When the other woman is his job
by Christy Scannell

Our friend Matt has been working late a lot recently. For the last several weekends, when Matt’s kids were eagerly anticipating a game of baseball with him in their backyard, Matt told them he had to go to the office.

Then there was the birthday dinner. Matt’s wife, Laura, invited Rich and me and another couple to celebrate Matt’s birthday a few weeks ago at his favorite steakhouse. We all arrived at seven, as planned, but Matt wasn’t there.

By 7:30, we were on our second round at the bar. Our table was ready, so we were seated. Matt still hadn’t turned up. When Laura called his cell phone, he said he was getting ready to walk out his office door, and that we should all order dinner.

He’d catch up, he said.

We ordered. When the food arrived, we ate. Just as the waiter was describing the dessert tray, Laura’s cell phone rang. It was Matt.

We all tried not to listen as she whispered in strained tones, but we snapped to attention when she said, “Bye” and closed her phone.

“He says he won’t be joining us,” Laura said sullenly.

“Wh—” Rich started to ask why his best friend was dissing us on his own birthday, but the look on Laura’s face was enough to stifle his curiosity.

While the guys paid the check, Laura, Beth, and I darted to the ladies room. We weren’t one second through the door when Laura started crying.

“I think Matt’s having an affair!” she wailed.

“Oh, Laura.” We tried to console her but the quick glance I got from Beth told me we all three thought Matt was up to something, and it wasn’t good.

We drove Laura home. As soon as Rich got back in the car from walking her to her door, I told him about Laura’s suspicions. I expected him to dismiss the idea, but he surprised me.

“Yes, something is definitely wrong there,” he nodded. “I need to have a talk with ol’ Matty.”

So the next weekend, Rich met up with Matt—his buddy since high school—to watch a baseball game. And at some point between the second and third innings,
Matt made a confession: he was indeed having an affair.

With his job.

Okay, so he didn’t exactly put it that way, but that’s what I thought when Rich recounted their conversation to me. He said Matt admitted that work was all he could think about, and even though he knew his time at the office was straining his marriage and disappointing his kids, professional success was the only thing that made him feel invigorated anymore. Plus, he said, his efforts allowed him to provide well for his family.

Was Matt committing adultery? No, but he was being unfaithful in other ways. By working so much, he temporarily widowed his wife and left his kids fatherless. While he sought the exhilaration of his next promotion, his family—the reason, he said, he worked so hard—was left behind. Ironically, his attempt to provide for his family left them instead with very little.

It’s times like these that make me examine my own marital scorecard. Is my marriage still the second most important thing in my world after my relationship with God? Or have I allowed Rich to slide into the third or fourth slot in favor of other pursuits?

For me, work and hobbies are easily kept in check. What I battle are emotions—worry, fear—that envelope me in a sort of fog. The more I fixate on them, the less attentive I am with Rich. And the less attentive I am, the more distant we become.

When Rich asks, “Are you doing okay?” in his lovingly pointed sort of way, I know he’s really saying, “I am concerned about your negative attitude.” Then when I respond with a halfhearted yes, he reminds me: “We have a great life, you know?”

He gets me with that one every time. As much as I’d like to wallow in my worries and fears, I know that God has a great plan for my life—a plan that includes a healthy, loving marriage. Focusing on that, I gradually pack up my emotional baggage. The more bad emotions I chuck, the more room I have to embrace Rich—and our love affair.

Questions for Reflection

- “For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer…” are part of the Catholic wedding vows. How has Matt misinterpreted these?
- Do you agree with the order Christy uses for importance in her life: God, marriage, self?
- What would you suggest for Matt and Laura to do to help their marriage?

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