## **Story 1**

my journey didn't begin as I had hoped on Thursday and Friday I was supposed to go to a conference in Minneapolis but it

wasn't the usual warm sendoff I was used to my wife Martha usually took half a

day off to make my departure memorable but this time she just gave me a quick goodbye kiss before going to work let me

introduce myself I'm Ava but people often call me Evan I'm 49 years old

happily married to Marta for 24 years and we have two kids Ross who's 22 and

Amelia who recently turned 20 my journey started at 3:00 in the afternoon I left

work and headed to the airport I always like to arrive early for my 600 p.m. flight to avoid any stress about being

late everything was going smoothly and I waited patiently for the announcement of the flight's departure however luck was

not on my side this time the flight from Minnesota was delayed due to to bad weather and an impending

snowstorm after a 45-minute delay we finally boarded the plane about 30

minutes into the flight I noticed the plane making a subtle leftward turn at first I thought it was a minor

adjustment but it became clear that we were turning around the pilot confirmed that due to the severe snowstorm we

couldn't land in Minneapolis so we had to return to where we started back on Solid Ground I hurried to the airline's

check-in desk to rearrange my plans for the next morning fortunately I managed

to get one of the last available seats on the next flight despite missing the conference I was determined to attend as

I sat down a glimmer of hope emerged but I couldn't get to the conference immediately I called my contact in

Minneapolis to let them know about the delay and left a detailed message on my boss's voicemail anxiously I called home

hoping to hear Martha's comforting Voice to my shock she didn't answer and the

house was dark with her car gone from the driveway I left my luggage in the car and cautiously entered the house I

heard voices coming from the living room which surprised me it turned out the TV had been left on and that led me to a

troubling conclusion Martha had apparently come home after work and I clearly remembered turning off the TV

before leaving I silenced the TV and searched for any sign of her but found none anxiously I called her mobile phone

finally she warmly inquired about my whereabouts a question that had become a familiar part of our marriage now tinged

with genuine concern and interest in response she mentioned that she was at home watching TV shows as she spoke the

weariness of my long journey began to wash over me in that moment my sole desire was to be with my wife seeking

solace in her presence and sharing closeness moments even if only for a few precious hours despite the flight delay

I held on to the hope of unexpected joyful hours in the comfort of our own bed however within just 30 seconds the

contentment of returning home was replaced by a profound sense of uncertainty instead of anticipating the

warm embrace of my devoted wife with whom I had shared 25 24 years of love and Trust I was confronted with the

shocking revelation of lies and deception it was an unexpected blow that left me speechless and unsure I couldn't

help but question whether she had truly cheated on me and why she would do such a thing there appeared to be no logical

explanation for her deceit whether it occurred while she was at work with friends or at a restaurant I must have

remained silent for a while as Martha's worried voice eventually broke through asking if I was still present I snapped

back to reality and mumbled in response uh yeah sorry we've landed in O'Hare and

I have to go with a heavy heart I abruptly ended the call the phone rang

again but this time I turned it off needing some Solitude to make sense of my racing thoughts sitting on the couch

surrounded by silence and emptiness I felt numbness wash over me the question

haunted me why did Marta deceive me maybe there was a reasonable explanation for the lie perhaps she was planning a

surprise thinking back I recalled how I had organized a series of deceptions four years ago for our 20th wedding

anniversary I had secretly arranged a two-e cruise and involved her boss and parents in the plan creating a web of

deception the memories of that lie came rushing back in the midst of my confusion one persistent thought crept

in which I vehemently rejected it was a thought I refused to accept not us we

wouldn't be in this situation it was simply inconceivable and that I thought to myself was it realizing that my

daughter Amelia might know about all of Marta's surprises and plans I quickly dialed her number from memory my beloved

daughter's voice greeted me on the phone and asked how I was I inquired with genuine curiosity about her well-being

and she replied saying she had just finished her homework and was watching TV feeling the importance of the

situation I cautiously asked if she had talked to her mom recently and if Marta had mentioned anything to her Amelia

mentioned that they had their usual weekly phone call on Sunday giving me a glimmer of hope I then asked her if she

happened to know anything about a surprise Marta Was preparing I made it clear that I didn't want to know the

nature of the surprise only if Marta was planning something my voice held anticipation as I waited for

her response Amelia's reply shattered my hopes she mentioned that she didn't know

anything and inquired about what was going on unaware of my worry coming up with a feeble explanation I told her

that Marta had been acting a bit strange lately and I wondered if she was hiding a nice surprise perhaps for my 50th

birthday Amelia quickly dismissed the idea reminding me that we had celebrated my birthday last mon month having failed

to get any information I accepted the truth and wished my daughter a good night she replied sounding dejected I

realized that the surprise I'd hoped for wasn't going to happen the question remained why would Marta deceive me

possible explanations started to form in my mind perhaps it's related to an upcoming promotion that's likely the case I

concluded even though I couldn't understand why she would lie I considered the possibility that she was

still working hard to achieve that elusive promotion lately she had to stay late at work several times due to her

unwavering dedication however deep down Martha knew that no promotion could outweigh the

value of the time we lost together she understood that I wanted her to reduce her work hours so we could spend more

time together a reasonable request that she understood ironically I recalled an

important decision I made a few months before our 20th anniversary turning down a promotion it had been nearly 5 years

since I had enthusiastically accepted a job offer to become the Vice President of Finance at my company but this role

required frequent travel to the company's headquarters in Chicago for board meetings and visits to various

factories across the country initially I was excited about the job offer but

Martha quickly raised doubts making me reconsider my decision the cautionary tale of a colleague who went through a

divorce just 2 years after accepting a similar position couldn't be ignored while financial success was a reward for

him it came at the cost of loneliness and suffering given the circumstances

and the fact that our children still needed guidance and support through their remaining years of school Marta

understandably didn't want to take on this responsibility alone throughout the week we had in-depth discussions about

the potential consequences of accepting the promotion gradually it became clear

that I was on the verge of losing sight of what truly mattered in my life my wife and children regaining Clarity I

made a heartfelt decision to decline the promotion recognizing that my commitment to my family took precedence over

material success the past few months had been challenging as Marta pushed hard for her promotion it brought back the

doubts I had about my own career growth since our children were now in college our family consisted of just the two of

us while Martha thought her promotion was attainable with minimal impact on our lives such as more business trips I

worried about the many hours of overtime I would need to put in seeing my wife for only an hour or two a day during the

week left me dissatisfied brief moments together didn't bring contentment and

the lack of quality time together weighed on my heart the decline in our closeness life couldn't go unnoticed

Martha became increasingly engrossed in her work spending Saturdays and even Sundays at the office when she returned

home fatigue consumed her leaving no energy for anything else it had been a while if not impossible to remember the

last time we were closeness 3 weeks ago last month specific details blurred into

a depressing Haze acknowledging that age contributed to our diminishing physical connection it was hard to ignore the sad

lack of bed life we used to share it's possible that her deception during our phone call was an attempt to avoid

discussing my concerns and hide behind her work commitments however it's only

fair to admit that I too was on a business trip and had to work overtime occasionally at the same time there was

a simple way to uncover the truth I decided to call Martha's direct line at the t- Bold advertising agency to

confirm things to my surprise her colleague Jake Turnbull answered the phone alarmed I quickly composed myself

expecting to hear Martha's voice I greeted him using my nickname and his response caught me off guard as he

mentioned that I should be enjoying a vacation with Martha I was shocked and confused by his comment and it was clear

that something was a miss that evening I found myself in a web of surprises and

inquired about the supposed vacation afterward I quickly regained my composure apologized to Jake for the

interruption and fabricated an excuse claiming that I had dialed his number by mistake he reassured me without any

concern mentioning that Martha owed him lunch for covering her shift and the late working hours he expressed his

frustration saying that it was 9 the evening and he was still at work with that he concluded the conversation and

hung up gradually the truth became clear to me Martha wasn't working and was in

fact absent from her workplace according to Jake she had taken a vacation until the end of the week Panic slowly crept

into my mind tightening its grip as fear took hold where was Martha what could

she be doing an unwelcome but silent thought invaded my mind no it couldn't

be true I I've always strived to see the best in people maintaining a positive outlook and valuing the inherent

kindness in everyone but now against my will I started contemplating the worst

case scenario could this really be happening could Martha betray me like this the thought of her being with her

sister Victoria crossed my mind involuntarily over time we distanced ourselves from Victoria and her

ex-husband Mike once we were Incredibly Close Bound by strong friendships that

felt Unbreakable as our lives intertwined in a beautiful tapestry of shared experiences we spent evenings together

supported each other cared for our children organized numerous family gatherings and even went on vacations

together but everything changed one fateful day when I returned home with a throbbing headache in search of relief I

took a couple of Tylenol tablets and laid down on the couch half an hour later Marta and Victoria returned from a

shopping trip chatting animatedly unnoticed by them I remained on the couch suddenly Victoria began to speak

asking if Martha had noticed the new product manager at the grocery store my heart raced as I anxiously awaited

Martha's response she calmly replied that she found him cute admitting that he had smiled at me then with unease she

added that it would be better if he were smiling after yesterday's encounter in the backseat of her car declared

defiantly by Victoria to my surprise my wife responded disapprovingly cautioning

Victoria that she might get caught risking the loss of a good husband and more unfazed Victoria responded

confidently assuring Martha that she was always careful with those words they abruptly left leaving me in a state of

uncertainty as someone who values honesty and integrity I struggled to Bear the weight of this Revelation

uncertain of the right course of action I found myself at a Crossroads one thing

was clear Mike deserved to know the the truth hearing about Victoria's infidelity would undoubtedly devastate

him and the thought weighed heavily on my heart I knew that Mike upon learning

of her betrayal would not hesitate to kick Victoria out of their home I carried the burden of potentially

causing the collapse of their marriage did I really want to be the reason for such a profound change before I could

reach a final decision my wife returned home with our children comforted by the fact that she disapproved of her

sister's action I decided to postpone my decision until we could discuss it further that evening

as we prepared for bed I broached the subject seeking her guidance I cautiously began explaining the

situation and sharing the news of discovering infidelity in our Circle her expression initially revealed

uncertainty as I asked in all seriousness what I should do and whether confronting the cheater with anger was

an appropriate response Martha took a moment carefully considering the circumstances surrounding the situation

she began slowly suggesting that it might depend on the specific situation and that there were various factors to

consider seeking further Clarity I presented hypothetical scenarios for discussion inquiring about our friend

Mike and whether we should turn a blind eye if he had cheated before and picked up a woman at a bar I wanted to know her

viewpoint the weight of the situation hung in the air as I contemplated potential courses of action suddenly

Martha sat up in bed gripping the phone tightly and expressing her anger it was clear she felt compelled to take

immediate action and informed Victoria about the Betrayal instinctively I gently took her phone and told Martha

that I would handle the situation as it was my responsibility Martha had doubts about the correctness of our decision

and asked what was going on I responded confidently assuring her that I was sure

and hoped that Victoria would kick the cheater out of the house Martha looked at me me with determination in her eyes

affirming that we wouldn't let him stay with us she declared firmly that he could find his own place and that she

wouldn't shelter a cheater in our home luckily things played in my favor and Mike answered the phone I began with a

heavy sigh addressing him as his favorite son-in-law Mike responded with a touch of humor acknowledging that I

was his only son-in-law making me automatically his favorite he asked what was so important that I was calling so

late after taking a deep breath I cautiously continued warning him that I

had overheard a conversation and had devastating news to share I told him that his spouse hadn't been faithful and

had cheated on him just yesterday there was a long pause on the phone as Mike absorbed this shocking Revelation when

he finally spoke his voice was barely audible filled with disbelief he expressed his doubt asking if I was

absolutely certain it was about his Victoria I confirmed that I had heard it directly from her own mouth describing

it as more of a boast without a hint of remorse expressing my condolences I offered my support and told him that we

were there for him and the kids Mike reassured me and hung up the phone Martha looked at me with sadness in her

eyes tears welling up she whispered that she was proud of me and asked for a hug

feeling lost and scared embracing her I offered comfort in the face of

uncertainty after a moment of calming down I inquired about whether they should consider seeing a therapist

curious about their potential next steps Martha feeling weary mumbled sleepily

expressing doubt about whether therapy would change anything and mentioning that once someone has strayed they tend

to do it again I quietly agreed with her assessment the ringing of the phone roused me from sleep and I answered

groggy trying not to disturb Martha Victoria's Furious voice lashed out at

me demanding answers about what I had told Mike I responded calmly to Victoria

stating that I had told Mike the truth and emphasized the importance of honesty as Martha watched with concern and

resolve Victoria's voice was filled with anger as she expressed disbelief that her sister would betray her I firmly

replied that sometimes the truth comes out unexpectedly and we both agreed that cheaters should face the consequences

Victoria's tears began to flow uncontrollably and she confessed that Mike had kicked her out of the house I

reiterated that it was a deserved consequence Victoria pleaded desperately asking what she should do and if she

could come to us regretfully I replied that we couldn't provide Refuge to a cheater and she would have to navigate

the situation on her own Victoria seemed shocked by my response and I turned to

Martha for guidance asking her what to say to a cheater who wanted to come to us Martha leaned towards the phone and

firmly declared that she didn't want a cheater in her house and told him to get lost I then convinced ConEd a message on

behalf of both of us stating that Victoria was no longer a part of our lives and that she should stay away from

us we didn't want her to come or call Martha snuggled closer to me and we sought comfort in each other's arms she

whispered that she was proud of how I had handled the situation and we peacefully drifted off to sleep however

the morning brought an expected storm as Martha's father called and yelled at his daughter Martha was anxious and tearful

after the phone call I explained to Martha that it was our mutual decision and we had discussed the possibility of

seeking advice and ending our connection with the deceiver I clarified that I had only mentioned a hypothetical scenario

about Mike and hadn't asserted that he actually cheated on Victoria I posed a

thought-provoking question asking how Mike's potential betrayal differed from Victoria's infidelity Martha defended

her sister stating that Victoria was family I expressed disappointment and

questioned if it was acceptable to cheat on on someone because they were family leading Martha to be momentarily

speechless 3 years ago I had a pivotal conversation with Martha asserting my

stance about her sister I made it clear that I didn't want her sister near our children or in our home although Martha

occasionally met her sister secretly it remained an unspoken Taboo in our household and she visited Victoria

covertly while I was away over time Mike managed to overcome the situation and

prepare for remarriage and my resentment toward Victoria waned I had stopped caring about her presence and found joy

in her absence shifting my focus to Martha I gently broached the subject feeling the need to resolve the issue I

suspected that Martha might carry guilt for deceiving me although I had reached a point where I no longer cared a

surprising turn of events unfolded as I found myself on a stage in front of a vast audience at the Congress I began my

speech addressing the crowd and discussing two distinct types of individuals in in the realm of tissue

use deniers and those who confront reality during the talk Dave millant

Martha's boss waved his hand wildly and confessed to evading my wife Jake

Turnbull seated behind Dave also admitted to evading my wife another man

joined in with a cheeky comment creating a moment of shared amusement and light laughter among the audience suddenly I

sat up on the couch wiping drool from my face and realized it was already midnight I must have slept for over an

hour and I wondered if Martha had returned home during my nap possibly unaware of my presence as an unexpected

guest hastening toward the bedroom I entered but found no signs of her then

it dawned on me that she was likely with her sister Victoria contemplating whether to contact Victoria and inquire

about Martha's whereabouts I hesitated realizing that obtaining Victoria's address would entail acting behind

Martha's back recalling that I needed to pick up Victoria's children from a specific location I wondered if I still

had Victoria's phone number as I prepared to search my contact list I noticed the fine my phone app icon on my

smartphone a year ago I had installed it on both our phones after losing mine during a trip from New York to

Cincinnati recognizing its capabilities I promptly opened the application within

seconds I received information about Martha's phone's location it indicated Mills Lake I was puzzled wondering why

she would be there contrarily Victoria was facing financial difficulties making

it unlikely for her to afford a cottage on Mills Lake the situation was becoming increasingly mysterious Mills Lake was

renowned as an upscale residential area with cottage costs far exceeding those of our modest home using Google Earth I

carefully pinpointed Martha's precise location to my surprise she was inside an exclusive estate surrounded by an

imposing stone wall this Revelation left me baffled what could Martha be doing in

such a luxurious Millionaire's estate the distance between Mills Lake and our town was an hour's drive but my

determination to uncover the truth propelled me forward at the same time I realized that a direct conversation with

her would likely result in dishonesty or evasion Gathering indisputable evidence

was essential before initiating a conversation despite my hesitations flooded with intense emotions I quickly

headed to Mills Lake reproaching myself for refusing to consider the possibility of Martha's wrongdoing regret nod at me

as I realized I should have checked her phone's GPS locator right from the start instead of seeking excuses for her

actions uncertainty clouded my thoughts as I arrived at Mills Lake uncertain of

my intentions and harboring a faint hope for a straightforward explanation anxious I made my way to the

estate where Martha was located weighed down by the anticipation of what awaited before me loomed a massive gate barring

direct access to the estate I wasn't planning to drive up to the house and announce my presence in search of my

wife after assessing the situation I understood that parking by the road might attract unwelcome attention

possibly leading to the arrival of security guards or law enforcement in this exclusive Community driving a bit

further I stumbled upon a humble path and decided to park the car there

stepping out I grappled with uncertainty how would I bypass the Towering wall separating me from the

truth then it dawned on me that the estate bordered the lake meaning an approach from this side was possible

with renewed determination I made my way to the lake shore my heart racing at the prospect of finding an entry point to

the estate from this direction discovering a foot paath leading to the lake I cautiously moved toward the

shoreline not knowing which Grand Cottage Martha was in I counted on another check of the GPS locator in the

end I reached a luxurious mansion where several second floor Windows still had lights on however the ground floor was

dimly lit only one curtain remained a jar casting warm light outside seeking

an elevated vantage point I found a sturdy tree and climbed high enough to peer inside my gaze settled on a man

wearing a white terrycloth robe though he was hardly recognizable to me the man

appearing older than me swiftly vanished from view a moment later a woman emerged

confirming my suspicions it was Victoria as she stood in an open robe sipping champagne from a glass I couldn't deny

that she remained attractive at her age the pieces began to fall into place and I realized that Martha was indeed with

her sister this Revelation didn't surprise me given the financial implications of a divorce it seemed

likely that Victoria was seeking a wealthy partner yet I couldn't help but think that Martha had been drawn into a

lifestyle I disapproved of and didn't want for her as events unfolded before my eyes I witnessed a scene that left me

disheartened the man I initially spotted approached Victoria and His Hands boldly explored her body he took her champagne

glass discreetly setting it aside I had to climb down from the tree and avert my

eyes from this closeness display of my sister-in-law's Allure my sensibilities were rooted in traditional Notions where

love and bed life formed the core of a genuine relationship between a man and a woman what I observed felt devoid of

Love lacking the connection and affection I held dear even if I didn't hold Victoria in high regard I wouldn't

wish such a destructive and empty existence on anyone feeling uneasy with the scene unfolding before me I

contemplated descending from the tree however as the couple moved away from the window I locked eyes with Martha she

sat on a distant couch sporting a foolish inebriated smile my heart sank

Frozen in bewilderment her robe was open revealing a sight that sealed the fate of our marriage overwhelmed by shock I

took a hesitant step backward but lost my footing and tumbled from the tree branches broke my fall and I was

fortunate to escape with minor injuries in a days I got to my feet feeling like

an old man under the weight of what I had witnessed I started wandering aimlessly like a zombie a drift in a

desolate World tears welled up in my eyes as I limped my way back to the car

reflecting the profound pain pain that consumed me it wasn't the physical fall from the tree that caused me pain but

the emotional loss of happiness and the separation from a loved one during those

distressing minutes I briefly considered breaking into the cottage forcing my way inside to confront the situation however

the harsh reality of the consequences potential years in prison for trespassing and assault quickly

extinguished this desire alone with my thoughts at night a storm of emotions

raged Ed Within Me denial could no longer Shield me from the harsh truth

and I grappled with the profound sadness and simmering anger yet I recognized the

danger of letting that anger consume me understanding that it would only further damage my own life deep down I knew that

no matter how angry I was I would never resort to physically harming Martha as

events unfolded I considered various options the simplest one would be to return home pack my belongings and leave

her if we lived in a no fault divorce state had separate incomes and no dependent children the divorce process

would likely proceed smoothly we would divide our property equally and part ways however despite this

straightforward path a part of me yearned for justice and the desire to exact some form of Revenge a bold idea

took hold of my thoughts and without hesitation I decided to seize the moment and see how it played out clutching my

phone tightly I dialed Martha number anticipating that she might not answer and I'd be directed to her voicemail I

hoped she'd check her voicemail right away just in case hi honey I began

projecting my voice onto the answering machine recording since you didn't pick up the home phone I'm calling you on

your mobile I wanted to alert you not to be alarmed when you hear my keys in the door in a few minutes amid the chaos of

a flight delayed by a blizzard and uncertain arrival times I left a message for Martha it had been a chaotic evening

and I outlined the challenges we faced our flight had been diverted to Chicago but we were finally on our way back home

they couldn't pinpoint our exact Landing time but I estimated I'd be home in about 30 minutes then I said goodbye and

hung up knowing Martha would receive a notification of a new voicemail curiosity and anxiety would undoubtedly

eat at her late into the night leaving a message at that time was unusual adding to the Intrigue I pictured her reaching

for the phone eagerly checking her voicemail hoping for clarity amid the chaos I silently prayed that Martha

would be intoxicated enough not to notice that I couldn't use my mobile phone during the flight Panic must have

been growing inside her she realized she might be ens snared in her own deceitful web in a fit of rage she was likely

contemplating how to get ahead of me and rush home hastily dressing and Fielding questions from her sister and lover my

phone rang interrupting my thoughts and I quickly answered realizing that she might be trying to gauge my time of

arrival I began the conversation with a weary tone apologizing for potentially

waking her up she replied assuring me that it was okay and informed me that

she was on her way home expecting to arrive in about an hour give or take a few minutes Martha acknowledged my

response with a simple okay and ended the call promptly I soon saw her car

exiting the estate's gates and speeding down the highway my heart skipped to to beat as I witnessed her reckless driving

nearly swerving into a ditch and it became evident that she was much more intoxicated than I initially thought

although I felt anger and frustration I realized that her actions posed a threat

not only to herself but also to innocent people on the road despite my lingering

resentment I couldn't bear the thought of her life being in Jeopardy as the mother of my children determined to

ensure her safety I decided to follow her ready to intervene if necessary

thinking quickly I dialed special services and informed the operator that I wanted to report a drunk driver I

described the car's erratic Behavior how it had almost collided with mine and its Reckless swerving I also provided

details about the car mentioning that it had pulled onto the south side of the highway at Mills Lake and was a dark

blue Ford Taurus I had memorized the last four digits of the license plate

and emphasized the urgency of stopping the car before its driver caused harm the operator thanked me for my report

and assured me that a patrol car was on its way to apprehend the intoxicated driver keeping a safe distance I

continued to tail Martha navigating the traffic carefully two exits later I

noticed a patrol car approaching her location from a distance I could see a patrol car parked on the bridge facing

the highway as Martha's car came into view the patrol car quickly accelerated

flashing its lights to Signal her to pull over I drove past them feeling a mixture of relief and deep sadness 45

minutes later I arrived back home the weight of the evening's events heavy on my shoulders it seemed almost ironic but

undeniably tragic in a single night the life of someone I deeply loved could

have been reduced to A Series of Unfortunate consequences a somber realization settled within me making me consider

that Martha's actions could have resulted in a fatal car accident and the subsequent grief and suffering for my

children I paused to reflect allowing my fears to surface acknowledging the

fragility and preciousness of life my love for Martha was no longer a central factor in the decision I had made it

wasn't that I had stopped loving her but I could no longer Envision a shared future together I took drastic measures

by turning off the home phone and silencing my mobile phone I needed some privacy to gather my thoughts as I

reflected on the hours spent searching for an explanation for Martha's deception I realized that the most

straightforward explanation had been right in front of me all along disappointed in myself I opened a bottle

of wine and contemplated the path forward for many years I believed that

my love for Martha would mature like a fine wine and eventually reach its Zenith now confronted with the reality

of our strained relationship I faced the challenging question of what to do next

as I continued to sip wine and the night unfolded I searched for clarity and Direction amidst the Whirlwind of

emotions that engulfed me the love that had once bound us now felt like it had turned into bitter vinegar leaving me in

agonizing pain the depth of her betrayal struck me to my core but the pain was

not solely from the Betrayal itself it was the realization that our love had withered away this love had defined me

for the past 26 years 24 of which were spent as husband and wife without her I

felt lost like a soul a drift devoid of purpose and self-identity could I go on

without this love the pain intensified making me contemplate putting an end to the suffering perhaps by finding solace

in the depths beneath a bridge I had never imagined living without Martha starting life a new felt like an

insurmountable challenge filled with uncertainty how do you plan your life when a person who has been your

everything is suddenly gone I was at a a loss unsure of where to begin making

decisions without consulting Martha seemed inconceivable family had always been the focal point of my life I

carefully weighed every choice considering the well-being and happiness of my wife and children even our social

life revolved around our family's needs and I rarely engaged with colleagues and others while I attended obligatory work

events like the annual Christmas party my priority had always been getting back home quickly the times I ventured Beyond

on these obligations were few over the past decade I'd occasionally reminisce about the times when we socialized with

colleagues but now with the kids gone it was just Martha and me and now I found

myself alone engulfed in my sadness I had no one to love no one to lean on for

the first time in my life loneliness became my unwelcome companion why did

she choose this path why resort to cheating when a straightforward divorce would have been more painful but perhaps

more considerate of the years and joyful moments we shared when did she stop loving me did she merely endure our

relationship until our children grew up and moved away when did her care and attention wne as our children embarked

on their own Journeys I saw it as an opportunity to invest more in Martha and our relationship I didn't realize that

she saw it as the end of our shared path I watched as a stranger became a

constant presence suggesting they were comfortable with each other or perhaps how easily deception had infiltrated our

lives Martha and her lover leaving me isolated and unloved made it evident

that we were no longer a couple in the midst of Despair my pain became a connection to life it served as a

painful reminder of what I had lost of the best moments we had shared and most importantly of the presence of our

children in that dark moment my children became my saviors casting a glimmer of

hope upon me my self-esteem had plummeted to the point where I lacked the strength to lift myself out of the

abyss of Despair my children came to my rescue just thinking about them provided

a faint spark of self-preservation soon Ross and Amelia would go on their independent Journeys

and start their own families to Shield myself from the impending wave of grief I realized I needed to distance myself

from all of it it wasn't an easy task but it was filled with pain I understood

that I'd always carry the memory of Martha of how I loved her but I'd also remember her with another man I needed

to extricate myself from this situation throughout my life I had always been content with simple expectations even

though my parents weren't wealthy I had the fortune of growing up in a family where deep affection prevailed the

material possessions that now surrounded me seemed insignificant in comparison as

I contemplated everything I owned I realized that clothes a car and a laptop

were the only items worth taking with me the more I thought about it the clearer my path out of this predicament became I

made the decision to pack my belongings and disappear Without a Trace I no longer wished to gaze upon the woman who

had once been the Center of My Universe just seeing her would serve as a painful reminder of my loss and the constant

ache within me with renewed determination I Rose from my seat ready to act decisively I swiftly packed

several bags and it took me only 30 minutes to do so soon I was loading my

things into the car it was just shy of 6:00 in the morning when I completed the packing exhausted yet resolved I decided

to take a brief nap confident that Martha would still be in detox until late in the morning when I closed my

eyes thoughts filled my mind about starting aresh my phone's alarm woke me at 9:00 a.m. without delay I scheduled

an urgent meeting with a lawyer following that I headed to the shower to symbolically wash away the remnants of

the past with a heavy heart I removed my wedding ring and placed it solemnly on the table

next to the phone this Final Act marked the beginning of my journey toward a new chapter in my life one where I sought

personal Liberation and happiness I had made the painful decision to express my disappointment in a letter addressed to

Martha Although our conversation had reached a point where it seemed feudal I felt the need to express my emotions

Martha it saddens me to acknowledge that I now see you following the path of Reckless promiscuity and loneliness that

often accompanies your sister perhaps it's an inherited trait a sad Legacy by

the time you read this I will have completely removed myself from your life ensuring that our paths never cross

again the extent of your betrayal has left me reeling in a pain I couldn't even fathom the intensity of my pain is

beyond measure nevertheless I am grateful for the 24 years of happiness

we once shared and for the two wonderful children you gave me trying to be fair and honest I will be

brief in this farewell may you quickly return to the arms of your beloved leaving behind our broken family I

thirst for a Justice you couldn't provide did your dissolute escapades bring you any satisfaction or revenge

for your actions the man you were with judging by the Grandeur of the Mansion was quite wealthy I no longer have the

desire to see or talk to you we have nothing left to discuss our lawyers will handle all the necessary procedures and

I ask that you promptly sign the divorce papers the reason for our separation is of no importance by 10: in the morning I

was at the bank I responsibly addressed our shared credit card debt and promptly closed the accounts taking immediate

action I visited the bank to obtain a cash receipt for our entire savings and securities additionally I ensured that

there were sufficient funds in the checking account to cover the mortgage and utility bills for the next 2 months

taking a further step toward toward Independence I removed my name from the joint account upon leaving the bank I

held a substantial check amounting to approximately $250,000 before noon I arrived at work

surprising my boss who expected me to be in Minnesota when I shared the news of my immediate resignation and relocation

his surprise grew our relationship held a unique meaning that transcended the typical employer employee Dynamic my

boss had maintained his current position because I turned down a promotion and initially he wasn't pleased and felt

indebted to me but two years ago during his divorce I explained that my decision to decline the promotion was due to his

situation since then our relationship had evolved from a traditional boss employee Arrangement into one of equal

partnership he began by stating that he understood my desire to resign and was willing to accept it instead of going

through the HR department and writing a check for my 4001 K he had an

alternative proposal he offered me an opportunity in their newly established Optical division in taxi although the

salary would be lower than my current position there were reportedly affordable housing options there that

would enable me to secure decent housing at an attractive price we sealed our agreement with a handshake and he agreed

to spread the word that I had chosen to leave my job voluntarily The Next Step was to meet

with my lawyer and explain my decision to separate from Martha I instructed him

to serve her with the divorce papers and Grant her the power of attorney to sell the house which represented 50% of our

total assets although my lawyer who was also a close family friend attempted to

persuade me to consider alternative scenarios he soon realized the significant changes awaiting Me by

midnight I would be in another city in another state and without a wife in the

afternoon as profound fatigue over overcame me I sought a place to rest and

stumbled upon a rather dated motel around 8:00 in the evening using a disposible phone I had acquired for this

purpose I dialed Ross's number and explained that it was my new phone number Ross inquired if I had heard from

Mom and I revealed that I had found out the day before that she had been unfaithful he expressed his

disappointment and concern asking what I planned to do about it I shared that I had taken care of everything I had

packed my things cleared my bank accounts resigned from my job and was heading south ending my relationship

with her I also mentioned that she would receed the divorce papers by the end of the week Ross asked if Amelia knew and I

informed him that she didn't yet I assured him that I would keep him informed and promised to call regularly

we exchanged expressions of love and care and I reassured him that I loved him and would take care of myself after

concluding the conversation I contacted Amelia the conversation was filled with deep sadness

my children with heavy hearts learned the truth about their mother's actions and how they affected our family

witnessing the destructive influence of Aunt Victoria on her family my children like me tried to comprehend how their

mother could inflict the same pain on us I was certain that Victoria had influenced her sister to act in this

manner Amelia always candid broke the Silence by asking how long it had been

happening and how long we had ceased to be enough for her I comforted her by

explaining that the duration and reasons were no longer important What mattered

was that I had loved her deeply trusted her with all my heart and she betrayed that trust I reassured Amelia not to

worry and said that I would be okay I mentioned that I was incredibly sad at the moment but I believed I would heal

over time especially if I could maintain some distance from her mom I also

assured her that I would share my new address and she could come to me once her school year was over as I made this

promise tears welled up in my eyes and I wanted Amelia to know that there would always be a place for her by my side in

Tucson the Optics division was relatively small with only 30 employees the district manager Who Bore a stronger

resemblance to his father than a Stern boss fostered a sense of camaraderie and comfort within the team I immediately

felt like a welcomed guest which provided some Solace during a difficult time a month later I chose a lovely

house in a condominium throughout this period i maintained no contact with Marta relying solely on updates from my

lawyer and my children moving forward was not without its challenges one situation proved particularly demanding

my lawyer informed me that Marta was ready to contest the divorce expressing her unwillingness to proceed with it and

her Readiness to fight to The Bitter End even if it meant Financial ruin for both of us in response I calmly instructed my

lawyer not to proceed with the divorce course I said I didn't care anymore and that I wanted to give her the chance to

rebuild her life after the 24 years of happiness we once shared together I

instructed my lawyer to tell her that I had no desire to continue the relationship and that I wished her a

good life I added a more colorful message to tell her to go to hell and I asked my lawyer if he could deliver that

message my lawyer recognizing our close connection replied that he could do it

with pleasure but warned that there would be an additional $150 fee for this

conversations with the children were more challenging one by one I had to convince them that there was no turning

back on this decision the first hurdle arose when Amelia told me dad mom

completely freaked out when I mentioned that I plan to live with you this summer I promised Amelia that I would do my

best to visit her and her grandparents however her reaction was so concerning that I found it necessary to step away

from my phone for a few days Martha's behavior worsened when Ross decided to split his summer between both of us as

for Martha I consciously refrained from inquiring about her focusing on moving forward with my life it wasn't easy

because remnants of my feelings for her still lingered a mix of emotions tied to our shared past before the Betrayal yet

with my children's help I gradually learned more about Martha's State of Mind to my surprise it turned out she

was going through a deep depression mirroring the emotional shock I had once experienced it's just unbelievable able

especially considering what happened to her sister the concept is quite simple when you cheat it hurts the very people

you should love which leads to the destruction of your marriage afterward you continue to live your life so how

could Martha be depressed when I did everything possible to enable her to carry on without my presence her

reluctance to divorce seemed like an escape from reality a way to avoid facing the fact that her actions caused

our family to crumble it's absurd is isn't it for a few hours I was in denial

myself but she had been living in denial for the past 2 years even though she knew our children were in regular

contact with me she used our children as a way to express remorse for her actions

through them she tried to convince me that she was willing to do anything to prove her love for me although I

understood that our children held hopes of reconciliation between us I just couldn't bring myself to agree to talk

to Marta the geographic distance between us was was also an issue for them as

they had to choose between their mother and me MARTA was relentless in her pursuit of my whereabouts from our

children all she knew was that I lived in one of the southern states it had been almost 3 years since I left her and

she finally managed to discover my location one fateful day leaving work I

spotted her lurking near the office I couldn't fathom how she found out the city where I now resided as I had tried

to keep that information strictly confidential based on what what my children shared with me Martha was

convinced that a face-to-face meeting would be enough to change my mind but I was determined to change her mistaken

perception swiftly and discreetly I slipped out through a side door my heart racing and called Louise to let her know

about the situation knowing my plan I deliberately placed myself within Martha's sight luring her to follow me

when I pulled into the parking lot Martha caught up with me to confound her I drove around the city for a while

stopped stopped at the grocery store and then returned home upon reaching the house I parked and Louise a beautiful

30-year-old Latina opened the door instead of my keys a moment later the

doorbell rang and Louise cradling a one-year-old baby in her arms rushed to open it from my place in the kitchen I

observed Martha's astonishment upon seeing Louise Louise greeted her with a distinct Spanish accent and asked how

she could help Martha expressed her desire to talk to me at that moment Louise called out to me from the doorway

and I took the baby in my arms Louise told me to take care of our daughter while she finished preparing dinner I

turned to Martha and began well well well with a mix of surprise and irony in my voice I met her gaze acknowledging

the situation I inquired with a Resolute yet attentive tone asking Martha what she wanted after almost 3 years apart

she responded in a barely audible whisper confessing that she needed to apologize and convey how deeply sorry

sorry she was for the pain she caused me she acknowledged that it wasn't my fault but rather her own

foolishness Martha expressed her love for me then and now describing me as the best husband and father a woman could

hope for while admitting her own thoughtlessness and genuine remorse for the suffering she had caused I found her

sincere apologies moving but I knew it was essential to end this charade promptly I replied well it's all right

feigning happiness as they say all of this is in the the past I haven't dwelled on these memories for so long

that I can genuinely say I forgive you as I looked at tamarita who was radiating with joy while in my arms I

continued in conclusion I sincerely Wish You A Joyful life filled with love much

like mine and my voice carried genuine sentiments Martha's tears streamed down

her face and she mumbled something unintelligible she hesitantly approached embraced me and hurriedly left the house

I closed the door behind her Louise noticing my fragile state emerged from the kitchen feeling relieved and sad she

gently took tamarita from my arms sensing my need for Comfort I leaned against the closed door giving in to

tears touched by the scene Louise hugged me tightly and planted a gentle kiss on

my forehead with a determined look she reached for the phone she said I need to

let Horatio know that I'll be heading back home with our daughter soon her voice exuding warmth and confid idence I

whispered thank you Louise sincerely appreciative of her presence and unwavering support I instructed Louise

make sure to tell htio I'll be waiting for you at the barbecue on Saturday and her voice brimmed with enthusiasm

absolutely boss I'll see you at the office tomorrow the following week my lawyer

received the divorce papers duly signed by Marta as I moved forward I realized that healing takes time and I needed to

find my own pace I formed connections with several female friends engaging in in closeness relationship with only one

devoid of any serious commitments it appeared that I was finally moving past the pain that had been inflicted on me I

grew less fearful of women shedding my nervousness and timidity recognizing this personal growth I began to think it

might be time to Grant Louise the freedom to introduce me to a kind and suitable woman trusting her judgment I

contemplated the opportunity to meet someone who could bring genuine happiness back into my life

now I'm reconsidering my decision after this unexpected encounter doubts have

Arisen not about leaving Marta as that decision remains steadfast but about my

prior assumption that we had nothing in common I've always believed we had nothing to discuss assuming she

understood my stance on infidelity and how I'd react in such a situation however listening to fragments of

Martha's story during our recent conversation I'm beginning to question if I should have avoided this confrontation despite my aversion to it

one thing though is undeniable removing myself from her life was the best course

of action for me it allowed me to find peace and recover away from the toxic environment that engulfed us I loved

Marta so much that if I had encountered her at that moment I might have succumbed to her remorse and accepted

her apology this could have led to more suffering and eventual divorce but now 3

years since her betrayal and our separation Mar 's apology suddenly gave me a sense of closure it released me

from the pain I'd been carrying and offered a glimmer of hope for love once more over time I might even contemplate

revealing that I don't actually have a second daughter though I'm not certain I'll decide to do so I no longer owe her

anything and the choice to disclose or keep it to myself is mine to make I

finally unburdened myself of obligations to her allowing me to move forward and embark on a new chapter in my life but

not for long yesterday I stood by Marta's grave with my children and numerous relatives including Victoria I

wept bitterly like everyone else present but I didn't see a single tear on Victoria's face Martha in a state of

complete Despair and inebriation was involved in a fatal accident her life couldn't be saved I contemplated for a

long time why Victoria had encouraged her sister into un closeness relationship with her lover and arrived

at only one explanation it was a form revenge for Martha and me revealing her betrayal which had led to the end of her

marriage with Mike perhaps now Victoria feels some sense of relief as her sister

lies in a casket and I know one thing I will never love any woman the way I

loved [Music] [Applause]