

SUNSET

He was finally alone.

The children were in bed and Dorothy was at her evening class. This was Frank's first opportunity in three days to relax and think about what had happened. And God knows he needed time to think.

He took a drink from the glass beside him, then thought of his alcohol consumption. "Better keep it down to two drinks," he thought. "She can always tell, and that would be enough to make her suspicious."

Had he done anything else to make her suspicious, he wondered? The first evening home, after the encounter, he had certainly been nervous but Dorothy gave no indication his behaviour was abnormal. He had, perhaps, been over zealous in answering the phone, fearing *she* would call, but he had tried to be casual about it. And out of guilt, he had helped out more than usual, making a concerted effort to spend more time at home. Again, though, if she suspected anything, she gave no sign.

So for the moment it seemed, he had successfully deceived her. This, however, gave him no comfort whatsoever. He had never intended to hurt or deceive her. If he began the affair with any intentions at all, they were subconscious. Or were they? Lindsay was certainly an attractive woman - pleasant, fun loving and easy-going. But it had begun innocently enough and although he had been aware of his desires, he also felt he had no intention of acting on them. He was thirty-eight and happily married. He had been with Dorothy for twelve years, twelve happy years. No reason to look for anyone else. Everything was fine in the bedroom department. And then there was

Jimmy and Kelly - two wonderful children. So why did it happen?

Lindsay was not the only attractive woman around and not the only one he knew. "It shouldn't have happened," he thought, "and now I'm paying for it. I have to bear the burden of guilt and face a wife and two children who trust me implicitly."

He reached for the glass once more. One way to purge his guilt would be to tell Dorothy, but the thought of confessing terrified him. He could envision the solid foundation of his marriage and family crumbling under the hatred of infidelity. He was sure she would not forgive him and he could think of no reason why she should. Even if she did somehow accept the affair as a mistake, the trust that they had always shared would be gone. Suspicions would inevitably arise in the future whenever he told of working late or visiting a friend. No, he could never tell Dorothy. Better to bury the secret inside and try with all his soul to be the father and husband he was only four short days ago.

Since the affair, he had successfully avoided Lindsay, but he lived in fear of having to confront her. Would he have the courage to call it off? She worked in a different department but they continually ran into each other either in the halls or the cafeteria. He had taken to eating lunch at his desk and skipping coffee breaks in an effort to avoid her, but he knew this could only be a temporary solution.

He thought of how he met her, six weeks ago. She was a new employee then so he simply said hello in passing and she returned the greeting with a pleasant friendly smile. He was flattered by the nature of her greeting and, he admitted, aroused by her beauty. One day, after a week or so, they were each having lunch alone in the cafeteria and her infectious smile prompted him to ask if he could join her. They found

conversation easy. Each loved the other's sense of humour and they often complemented each other by supplying the perfect straight line for the other's joke. The luncheon provided the foundation for a friendship, a rapport to stop and chat whenever they ran into each other. Still, neither pursued the relationship further until the fund-raising campaign two weeks ago. One representative from each department was asked to serve on the campaign, and they each represented their own area. Since the other volunteers were much older, Frank and Lindsay naturally worked as a pair. This fund-raising necessitated some evening work which usually ended with Frank escorting her to her car.

On the last night of their campaign work, they finished earlier than expected. As they walked to her car, Frank found himself grappling with new, stronger feelings for her. They had grown to know each other well and now that the campaign was ending, he felt that he was somehow losing her. He was aware that he enjoyed her company in part because he was sexually attracted to her. He knew other men were equally attracted to her and he took pride in being able to share so much of her time. It was a boost to his ego. Although the relationship to this point was simply platonic, he did not want to give her up. He suggested they go for a drink nearby.

The bar he had in mind was closed - "Under Renovations". They stood outside the entrance and laughed, wondering what to do next. Then Lindsay invited him to her apartment. It seemed from her tone that she had no other intention than enjoying his company, however there was a sense that the relationship was changing.

She was thirty-four, tall and slender, with shoulder-length curls and a tiny sensuous smile. Traditionally, she wore loose-fitting tops that hid her shape but, for

some reason, Frank had found the mystery alluring. On this night however, she wore a new magenta outfit reminiscent of a sunset that outlined the full curvature of her figure. Frank was overcome with passion but reminded himself throughout the evening that he simply could not act on those feelings. Nevertheless, he couldn't bring himself to refuse the invitation to her apartment. He rationalized that she had no sexual intentions and that there was no danger of anything happening.

But then, being in the apartment together, alone, away from their work and their co-workers, broke down the walls between them. It was apparent from the moment she closed the door that they had both wanted to be much closer.

He relived the excitement and the passion in his mind, recalling with clarity and understanding exactly how something like this could happen. Now the question was "Would it happen again?"

After much soul-searching, he was convinced it would not. Despite the pleasure - the intense excitement, he knew the relationship was wrong. He understood that anything that could potentially hurt and destroy his entire family and make him feel so guilt-ridden and retched could never be justified. If the opportunity for another liaison arose, he would say no.

But would he have the courage? Judging from Lindsay's response to the affair, she would be willing to do it again. He smiled, flattered by the pleasure he had given her. When they held each other afterward, he was already regretting the incident but she seemed only to want to hold him and be close.

But she too was married. Would she not be going through the same emotional torment? Wouldn't she perhaps be weighing the brief passionate affair against years of

marriage with a loving spouse and wishing it had never happened? Unfortunately, he knew little about her marriage. It was possible she was not happily married. It was possible that she wanted to have an affair or develop a relationship with another man with the intention of leaving her husband. No, that did not seem to fit her character. After all, she did not flirt with other men at work and their own relationship before the affair was not at all sexual or flirtatious. It seemed, from his point-of-view that they had stumbled into the affair from similar backgrounds with no preconceived notions.

He tried to recall the sequence of events inside her apartment three nights ago. Who initiated the act? It was difficult to say. His desire for her was overwhelming, but he remembered trying to suppress it even then. He sat close to her on the couch and smiled frequently. Before long, they had kissed, ...then embraced, each action being mutual. As they stroked one another, he looked into her eyes and saw that she wanted him to make love to her. Then his touching became sexual. She may have made herself available, but he had initiated sexual activity.

And what were their feelings afterward? There was little conversation. As she sensed his regret, she seemed hurt and sorry that she had been a part of his remorse. Then she seemed to regret the affair herself because of that. She tried to comfort him and he willingly returned to her arms but it was a loveless embrace. There was no discussion of the event happening again or not happening again. They simply parted, confused as to whether they should say they were sorry, or tell each other how great it was.

Of course, one phone call would settle the matter. He could call her now and straighten everything out, putting the confusion behind him. But what do you say to a

woman you've just committed adultery with? He'd never had an affair before and he didn't know what people said to each other under those circumstances. He could pretend nothing had changed, but it seemed to him that everything had changed.

And if he did call her, what then? If he did end the affair, would she be hurt, or even crushed? They had said they loved each other, in the heat of passion. Did she mean it? Did he mean it? And what if she assumed it was a one-night-stand? If he telephoned her to call it off, she might even laugh, thinking he was presumptuous to assume it would happen again. He could not cope with that possibility.

As he drained his second drink, Frank realized he had, at least, come to two conclusions. First, he would not, ever, tell Dorothy about the affair. She must never know what happened. Secondly, he could not call Lindsay. He could not speak to her without first knowing her feelings.

But he would have to talk to her eventually. What would he say when they ran into each other at work? Frank imagined they would awkwardly say hello, then give each other a knowing smile. If she did not express anything openly, he would have to interpret whatever she did say as well as her expressions and general manner. Then he would somehow have to make it clear to her that it was over.

Frank rose wearily and headed for the window. The sun was setting earlier in the evening now and there was a brilliant orange streak across the horizon. He sighed and contemplated a third drink.

Then the telephone rang.

His heart jumped. It could be anyone, ...but it could be Lindsay. Lindsay knew Dorothy went to her French class Thursday evenings. If she wanted to call when

Dorothy was out, this was the perfect time.

There was a second ring.

"Should I answer it?" he wondered. "What if it is Lindsay? What would I say?"

Then another thought occurred to him. "What if it's Dorothy and her class is out early?"

If it is her, she would wonder why I didn't answer it."

A third ring.

"I'll have to answer it," he thought. "If it is Lindsay, I could always hang up. Or else I could say nothing and just listen to her. If she's calling me, then she must have something to say to me. I could certainly hear what she has to say."

He answered it on the fourth ring.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Frank? I'm glad you're home."

It was Lindsay. She knew I'd be home, he thought. That's why she called tonight. Into the receiver, he asked, "What's up?"

"Well, I just thought I'd call and see how you're doing. I mean, I haven't seen you at work since Monday."

"I've just been busy. You know what it's like."

"Yeah."

"And how are you?"

"I'm fine, I guess. Bill's on shift work again. I hate it when he works late. I'm going to watch a movie or something, but I thought I'd give you a call first."

"Uh-huh. Dorothy's at her class. I was just relaxing."

"Are you sure you're okay?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I was kind of worried the way you left here the other night."

"You mean Monday night?"

"Yeah."

"I was just, ...you know I had a lot of things to think about."

"Me too." There was a deep sigh on her end of the line.

"And?"

"And what?"

"And, so what about the things you were thinking about?"

"I was concerned about you."

"Is that all?"

"Well, I don't know, Frank. There are some things I don't want to discuss over the phone."

"We can't really talk at work."

"That's for sure."

"I'd like to clear up a few things."

"Sure. Do you want to meet somewhere?"

Frank envisioned a public place that would ensure no intimacy occurred. Then he realized that if anyone saw them together, it would only make matters worse. On the other hand, he had vowed he would not go back to her apartment.

"I don't know what to do Lindsay."

"What do you mean?"

"Where were you thinking of meeting?"

"I thought my place ...while Bill's on shift work. I can't come over there if your kids are home, can I?"

"No. But isn't there somewhere else?"

"Frank. It's me - Lindsay. There's no reason to be afraid of me."

He suddenly felt very childish. She knew he was trying to avoid her apartment. It was quite possible she also understood why. "I'm not afraid of you. Quite the opposite. I just thought, because of what happened ..."

"Well, where do you suggest we meet? I don't want to hide in a dark corner of some out-of-the-way bar."

"No, of course not."

"I couldn't talk with other people around me, anyway."

"What about a park?"

"What park?"

"I don't know. Any park."

"Frank, for God's sake. My apartment's only ten minutes from your place. Just come over, we'll sit down, have a drink and work things out."

Perhaps it would be alright. "When?" he asked.

"Tomorrow night?"

Frank thought for a moment. "I'll have to tell Dorothy I'm going out somewhere."

"So tomorrow, about 8:00?"

Frank turned to the window and gazed at the sunset, the last of the orange fire disappearing over the horizon.

"I'll be there."