

How Don Came to Watch Another Man Love His Wife and Raise His Children

Mary divorced Don because he was unfaithful, but she had never been unpleasant about it. If anything, she killed him with kindness, which only made him feel even more rotten.

Don was not a scoundrel. He didn't set out to fail. He didn't wake up one day and think, "Well, I wonder what I can do to ruin my life today." Rather, his fall followed on the heels of thousands of small, daily choices he made in his private thoughts over several years.

It all started the day after he and Mary moved into their first home, when he fixed the blinds just right so he could watch the woman next door sunning in her backyard. What began as a single act of curiosity snowballed into a regular habit of lust.

He was also a little too huggy-kissy around the office, where he led in sales year after year. Don was no Brad Pitt, but he could tell women found him attractive. This flattered his ego, especially since girls had not noticed him at all in high school. He tended to let his eyes fix a moment too long on his female associates. Often Don found himself engaging in sexual fantasies as he would creep along the freeway toward home after work.

Evelyn was an ambitious young woman also in the sales department. She was bright, a quick learner and already earning more commissions than most of the men in the office. By her ambition she was eager to learn from Don, and by her upbringing she was lonely for love. She had not been hugged enough by her daddy.

There was a natural sexual attraction between Don and Evelyn. But for Don, this was no more than most men felt toward a physically sensuous woman, which Evelyn certainly was—she had “the look.” Neither of them ever overtly acted on the physical attraction by flirting, but the chemistry was there.

One of the company’s biggest customers was interested in getting a quote for a privately labeled product. If the numbers worked, it could be one of the biggest sales in the history of their company. Four top salespeople were assigned to work out the details, including Evelyn and Don. About two weeks into the project, it became clear that the four of them needed to travel to the customer’s home office to work out kinks in the pricing.

After checking in at their hotel, two of them wanted to hit the downtown entertainment district that night, but Don and Evelyn both declined. They waved goodbye as their associates’ cab pulled away from the curb.

As they walked inside, Don’s senses were alert. There was a sense of danger in the air, and he welcomed it. He said, “I’m going to get something to eat. Would you like to join me?”

Evelyn simply nodded as her eyes fell to the carpet, and they walked to the dining room. The *maitre d’* seated them in a booth near the back of the restaurant. Don had already made his first mistake but not his biggest mistake. His biggest mistake was mixing wine with dinner. But his real mistake had been made thousands of choices earlier.

The wine lowered both of their inhibitions, which led to exploratory questions. The questions became more and more provocative. Each successive answer signaled interest in going further. By the time Don signed the check, he had pulled the noose tight around his own neck. They walked to the elevator, went up to her room, and Don became an adulterer.

Don woke up the next morning laden with guilt, remorse and

shame. The balance of the business trip was extremely awkward. He resolved in his mind that it was a one-time tryst and that he was going to change a number of his ways. Unfortunately, that thought came several years too late. Don was addicted, and he couldn't walk away from his lusty habits.

Evelyn, his correspondent, was equally flustered by the affair, but she was single. She was also highly attracted to Don, and that fed his ego. Less than two weeks later, Don found himself at Evelyn's apartment during lunch. For the next three months, that became their regular rendezvous two or three times a week.

Meanwhile, Mary had been frustrated several times because she had been unable to reach Don during lunch, which he usually ate at his desk. He explained by lying to her that he had started taking key customers to lunch from time to time. Meanwhile, it didn't take long for Evelyn's and Don's co-workers to add things up. Several of the women in the office felt scandalized. Don naively didn't think anyone had noticed.

One day Mary called and reached Susan, one of the scandalized women. She asked, "Is my husband there?" Susan, who could be vicious as a cornered cat, shot back in a villain's voice, "No, and you may want look into it a little further."

Mary sat with the phone hanging limp in her hand until the phone company's you-didn't-hang-it-up-right ringer brought her back to earth. The next day Mary—she couldn't help herself—followed Don's car from the office at lunch. When she saw him go into an apartment, she didn't want to see any more. She sped away, sobbing hysterically.

As soon as she arrived home, Mary called her mother and spent 10 emotional minutes telling her what she had just seen. "Mom, I'm just so scared. I don't know what to do."

"Honey, I am so, so sorry," her mother began, then followed with 20 questions. After talking out every possible

explanation and course of action, they agreed that Mary would tell Don that very evening exactly what had happened step by step, starting with Susan's offhand phone remark.

After the children were in bed, Mary asked Don into the den and shut the door. She began trembling, and tears streamed along the creases of her face. Don knew he had been caught before Mary said a word. The guilt had been eating away at him. He started crying too. He made it easy for her by asking, "How did you find out?" For the next two hours they covered every angle. Don, a former altar boy, was defrocked. He confessed how it all got started and the hundreds of little sins that led up to the big one.

Mary heard more than she thought she could bear. That night she set her course, and she never wavered from it once. She was a woman of faith—strong faith—but she would not be married to an unfaithful husband.

The divorce took six months. The awful pain didn't begin to recede for two years. Then she met Sid. Sid was a lot like Don. After all, she had never found anything wrong with Don's personality, just his character. At the end of 12 months of dinners and picnics with Mary's three children, they both started thinking, "This might work."

Four years after Don took Evelyn to be his unlawful mistress, Sid took Mary to be his lawful wife.

It took another year or so to work out the details of shared parenting. Eventually, the children each had two toothbrushes, two beds—two of everything. The children spent every other weekend with Don, and he could attend all their contests and concerts, which he faithfully did.

One Saturday morning, he arrived a few minutes early to pick up the kids for the weekend. Don's children—ages 14, 12 and 9—were sitting at the breakfast table when he knocked on the kitchen door.

Mary and new-husband Sid were scurrying around the kitchen, fetching more milk and cooking scrambled eggs. Mary went to the door, swung it open, smiled a genuinely friendly smile, and invited Don to come in for a cup of coffee while the kids finished breakfast.

Don came in and, feeling quite awkward—this was their first time all together in the same room—sat down at one end of the kitchen table. The kids were at the other end of the table, with a couple of empty chairs between him and them. The kids didn't greet him right away because they were arguing about who should get the last piece of toast. He felt like he wasn't really even there—like he was a ghost, and he felt like a giant horrible, smelly toad.

Mary intervened and calmed the toast storm. Sid said, "Thanks, honey," gave her a soft kiss on the cheek, then served the kids their eggs and asked if they wanted more milk. Sid tousled Tommy's hair, and Tommy smiled that toothy grin that always melted Don. But today he was flashing it at Sid. Don was melting anyway, but for a different reason.

Then Sid turned to get the milk bottle and brushed his arm across Mary's back and gave her a love pat. He poured the milk into Anna's glass, and she said, "Thank you." Sid said, "You're welcome, sweetie." Sid turned toward Don and exhorted the children, "OK, now, kids, your dad's here. Aren't you going to say hello?"

I cannot believe this is happening to me, Don thought as he turned numb. Here is another man doing what I am supposed to do. Here is another man calling my wife "honey," kissing her face, cooking for my children, tousling my son's hair, touching my wife's body, calling my daughter "sweetie," and my children can't seem to get enough of him. Meanwhile, it's like they didn't even see me come in. There must be some mistake!

There had been a mistake, but it was too late to do anything

about it now. Don was going to watch another man love his wife and raise his children.

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