

naked

CONFESSIONS
of
ADULTERY
and
INFIDELITY

Edited by

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Some time ago, in the space of one week, three friends sought Kylie out. They came individually, unaware of the others, but each told the same story, albeit with three different casts and from three different viewpoints.

The first, A, confided in Kylie over dinner. After the usual chat about children and school canteen arrangements, A put down her glass and said, *Enough. I have to talk.* There was this man, she confessed, and she was crazy about him. Well, actually he was more like a boy—her personal trainer, only one step up from the pool guy in the cliché stakes, but she had fallen hard for him. *It's not love,* she said, *but I can't stop thinking about him.* They hadn't yet had sex, though things had got heated and were moving inexorably in that direction. *I can't stop!* she reiterated, looking stricken and defiant in equal parts. *I'm not going to leave Daniel and I do feel dreadful, but I have to see where this goes.*

B's situation was different. She was a former colleague of Kylie's, married to a prominent figure in the community for more than a quarter of a century. They were an impressive couple: smart, good looking, both highly regarded in their fields, the proud parents of a brood of attractive and well-brought-up children. She'd thought everything was fine. Then a month ago he'd suddenly revealed that

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he had been having an affair with an employee for a number of years. As if that wasn't enough, he was currently trying to decide which way to jump. He stayed at home most of the week, playing at happy families for the benefit of the children, but spent some nights with his mistress, keeping both women on tenterhooks.

C also met someone through work. What she described wasn't a physical affair, but they shared an office and talked all the time. Both were married; both enjoyed the interest and approbation of an attractive member of the opposite sex. Working together on an intense and important project they'd become closer and closer, spending first forty, then fifty and sixty hours a week in each other's company. When asked if anything had happened, C laughed and said they were both too tired. *But we're so mentally attuned*, she added, looking guilty. *I feel unfaithful because I share so much with him—not just work, but everything going on in my life, even in my marriage. Something happens at home and my first thought is 'I must remember to tell Chris that'. We've never even kissed, but he's my soul mate.*

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It's one of the oldest stories in the world. It's in Shakespeare, the Bible, literature of every age and nation; it's in the gossip mags and the agony pages. Boy meets girl, but sometimes, a little while later, boy meets another girl. Or girl marries boy but finds herself drawn to someone else. Does she stay or does she go—resist or give in?

We felt dreadful for B, but to be honest, the overwhelming reaction to all three of the stories was pure, unvarnished curiosity. What happened next? Where would it end? How did they feel? And, most of all, why? Why now? Why at all?

Searching for answers to these questions, we placed advertisements in writers' magazines and on websites, looking for true stories of adultery or infidelity. Over five hundred people answered those ads. Many simply wanted to pour out their pain; a few told us we would burn in hell for even mentioning the topic. Some wanted advice or a friendly ear; others submitted graphic sexual material, which

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completely missed the point: it wasn't the sex we were interested in so much as why it had occurred and what it meant. Word of mouth spread, and more inquiries arrived. We sent out longer, more detailed guidelines and over the next year the essays began to mount up.

As they came in we saw all sides of the equation: the cheaters, the cheated-on, the cheated-with. We received stories from the children and friends of adulterers; from people in their early twenties to others in their sixties; from one-off flings to decades-long entanglements; from those who had never even met to others who have a regular arrangement to this day; and in one case, we heard from both sides of the same story. Some essays were eloquent, polished, considered. Others were raw, almost still bleeding. Yet for all their diversity, the many submissions had something in common: they were honest. We had asked contributors to be frank and frank they were; laying themselves and their situations bare, prepared to sift for meaning amongst the rubble of bad behaviour and broken promises.

A number of themes emerged, some we had anticipated, others we hadn't. Many contributors wrote of the pain arising from their situation, either as the betrayer or the betrayed. One woman, discovering that the husband she had sacrificed her own career for had been systematically unfaithful over the last few years of their long marriage, spoke of her anger and grief: 'The deep end was not deep enough for me. I went off it and still it was too shallow. I screamed, I shouted, I hyperventilated, I scratched his face . . .'

Guilt was expressed, but not always from the expected quarters. Certainly a number of cheaters felt guilt about their actions, but so too did some of the cheated on: for staying in the relationship after they knew of the infidelity, for allowing things to reach that stage, for not being better partners in the first place. These were some of the saddest stories.

Others, though, spoke of what had been gained. 'I wasn't looking for anyone; I had no reason to look,' writes one man, happily married to his childhood sweetheart for thirty years. His creativity is rekindled

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by the new relationship and he begins to write again for the first time in decades. Another contributor discovered that, too afraid to test her limits otherwise, she was using infidelity to ‘unearth and nurture new components of my being’. A third revealed that after they both had affairs, she and her husband had to learn *not* to trust each other, and writes of how this actually saved their marriage. Whatever the outcome, in every story infidelity is a catalyst for fresh starts or new insights or increased self-knowledge.

We were also intrigued by the similarity of the words used for the process of falling hopelessly in love. Editors do not like to see the same terms used over and over again in a book, and at times it was difficult not to sneak in a little cosmetic change here or there to avoid repetition. But in the end, we decided that these repetitions served to reinforce the universal nature of this human dilemma. You will read several variations on the theme that lovers share the same brain. You will see over and over again that passionate love denied makes us feel physically sick—lovesick. You will discover that many people have identified one of the first symptoms of this dangerous state of being as the recurring need to share their experiences of life with the object of their desire: *I must remember to tell him this* or *She would think that was funny*.

Several other contributors speak of feeling ‘found’. Why is it that so many of our writers felt so lost in the first place? Humans find a powerful sense of connection in these relationships, connections that we neglect, ignore or grow immune to within our long-term relationships.

The road to publication for this collaboration has been surprisingly free of problems. There have been no major disagreements and any minor ones have been easily worked through. One of the first issues to be resolved was the terms of reference. Kylie favoured using the word ‘infidelity’ because it is a much broader category and encompasses a more interesting range of stories. Leigh preferred ‘adultery’. In the end, the compromise was simple: we used both words because, as you

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will see from some of these stories, infidelity is not necessarily adultery and adultery is not necessarily infidelity.

Merriam Webster's Dictionary tells us *infidelity* is 'unfaithfulness to a moral obligation; disloyalty', while adultery is defined as 'voluntary sexual intercourse between a married man and someone other than his wife, or between a married woman and someone other than her husband.' These definitions imply that infidelity involves the breaking of an emotional trust, while adultery may be simply the act of having sex with someone other than your spouse. There are several stories about open relationships in this collection arguing that this of itself is not necessarily betrayal.

But somehow the very word *adultery* sounds more sinister. It's deep, dark and biblical. It hooks right into that fundamental place in the psyche where most of us store our first teachings of right and wrong: the Ten Commandments. *Thou shalt not commit adultery*. Our religious leaders, parents and society in general say so. Experience, either our own or that of our friends, tells us that to give in to the sometimes overwhelming desire to betray our vows of fidelity is a certain path to pain and ruin. And yet, we keep on committing adultery. Not everyone, of course. But a large number of us. People who are otherwise honest and trustworthy often lie and cheat on the people to whom they are closest. Infidelity—our own, our partner's or that of a friend or relative—is a part of our lives that we must routinely live and work around. Who can really know what percentage of the general population ultimately gives in to the temptation to enter into an intimate relationship with someone other than their partner?

One of the greatest strengths of this collection is that it is full of the common sense of the average person's experience. Some of the contributors to *Naked* are professional writers, others have previously written nothing longer than a Valentine's Day card. When we set out to gather these stories, we wanted the participants to understand that they did not need to be an expert in anything except their own lives. This is not a book by authorities telling us how to do this or how

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to stop doing that. This is a book by a group of people making themselves naked, telling us simply and honestly and in their own words: I did this, this is what happened and this is what I learned from it.

Naked: Confessions of adultery and infidelity was compiled not in an attempt to excuse or encourage unfaithfulness, but to understand it. We have learned that infidelity and adultery are rarely just about sex. That, for better or worse, and regardless of the morality involved, they are powerful and life-changing. That love and lust are complicated, and not for the faint-hearted. *Naked* is a sadder book than we expected, but it is also wiser. It is part of the collected wisdom of humankind in the truest sense of the words.