

1/15/19

Dear I,

Your most recent email was so sad. I could not help but cry. You told me the story of a true romance, and you know, it is the rare romance that can be considered a story of true love unless it ends with the lovers being star-crossed. Look at Casablanca. Would it be regarded as one of the greatest movie love stories of all time if the two lovers had happily walked of into the sunset, holding hands and heading for dinner at Rick's Café? No. Heartbreak is an essential part of great love stories.

I am so sorry for your heartbreak and sorry for Christine's heartbreak. In my opinion, she had no clue as to the real dynamics behind her decision to leave you and end up back with Don. Her reasoning was not rational, nor was it honest.

I will give you an example of the dishonesty. Do you remember when you and Christine stayed with Ken and me and our two babies, aged about 2 and 3, in our apartment near Seattle? I almost gasped when I saw Christine's forehead, because she had a scar running down the middle of it. It wasn't a terrible scar, but I grew up with her and I immediately noticed it. At one point I took her aside and said, what HAPPENED, you never mentioned anything on the phone or in a letter?

She put her finger to her lips and said, "Not now, I'll tell you later." Later, she said, "Don't bring the scar up, it happened when Don and I were making love and I hit my head on a sculptured piece of the bedstead. I had to go to the emergency room, and they stitched it up as well as they could. But "I" doesn't know that Don and I were "together" at that time."

I nodded and said that of course I wouldn't bring the subject up. Privately I was shocked. People's having affairs doesn't shock me. But I was surprised that someone so newly married would already have secrets about their sexual involvements. She always described Don to me as follows: "Cindy, do you remember Don, my good friend Don, whom I used to work with?" And it was like, "Hey Greg, have you met my cousin Gus, he's also a Seahawk fan!" He's my lover, but my story is that he's just a fellow Seahawk's fan.

I guess I was shocked that she would really think that you wouldn't perceive the truth. It kind of seemed to me, at the time, that she was constantly re-surveying the situation (Don or "I", what should I do?) to see if somewhere there were advantages she had not yet considered.

Why was she like this? I think it's because she was insecure, and always wanted to know that there was an alternative place to land, in case the engines failed.

I know you know that she was once married, for a short while, before she met Don. The man she married was so nice. He was 10 years younger than she was, his name was Delbert Provorse and he was of French Canadian origin. He joined the Navy, at the age of about 20, 21, and qualified to go through training to work on nuclear projects--probably nuclear subs. They need guys to swab the floors on subs just like anywhere else--except that these guys also have to be canny about handling nuclear devices.

As you can imagine, the Navy training was intense. After 6 months, Delbert just broke down and cried and told his commanding officer that he just couldn't keep up, it was too much for him. I think he left the Navy, but not with any dishonorable discharge. Maybe he stayed a couple of years in a less-challenging position.

But once Christine found out that he wasn't going to be a high-tech, highly-paid nuclear specialist in the Navy (and probably gone to sea for 6 months at a time) with all the perks that go with being a Navy wife (OK, I wouldn't dig it, but you do get taken care of), once all that changed, and it changed almost overnight, she was out of there. Good-bye Delbert. She didn't tell it to me that way; it's just that, when he left nuclear training, she left Florida, and came back to California. What more is there to say? I felt bad for Delbert.

Then, he kind of appeared again, to me, and I talked to him. It was over 35 years ago, I was living with my third husband and somehow we had some urgent question about Christine, we were trying to get hold of her, or something, and we needed to know something that Delbert might have known because of the time period he was with her. We located him, believe it or not, and I talked with him. He was so nice, he was concerned about Christine, and he gave us any info he could. That was the last I talked to him. He would be about 58 now, and I hope he's still alive and happy.

Here's another incident that made me think that in some ways, I did not understand my sister. She and I and a friend of hers were together on a Sunday afternoon and we lived off of Broadway, in Seattle. The whole family lived in a two-bedroom apartment, my parents were having financial difficulties. About 6 blocks north of the slightly fly-blown area in which we lived, the houses got really nice. There were mansions, and big houses that sat on half an acre of land, in the middle of densely-populated Capitol Hill. One of these houses had a goldfish pool in part of the huge, rambling yards that surrounded the house, and Christine said she had a surprise and that we should follow her. We did. We ended up on the cement walkway that surrounded the pool, which was a little murky, but clear enough to show schools of goldfish swimming around, some of them big.

Christine had a net and a jar with her, and she said, once we got there, that she was going to capture a couple of these goldfish and put them in her jar, with water, and take them home. Her friend and I were a little stunned. Huh? We

couldn't just take someone's goldfish. But we didn't know what to say. Parents could say things like, "You can't take things that don't belong to you, not if they already belong to somebody else." But as her friend and peer, sister, I couldn't say something like that.

It was as if I were to say, "Chris, dammit, what is the matter with you? You're talking about STEALING." Then what? We all go home different paths and not talk to each other again? I was at such a loss as to find a way to make her aware of something so basic. And her girlfriend was definitely too timid for that. We just stared at each other, then at Christine, then back at each other.

But Chris was undeterred by our reluctance to do anything but just stand there, and she tried again and again to capture some fish with her little hand-sized net. Finally, the whole event came to a close, what with the failing light, the falling temperature, the inactivity and boredom on the part of the non-participants, Christine's failure to net any fish, and the fear on the part of two of us that the homeowners were going to come out into their backyard and ask us what the hell we were doing on their property?

We went home, two of us so relieved that Christine hadn't caught any fish. I don't know about her girlfriend, but I was from then on very perturbed about Christine's take on societal norms. How did her mind work?

I ran into these kinds of problems, with Christine, when my mom's care and using the money from her estate came into question. You know the later set of pictures, of Christine sitting at a table with Don? The pink cement patio that was in the picture was extensive, not only spacious but walled off where the hillside started, about 30 feet from their back door. Christine lived at the end of a cul-de-sac that was outside of town. Her house was at the top of the cul-de-sac, and the cul-de-sac itself was part of a hillside. I think a lot of the cul-de-sac was gravel, and a cement truck had to back up to the top of the hill and dump the wet cement and spread it out.

I believe that the creation of that patio was pretty expensive. Christine's explanation as to why mom's money had been spent on this project was that mom could sit outside in the summer and listen to the birds. There were a number of projects that got done with mom's estate money (when Bob Brinton died). So it took the court about 5 minutes after reviewing the paperwork to give me complete custody of mom. (Not having any knowledge of how bad things had got, I called Christine and tried to talk to her about having an official, legal, joint custody arrangement. She got mad at me very easily during those times. The legal secretary for the lawyer we finally hired tried to talk to Christine about such a joint custody arrangement (joint guardianship?), and the secretary told me that Christine had replied to the suggestion with the statement: "There is no way

I will ever share custody of mom with Cindy." So on to court we went, and I was awarded full custody.

This decision was a terrible blow for Christine, an emotional blow even more than a financial blow. Once again that stinking big sister had convinced everyone that Cindy was right, Cindy knew what was best, and Chris' efforts could be disregarded and disrespected. I believe that that is how she felt, and it breaks my heart to think of her heartbreak. How rejected she always felt. Way, way underneath.

I have come to think that Christine was even more amoral than I am (I don't care too much about living my life according to rules that other people form). But way, way more amoral, to a point sometimes that I could not grasp. And that brings me to something else that I cannot grasp.

I cannot grasp why she was so mean to you. You loved her so much, you forgave her so much, but she could not use your kindnesses to cogitate on why it was so important to give you back the kind of love you gave her. When I read your letter I felt so bad for you. And I always feel bad for Chris, because for all her efforts to try to ensure that she would have a soft landing (the fall she saw as inevitable), she never found happiness, I don't think. Except for those times when she was happy with you, and probably during her first years with Don.

Know this, I, it is only my humble opinion, but it is my opinion, that Christine's outrage at your sexual encounters with other women was an excuse for her to avoid a situation that would have HAD to come up at some point, where she would have had to say, "Because, I, I've thought about it, and I don't WANT to have children, or RAISE children, it's just not something I've ever really yearned for."

Myself, I've had extra-marital affairs, but they never overlapped with what I think of as my REAL life, my life with my family. Sometimes the "family" was just my husband and me, but to me, THAT was "my family", in addition to any siblings or parents still alive. The point is, those escapades or sharing of true affection, sometimes one, sometimes the other, never changed my relationship with my family.

If I got a new manager at work, that change was not one that generally affected my family, or I had a new co-worker that I got along well with--none of these things changed or lessened my interactions with my family. Maybe it's different for other people, but what I describe is the way that life works for me. I don't have experiences like these any more, I'm seventy, but if my husband would really LIKE a lap dance for his 78th birthday, next October, I'd take him to a strip club, no prob. And I wouldn't think, "I wonder if he still loves me after being around a beautiful, sexy 22-year-old?" I know he still loves me because no one else has a relationship with him like the one that he and I have.

So I cannot judge your having extra-marital affairs, which I would regard as totally normal if you were halfway around the world doing your work and I had CHOSEN not to stay with you, maybe for a variety of very good reasons (an ulcer? A chronic medical condition needing periodic treatment from first-world medical care?) But the point is, if month after month, I wasn't there, I would EXPECT you to have some sexual outlet. As long as the love is the same, the rest is secondary. And yes, the fact that Christine blew when she did, I put down to fear of facing the fact, both to you and herself, that she just didn't want to have children. I am so sorry.

I did not ask, but I will now, after discussing this whole issue with you, a big question: did you ever have children? I hope so, so much.

Write me anytime, and good luck with everything. And congratulations on your being happy with your significant other!

Cindy