

“I glanced out of the window and saw my husband kissing another man.”

A silence. Not intentionally dramatic: having at last got to this point, Lucy was struggling how to go on. Peter waited.

“I’d just looked in to his office to see if there was a cup or a plate that needed washing. I didn’t switch the light on—so they wouldn’t have seen me.”

Was that important? Peter wondered. But kept silent, from professional experience. Anything responsive he said at this point, even if it wasn’t conventionally responsive, could damage Lucy’s struggle to disentangle her real feelings, and find out what it was in the situation which really hurt her, as an individual.

The walls of the consulting room were a softened white—apple white, grape white, something like that.

“I stood there for a bit—then I started to worry that they’d see me, as though I’d been spying on them. There wasn’t anything to wash up, so I went back to the kitchen.”

A longer silence. Lucy looked, not seeing it, at a soothing pastel print. “And then,” she went on, “I started asking myself why *I* should be feeling guilty. I hadn’t been spying. It was Gil who was up to something he’d never told me about. And I thought about you—about why I’d been coming to see you. And that really it hadn’t been my problem at all.”

Energy crept into her voice. “And then I suddenly felt... I don’t know how to explain it. I felt... free. I felt it was up to me what I did. Gil could do what he wanted. So could I. I could do anything.”

For the first time, after a pause, Peter put in a word. “That was all you felt,” he said. It was half a statement, half a question.

Lucy looked at him, quite straightforwardly. “Well, I still felt puzzled. Maybe I felt... cheated. All the usual things. I wondered if our whole marriage had been a sham. Last night in bed—I slept on my own, of course—I kept asking myself that. But this morning, all I could feel was that I was all right. And more than all right. I wasn’t supposed to be a man, even if that was what Gil wanted. I was supposed to be a woman.”

There was sunlight in her hair. A patch of sunlight on the wall, too. “You assume that your husband has always been interested in men, sexually,” Peter said. “That this wasn’t just an odd incident.”

“I know it wasn’t. I had it out with him.”

This was a new Lucy, Peter thought. He remembered her as she’d been in the first session. “I’m perfectly happy,” she’d said. “I just wonder if something’s

wrong.” Words like that usually hid a black pool of pain—but this woman made him wonder whether what she said was true. Her open, smiling face was the face of a woman who enjoyed life, like a bird lapping at a stream. Her calm was the calm of rooted contentment.

There was something wrong with this, he began to feel in later sessions. Her acceptance started to irritate him. It would be too much to say he’d seen her as compliant, let alone faint-hearted. All the same, she’d increasingly seemed just a touch too reasonable. Too good at seeing other people’s points of view. Too unwilling to interfere. At last she was alight.

She crossed her legs—legs which, as a man, he’d noticed from the first. Curious how one could notice things like that and then—not repress them, but simply hold them in abeyance. Until, if ever, they became relevant to the therapeutic process.

But it wasn’t his job to confirm to her that she was an attractive woman. And at this moment there was nothing to be gained by drawing her attention to what she was doing.

Do ideas float from head to head? Probably not. But Lucy, who was well aware of what she was doing, saw that Peter knew it too.

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She was still at the sink as the front door opened. “Hello babe,” Gil called. “Where are you?”

She didn’t reply, but put down the glass she was drying, and went into the dining room, which was between the kitchen and the hall. The house was suddenly territory, the men intruders.

The young man caught her eye first. He smiled, in what she could see was a naturally charming way. He was a touch taller than Gil, with fine features and deep set eyes. His hair was dark enough to be dyed, but might be natural too.

“Hello, petal,” Gil said. “This is John.”

She didn’t say anything. They were welcome in her territory, she thought. They weren’t intruders any more, She was the one with the power.

“Are you all right, babe?” Gil asked, in a mildly curious tone.

“I’m all right,” Lucy replied. She was pleased to hear that there wasn’t even a tremor in her voice.

“Meaning?” he smiled.

“You always *have* liked taking risks, haven’t you?” She remembered the risks he’d persuaded her to take when they were first married. Silly exciting things,

like strolling through the streets in a short skirt and no knickers. Making love where they might be seen.

To bring this young man into the house would be to Gil a risk of just the same kind.

“I don’t know what you’re on about,” Gil said, still smiling his sardonic smile.

“Have you known my husband long, John?” she asked the young man.

“Long enough,” Gil put in, before he could open his mouth. “Look, what is all this, babe?”

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