m still in a very bad way, but I knew I had to end it. I’ll always love Susan, and I only hope that, someday, I find someone like her.

Susan's Story

I haven't seen Rob for about a month now. He left the office soon after we broke up (he broke up with me). I'm doing a little better now, but it's been rough. Gary and I are very awkward with each other, but that's to be expected.

I'm at home, sitting on the couch, talking, on my cell phone, to my friend Fiona . We spend a lot of time together these days. Then I heard the girls running down the stairs, shouting at me, Madelaine screaming, "Mom, did you forget that Dad is taking me and Claire to dinner tonight? He'll be here any minute!"

She was right! A few minutes later, I heard Gary's car pulling into the driveway. He slammed the door as he got out and walked up the three steps leading to our front door. He opened it, saw me, and said, "Hi! How are you doing? You look good!"

"Thanks!" I said, "where are you guys going?"

"Lucharitos, in Greenport. I love that place, so I decided to take the girls there."

"That's great! They're always so happy to see you! . Got room for me in your car?"

The End