

A Different Approach

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'Everything's my fault,' barked Steve, determined to tell his side of the story. 'She mocks and criticizes everything I do, including buying her gifts - can you imagine? I literally can't win with her.'

'You bought me a necklace last week, because the previous week, you came home at like one in the morning, every single night,' his wife retorted with a sickened look on her. 'You were at the office, *working*.' She emphasized the word '*working*', animatedly.

Nicole and Steve Saunders, a handsome forty year old couple, sat in Susan Long's office in upper Manhattan. They'd chosen Susan on account of her sterling reputation as a miracle-working marriage counsellor. She'd been hailed as a magician in the field of mending broken marriages, and her hourly rate suggested so.

'Let him finish, please,' asked Susan, graciously.

'Exactly. It's my turn. I didn't interrupt you when you spoke,' Steve snapped, jogging his mind to what he'd been saying earlier. 'Oh yes, I pay for everything, doc. Our house, cars, school fees, groceries and so on – but it isn't enough,' he explained, using his hands for added emphasis. 'She reckons I don't spend enough time with her and the girls, but she's also not willing to downgrade our lifestyle. She adores the private schools, hosting brunches with friends, German cars ...'

'Don't paint me as some gold digging ...'

'Stop interrupting me, please.'

'Whatever,' was Nicole's cold response, gazing around Susan's plush office. It was a neatly kept room, comprising of Persian carpets, three expensive leather chairs, an exotic oak wooden desk, stacks of Psychology text books and a perfect view of the city.

Nicole had been impressed at first sight.

'I'm lawyer, doc. I work by the hour, as you do. If I take fewer cases, we'll have to take our kids to government schools, and maybe move to an affordable neighbourhood. She doesn't want that.'

'And you don't want me to get a job.'

'You have no qualifications, Nicole. Zero. You can hardly type. What kind of job do you think ...'

'I HAVE FRIENDS, OKAY! I HAVE CONNECTIONS. I KNOW A LOT OF PEOPLE THAT WOULD HIRE ME AT THE DROP OF ...'

'Wait, hold on guys,' Susan interposed. 'This isn't a screaming match. Please let Steve finish,' asked Susan politely, removing designer eye glasses off her face. She was a stunning fifty two year old woman, who looked half her age - with flawless skin, curled blonde hair and sparkling blue eyes. 'Carry on Steve.'

'Thank you. I work like a horse for my family, everyday, only to come back home to a fight. It's so predictable. Every night's the same. I didn't do this ... or I didn't do that ... I didn't call to check up on her ... I forgot to buy milk or sugar. Trivial stupid stuff like that.'

'Trivial stupid stuff like forgetting our daughter's birthday, twice in a row,' Nicole added, in a tone designed to invoke offence. 'You're always playing the victim. Stop it!'

He took a deep breath in, composing himself. 'What's more important: that I remember her stupid birthday, or I work hard so that she gets a great education?'

'BOTH! ARE YOU SERIOUS? DO YOU EVEN HEAR YOURSELF SOMETIMES? BRIDGETTE'S FOUR YEARS OLD. BOTH!'

He swung his chair to face his wife fully now. 'Is that why we haven't slept together in six months? Because I forget our kids' birthdays?'

Susan raised a brow. This was new. *The plot thickens*, she thought, waiting eagerly for Nicole's response.

'No, it's because you come home at one in the morning, smelling of perfume. I figure you're probably satisfied already, by the time you get home. I'm not stupid, Steven.'

'WHAT!?'

'You heard me.'

'Have I ever given you a reason to think I cheat? And don't bring up what happened at my bachelors'. We weren't even married then.'

'Just to clarify for you, dear Susan - he slept with his ex girlfriend, hours before we took our wedding vows. He reckons it's okay, it doesn't matter. They were just having fun.'

Steve pulled a fist. He shut his eyes tightly. His face turned red with a blood vein protruding from his skull. 'EIGHT YEARS AGO! AND YOU KNOW ABOUT IT BECAUSE I TOLD YOU.'

'No. I know about it because I saw a text on your phone. You told me afterwards ...'

'Oh yes, because you snoop and go through my text messages like a starving dog in rubbish bins ...'

'Who's the dog between you and me? And don't talk to me like that, Steven!'

'Guys wait,' Susan interjected once more. 'Maybe we should try something different. Instead of telling me what the problems are, I want you both to tell me what you love about each other. What attracted you to each other?'

Steve stood up from his seat. He'd had it. 'It's not gonna work, doc. We've already tried all these counselling exercises – reminiscing, being in the shoes of the other, writing down happy moments, getting rid of aggressive words and so on. We've tried it all.' He started towards the exit.

'So let's just give up. Typical. Let's just throw in the towel,' said Nicole, revolted.

'What the hell do you want from me, huh?' Steve spat, narrowing his eyes threateningly. 'You said let's consult our parents, we did. You said let's go for counselling, we've been to three!'

'It isn't working,' said a defeated Nicole to Susan, teary eyed now.

'It isn't,' Steve agreed, with his palm on Susan's office door handle, looking back at them.

'Can I suggest another route – a different approach altogether?'

Steve rolled his eyes, waiting to hear about another tedious couples' therapy technique. He sighed.

'What on your mind?' Asked Nicole, letting out a plastic smile intended to look artificial.

Susan chuckled softly, anxious about her unorthodox solution. 'Try God. Hand your marriage over to the big guy upstairs.'

There was a pause – a long one.

Dead silence.

Quiet.

Susan watched their reactions like a hawk, her gaze swivelling from him to her speedily.

'We aren't ... uhmmn ... we aren't religious,' said Nicole, wearing a confused look.

'Yeah, we aren't, doc.'

'And that's fine. I wouldn't force you into anything. I just wanted to offer another avenue to explore.'

Steve felt weird and uncomfortable about her suggestion. He'd been blindsided.

'I'm only suggesting it because it worked for my husband and I,' Susan explained, wearing her reading glasses again. 'We were on the brink of divorce, about ten years ago, after the birth of our little Kyle. We'd also tried different counsellors, without any luck.'

'And?' Asked Steve, stepping back inside now, curious.

'My younger brother's a Pastor. He'd been trying to get us saved for ... forever, basically. So finally I took him up on his offer. I was so desperate - our marriage had deteriorated to crumbs. Anyways, he asked me to bring Bill, my husband, to his chapel. We got born again, and Christ literally stitched our marriage back up - just like that. Well, not immediately. I had to warm up to scriptures like Ephesians 5:22 – *Wives submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord*. It's a good thing that the following verse instructs husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church,' Susan joked, trying to ease the evident tension.

Steve sat back down on his chair.

'So I recommend it to my clients. God can and will fix your marriage if you'll let Him in.'

Steve stole a glance at his wife, wondering if she'd consider this spiritual mumbo jumbo.

She turned to him also, wondering the same.

'It's so simple. We can do it right now,' Susan explained, depriving them of time to think about it, and refuse. 'All you do is accept Jesus as your Lord and saviour, and you're born again. Your journey

will start. And don't worry - I won't pressurize and call to check if you've gone to church and that sort of thing. In fact, we may never speak again after this meeting.'

'Okay. I'm in,' said Steve.

'Sure, why not?' Nicole reciprocated.

This brought tremendous joy in Susan's heart, though she hid it.

'Great! Close your eyes and repeat after me please,' asked Susan.

They obeyed and echoed.

'Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I believe that you died on the cross for me, and wiped my sins clean. I receive your divine forgiveness, oh Lord. Please come into my life and fill me with your Holy Spirit. I make you my Lord and saviour. Take my life and do something with it. I ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen.'

They opened their eyes.

'I don't feel any different,' said Steve matter-of-factly.

Susan almost laughed, but held herself back. 'What's important is that you're born again Christians now. All you have to do, from this point on, is read your bible - especially the New Testament,' she explained, pulling two little booklets from her desk drawer and walking around her table to them.

Nicole enquired. 'People say the bible is a bit tough. Can't you just tell us exactly where to read?'

Susan handed them the booklets titled *Marriage and Family Bible Verses*. 'All you do is read these scriptures, say twenty minutes a day, with your bible beside you.'

'That's it?' Asked Steve.

'Kinda. Christianity is basically about three things, guys: Having faith that Jesus died and forgave your sins at the cross – therefore we're healed, prosperous and blessed already. Secondly - loving God with all your heart and soul. You show this by reading and understanding his Word, the bible. Lastly - loving your neighbour as you love yourself. That's it. If you can honour those three things, your marriage will be renewed. I guarantee it.'

'Guarantee is a strong word, Susan,' Nicole highlighted, fiddling around to get purse, preparing to leave.

'God will rescue your marriage, if you both honour these three Christian principles. That's a fact. I mean, just think about the third principle: love your neighbour as you love yourself.'

They all stood.

'Okay, thanks doc,' said Steve, still a little unsure, paging through the booklet.

Susan walked them out, bidding them a happy farewell. She wore a huge silly grin as she closed the door behind them.

Victory! She thought, elated. She'd managed to win two souls within half an hour - WOW!

She understood, well, that the primary goal of all believers is to win souls - to bring non believers to Christ.

What an awesome day, she felt, dialling her receptionist's number.

'Postpone all my appointments for the next two hours, please. I have to step out,' she instructed, grabbing her handbag.

She was off to the local day spar for a foot and back massage. She'd also buy herself flowers and maybe a slab of chocolate.

The End.