

Uncoupling

Philippa Selby

Please come

She wrinkled her brow ‘Why?’ Anxiety again clawed at her stomach.

Thought we talked about this.

‘Wanted to end the marriage’ were the words he used. ‘Go our separate ways.’

Had he found someone else?

Yet, the invitation: *Please come*.

The words tugged at her heart. Kindnesses were rare. Was there a tiny hope?

But the confusion...

No, he’d said. *Finished*.

Was this now *Yes*? Another attempt?

Did she even want another attempt? *Yes*, she’d texted back. Then she worried, sick with bewilderment.

Why the change of heart? Two months of silence – not even a phone call and suddenly this text: *Please come*.

She re-read the first text: *Lunch at Ken’s—I’d love you to come*.

She’d responded *Why?* Sweet and smiling the reply: *I like your company; you’re a nice person*.

‘But not nice enough to be married to’, she thought.

Her churning stomach messed with her concentration. Lunch congealed on the desk. Her mind wasn’t attending to work at all.

She drifted again:

He loves me - calm and smiling.

He loves me not – the silent treatment. I always had to initiate the apology.

He loves me – supportive when I was retrenched.

He loves me not - scoffing at my disappointment when he spent our holiday money; joking with the shop assistant when I paid for my own birthday present.

‘Not even sure I want to see him’, she thought. ‘Can’t stand the hot/cold, on/off messages I’m getting.’ And *those* websites... And the email inviting a woman... But that guilt tugged again at her heart...she should be nice to him—make another attempt. Marriage is for life. Isn’t it? Christians forgive unconditionally, don’t they? Even for unfaithfulness, don’t they?

She sighed and returned to her emails. The work day, like her stomach and mind, crawled higgledy-piggledy to an end. Can’t face cooking – a burger will have to do.

He loves me...he loves me not...

Couldn’t he see the impact his change of heart had on her mind? She’d just started to make plans for herself – to somehow reconstruct her life; then *this!*

‘Perhaps I could talk to Kathy?’ she thought, turning right instead of left at the intersection.

Kathy’s response was immediate. ‘It’s to look good,’ she’d said. ‘Gives him an opportunity to be nice to you in public. You’ll be playing into his hands.’ She thanked God for Kathy – a woman who could see through deception. ‘He was always selfish – you know that’, she’d said. ‘It was always about him—his comfort; his pleasure. You were discreet in expressing your frustrations, but Gary and I suspected something was wrong – you were always so alone, even though you were married.’

She frowned, but knew Kathy’s words were true. He had been entirely selfish with every aspect of their marriage. Even the chores. He’d always pleased himself. And the money – the wild spending; the secret loans. Where was the evidence of our marriage vows—*In the presence of God ... all that I am, I give to you; all that I have I share with you?*

He'd lived like a single man with all the benefits of marriage; she'd had all the responsibilities of marriage with few of the benefits.

Prayer felt nearly impossible, but she spluttered a thanks for people who could perceive the truth, and see it through the eyes of faith. The endless games and half-truths had impacted her ability to make sense of it all.

She considered Kathy’s comment: *He has broken the marriage vows by emotional and financial adultery. He’s made no room for either you or God in his self-serving life.* It really wasn’t a marriage.

Her counsellor had been more direct: ‘It is abuse, and abuse always escalates.’ In the last months, both the deceit and the spending had skyrocketed. His behaviour had really frightened her.

He'd tried to get back together with her a few months ago, and the counsellor had asked her: 'What will be different? What reason has he to change?'

Glibly she'd replied, 'This is 'normal' for me. I'm sure I'll get over it, given time.' And she realised these were *his* words; the ones he'd so often said to her: *You'll get over it. Silly girl. You're just over-reacting.* She'd swallowed his words and believed them. But maybe *he* was the one being unreasonable? Maybe her reactions were normal.

She ruminated over the forgiveness she had constantly offered to him—the many 'sorries' that were just part of his vocabulary. *Sorry darling. Sorry, sorry. I won't do it again.* And the counsellor's voice again: *Do you think he is truly sorry? Or is it just another game?* And she realised, that she had known a long time ago it was just a way to get back inside, so he could do it again. And again. And he really wasn't sorry at all.

You took advantage of my kindness and of my generosity. And you weren't sorry. Does God forgive someone who isn't really sorry? Do I have to?

And now the text: *Please come. I want to see you. Maybe we can start again?*

'Start again?' she thought. 'But will we? Or will it be more of the same?'

Those words of the counsellor went corkscrewed through her brain: *What reason has he to change?*

Her stomach churned. *Forgiveness doesn't mean enabling abuse, does it?*

She picked up the phone...hesitated...

And blocked his number.