

**April psychodrama, age 27. Shall I have an affair--or a marriage?**

**This psychodrama** allows us to make a smooth transition from Story 3 to Story 4. A childless couple who'd been married for five years, came to my office seeking marriage counseling. We did two or three couple's sessions, and I suggested they each join one of my outpatient groups. The man chose the Friday group and the woman the Tuesday group. It was one way of getting at what they hesitated saying in each other's presence. During warm-up of the Tuesday group, April told us: *I'm thinking of having an affair with my boss.* I wondered silently that she'd come out with this her very first time with the group. She was a very attractive hysteric character, eager to have men notice her (which they did). She was the envy (and animosity) of the women present.

Except for me, all the people there were strangers to her. She had no deep investment in their opinions of her, but she'd made herself unforgettable. After an inaudible gasp, someone put forth his agenda, and it looked as if the group would ignore her. But when faced with a choice between rivals who'd been protagonists often enough before, the group crossed over to the 'dark horse' as a welcome resolution of the dilemma.

When April came to the stage, I asked: *What makes this an issue for you just now?* I continued with a straight face: Was this your first offer? Hardly, she replied, with a grin. The women glared and the men laughed.

APRIL: This is the first time I was willing to consider it. As a matter of fact, he hasn't come forth with a proposition exactly (pause) yet (giggling from the sidelines) but he's in the habit of working late, and his wife checks up on him a lot. What a bitch she is! He can't do anything to please her.

DIRECTOR (wryly): At least that's what he said.

APRIL (emphatically): That's what I heard and saw!

DIRECTOR: Let's see that.

1) APRIL: Josie. that's her name, popped in and cross-examined me.

JOSIE (staring at April's bare left hand): He knows better than to hire someone like you for private secretary without my OK.

APRIL (to the director): My ring was being downsized at the jewelers. I'd been wearing it on a chain round my neck, but my blouse covered it most of the time. Bill (April's husband) insisted I get it fitted properly and wear it like I should. After I explained to Josie, she was satisfied for the time being.

JOSIE: Maybe we can meet your husband sometime?

APRIL (to the Director): I think she wanted her husband reminded that I have a husband.

2) (We staged this, but to be brief we'll proceed as if April were telling us a story from the first person viewpoint): When I stayed late, she phoned. He answered before I could. I could tell he planned to stay a lot longer, and then changed his mind. I told him he didn't have to pay me extra, but he smiled, said it was no problem, just a legitimate business expense.

DIRECTOR: Be your boss.

APRIL: I'm in my early forties with a full head of hair, greying slightly at the temples, trim moustache, and I don't wear glasses. I play tennis and handball regularly, go to a gym to lift weights. I know how to treat a woman, old style: opening doors, telling her how nice she looks, never taking her for granted, remembering anniversaries, appreciative of her attentions to me, like when she brings the coffee.

(To the director as herself): I always bring him coffee at the office too.

3) APRIL (continuing the story): He inherited the secretary from the previous owner. She'd been there since the firm opened, and had just retired when the present boss hired me.

DIRECTOR: I'll bet Josie never checked up on her!

APRIL: Oh yes she did. She saw her like a stand-in for the mother-in-law. My predecessor was one to smooth things over. When the wife phoned and the secretary answered, they'd go on ten or 15 minutes before she turned to call over to mother's only child. I wondered at his mother calling him at work, but he told me she didn't like how the wife answered the phone when she (the secretary) called him at home. That's why I was shocked that he grabbed the phone before I could reach it the night I worked there late. He said he was eager to hear from mother, and was obviously disappointed that it turned out to be Josie. Josie asked whether he was working alone and how soon would he be home?

DIRECTOR: This describes where the boss was coming from, but how did he let you know he was interested in you in that way?

APRIL: A girl knows these things. (This time the women laughed). It's the way he comes across. I caught his reflection in the window, and he was staring at me, hungry-like. He told me all about himself. He forgot the business. He must've guessed that my marriage was in trouble. He was very sympathetic. (The women exchanged knowing glances).

[I hope the above suffices to bring out the protagonist's attention-seeking provocative behavior. We learned she is a lot like the boss's wife, and I knew that the protagonist nagged her husband already from the couples sessions. That's why he was all for the counseling in the first place. This may be why she jumped at the chance to join a group without him. I had my own reasons. I knew we'd have to get into her relationship with her parents, and I couldn't do that so easily with him present. I already suspected she's frigid, and it came out that night that with regard to sex, she was *doing it more but enjoying it less*. The boss is a father-figure, and she was a daddy's little girl. The husband wouldn't fit, for he insisted on being a husband rather than a father-figure, and he wanted her response as a grown woman, not a little girl. I believe that our going into the childhood relationship with her parents was the main accomplishment of the evening, for it hadn't come into the couples sessions at all. We made full-circle and came back to the presenting comment, whether to go ahead and have an affair with her boss].

When she expressed her doubts the group told her frankly that they thought it would be a disaster for everybody concerned.

DIRECTOR: We know you have a taste for melodrama, but are you really ready to go through all the emotional wringing out your decision will bring? If you and the other man divorced spouses and married each other, wouldn't it end up a lot like the relationship the boss and his wife have right now. You'd need couples counseling, So let's do it right this time.

#### Comment

Should she tell her husband about this? I didn't think she should at this time, particularly if matters go no further, and she lets the boss know she's not interested, and he shouldn't ask. She should talk to him about her husband in a more appreciative way; be pleasant with his wife. When he talks about her, protect her point of view. That shouldn't be hard to imagine. Another plus for that session was her developing a solid relationship with the women in the group, and putting to rest male acting-out fantasies. Oh yes, the last I heard they were still married, and she whispered to me that sex with him was better now than it had ever been.