

THE HIDDEN LOVER

*What Women Need to Know That
Men Can't Tell Them*

WILLIAM JULY II

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Know That Men Can't Tell Them

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LOVER

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Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[CHAPTER 1 - REAL LOVER OR HIDDEN LOVER](#)

[CHAPTER 2 - HOW HIDDEN LOVERS HIDE IN RELATIONSHIPS](#)

[CHAPTER 3 - HIS HIDDEN PAIN](#)

[CHAPTER 4 - HOW TRYING TO BE SUPERMAN CREATES A HIDDEN LOVER](#)

[CHAPTER 5 - THE HIDDEN LOVER NEEDS YOUR HELP BUT DOESN'T WANT TO ASK FOR IT](#)

[CHAPTER 6 - HOW FEAR OF LOSING FREEDOM AFFECTS THE HIDDEN LOVER](#)

[CHAPTER 7 - THE HIDDEN LOVER'S NEED FOR APPRECIATION AND RESPECT](#)

[CHAPTER 8 - THE HIDDEN LOVER'S VIEWS ON SEX He's Not Like All the Other Guys](#)

[CHAPTER 9 - WHY THE HIDDEN LOVER FEELS HE CAN'T REALLY TALK TO YOU](#)

[CHAPTER 10 - THE LADIES HAVE THEIR SAY Things Women Want Their Hidden Lovers to Know](#)

[CHAPTER 11 - HIDDEN RELATIONSHIP SINKERS](#)

[CHAPTER 12 - HELP, I'M IN LOVE WITH A HIDDEN LOVER ! What You Can and Can't Do to Help Him](#)

[CHAPTER 13 - ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT HIDDEN LOVERS](#)

[CHAPTER 14 - WHAT THE HIDDEN LOVER MUST DO TO CHANGE HIMSELF](#)

[A SPECIAL MESSAGE - Thoughts on Remembering to Love](#)

[WEB RESOURCES](#)

[BOOKS TO HELP HIDDEN LOVERS HEAL AND WOMEN TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THEM](#)

[GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS](#)

[WILLIAM JULY ONLINE AND IN PERSON](#)

[ALSO BY WILLIAM JULY II](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

DEDICATED TO LOVERS— the world's destiny is in our hands

*“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part
then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”*

1 CORINTHIANS 13:12

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INTRODUCTION

I've devoted a lot of time and energy to the subject of relationships because I'm fascinated by the dynamics that seem to pull us in and out of one another's lives. That fascination didn't begin as a carefree hobby, but rather as a quest to discover what relationships meant to me as I constantly went in and out of them. Those thoughts and reflections then grew into written expressions from my heart, which eventually became the books I now write.

In discovering the lover within, I also discovered many things about myself as a man and what we perceive to be manhood in America. Many of the masculine traits we celebrate are indeed admirable and important, such as decisiveness, single-minded focus, determination, independence and strength. On the other hand, when these traits are taken to the extreme and become hyper-masculine distortions, they become self-destructive. When a man becomes hyper masculine, he begins to rot away inside, a process which manifests itself through broken relationships, addictions or overly aggressive behavior. Thinking on these things and talking at length with other men, I began to see how such distortions of manhood work to ruin our relationships with women. Those observations led to my previous book *Understanding the Tin Man: Why So Many Men Avoid Intimacy*.

Upon completing *Understanding the Tin Man*, I felt there was another dimension to the issue that needed to be discussed at length. There is another type of man similar to the tin man who actually operates exclusively within relationships. Like the tin man, he has problems with intimacy. But unlike the tin man, this man, the "hidden lover," has a different dilemma with intimacy. He isn't avoiding intimacy like the tin man. The hidden lover feels drawn toward intimacy but has trouble making the connection because he feels blocked when it comes to expressing what he feels inside.

That's why this book was written. There are many things that men haven't said to women about how they feel. Most men, despite their stoic exterior, have a full range of feelings operating under the hood. They have passionate feelings and emotions that they may not be expressing to women because they aren't yet comfortable doing so. This book aims to bring some of those issues to the surface.

Bringing those issues to the surface wasn't easy. In doing my research for this book, I encountered hundreds of women who were more than willing to share their opinions, anecdotes and experiences in relationships. But men, the subject of the book, weren't so forthcoming. In fact, sometimes I felt like Indiana Jones when I was trying to find men who would speak up about the things they wanted women to know. I should clarify that it wasn't difficult to get men to complain about things. But to get men to go to the next level and talk about the fears and vulnerabilities behind those complaints was a different thing altogether.

In an odd way, it was actually funny sometimes. One moment a guy would be brash, outspoken and strongly opinionated. But when I tried to go from general generic issues into more personal subjects, he'd freeze. Getting men to talk about their fears and vulnerabilities in relationships can be like pulling teeth.

On the other hand, there were men who had long been looking for an opportunity to talk about the issues that most affect them emotionally. Those men found my probing to be a release because they wanted to talk about these things. These men had pent-up feelings and emotions to vent, so for them just getting a listening ear was soothing. That's the goal of this book. I want men to get an opportunity to expose their most guarded feelings to women in a safe environment. In turn, I want women to hear some of the fears and vulnerabilities of men without all of the emotions that are usually erupting when a man's feelings finally surface.

My hope is that reading this book will lead men and women into dialogues of their own at the breakfast table or in the bedroom—wherever their discussion needs to take place. To that end, I invite you not only to read this book but also to try the self-exploratory journal exercises at the end of each chapter. I hope you'll find this book a catalyst for your own conversations in helping you reach more fulfillment in your relationships and personal life.

CHAPTER 1

REAL LOVER OR HIDDEN LOVER

Which One Is He?

Lover. It must be one of the most misunderstood and abused words in the English language. Often we take the meaning of “lover” to be only romantic or sexual. But let’s take a new look at the word “lover.” When we do so, we discover that hidden within that word is a new meaning that we can apply to our relationships to make them better.

First, let’s look at the word “love” as defined by Webster’s dictionary [1](#):

Love—a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person. An intense personal attachment or affection.

Love—a devoted attachment or passionate affection for another person.

Note, the word “sex” is nowhere to be found in this definition of the word “love.”

Now let’s look at the definition of the suffix “er” as defined by the American Heritage dictionary*:

-er—“one that performs a specified action.”

Combining the word “love” with the suffix “er,” we get the true definition of the word “lover.” To paraphrase, *a real lover is a person who works at a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person.*

Which brings me to my point and the purpose of this book. The real lover in so many men is hidden behind walls. On the outside, men tend to show their affection through money, gifts, sex or doing things for a woman. Giving in these ways is good, but there is a deeper and more intimate place where women ultimately want to connect with us. Women want to connect with our feelings. That’s where the real lover dwells inside of us. But when it comes to sharing the real lover inside, many men are hiding. Afraid or unwilling to put in the emotional work necessary to make a true connection to a woman. This book sheds light on the reluctance of men to be complete lovers by revealing what so many men are hesitant to discuss and the reasons for the silence. The issue is two-sided, involving both how men relate to women and how women view and relate to men. That’s why open and direct communication is needed on this issue—not as a matter of placing blame, but as a realistic and balanced approach to the issues that cause men to “hide” their thoughts and feelings. I hope that through reading this book, women will better understand men. And as for the hidden lover, I hope it helps him take a step toward a “profoundly tender, passionate affection” for his significant other.

EASIER SAID THAN DONE

Being a lover is a 24–7, 365-day-a-year job for which the weak need not apply. It includes running errands, cooking, cleaning, doing things when you want to (and when you don't!), communicating, seeing a woman at her best and her least, helping her, knowing when to just listen and not help. In other words, it requires commitment. Look at the root of the word “commitment” and you find the word “commit.” To sum it up, one has to really put himself into the whole of a relationship for it to work, not just the easy parts. Many men (and women) opt out of the work part; they just want the romance, the euphoric highs that come at the beginning. Maybe that's why there are so many people with the title boyfriend, girlfriend, husband and wife, yet not enough of them seem to be lovers. I'll be the first one to tell you that this is easier said than done. But that's where the commitment part comes in.

There are two reasons it's difficult to overcome being a hidden lover. First, one must do an honest self-inventory. We must ask ourselves the hard questions about who we are. Also, we must reflect upon the events and people who contributed to making us who we are. Some people don't want to look at themselves that closely because it isn't usually a very comfortable process. However, this is a step that must be taken. Lack of self-reflection is one of the main reasons we go plunging headfirst into a relationship after relationship not knowing what we want or should expect from the other person. Much of the time we don't even know that much about ourselves.

The second obstacle to overcoming being a hidden lover is found in the societal role that men play. The traditional role of men in our society has given us all a mask to wear. The mask of superman: the man who must make big money, have all the power, know the answer to every question, etc. We feel we must be the man who gets a promotion every year at work, repairs the car, balances the checkbook, and makes love all night. Starting from the time we are young boys in this society, we're taught that such things are expected of us, and that those things add up to our value as men. So instead of expressing ourselves when we feel the burden is too heavy, we keep a stiff upper lip. We wear the mask hiding how we really feel deep inside, where it burns a hole in our souls.

Yet there's a part of every man that yearns to take off the mask. Inside every hidden lover is a man who would love to have the freedom to be expressive and feel safe enough to share his vulnerabilities. Because this often conflicts with the role he feels he must assume in his relationship, many men rarely express their true emotions, even to the women they love. And as long as that wall is there, the relationship can't reach its highest level.

WHY THERE IS A HIDDEN LOVER INSIDE EVERY MAN

As I mentioned, from the time we are boys we men are taught to hide or suppress our emotions and feelings. Boys are programmed to define manhood by power and achievement. For example, observe some of the games boys play: arm wrestling, hard-hitting tackle football, foot races, wrestling, king of the mountain. Boys are always testing each other to see who is stronger, faster and taller. They're placing their worth in those things. Therefore, it's easy for boys to slip into a mindset that views emotions and feelings as of secondary importance, if not altogether a nuisance. The reality is that men

and boys do feel emotions and desire to experience that part of themselves, but unfortunately many of us feel we have to hide them in order to fill the role we perceive as being a man. To put it another way, men and boys learn to hide their humanness deep inside while presenting a game face for the world, a face that shows no emotion or vulnerability. It is that very hiding that creates the hidden lover. *The hidden lover longs for pure open connection, emotionally and spiritually, with his mate.*

Now that I've defined what I mean by the term "hidden lover," I want to elaborate on some of the things that create barriers to intimate connection for hidden lovers.

MAJOR CHALLENGES FACED BY HIDDEN LOVERS

Healing from pain in his past so it doesn't ruin his relationship. (See Chapter 3, His Hidden Pain.)

Explaining to his significant other why he feels communicating with her can be difficult. (See Chapter 9, Why the Hidden Lover Feels He Can't Really Talk to You.)

Learning to feel comfortable asking his significant other for help. (See Chapter 5, The Hidden Lover Needs Your Help but Doesn't Want to Ask for It.)

Managing the responsibilities of a relationship without feeling burdened. (See Chapter 6, How Fear of Losing Freedom Affects the Hidden Lover.)

His views on sex. (See Chapter 8, The Hidden Lover's Views on Sex: He's Not Like All the Other Guys.)

Overcoming rigid old beliefs about manhood that make it difficult for him to overcome being a hidden lover. (See Chapter 4, How Trying to Be Superman Creates a Hidden Lover.)

Expressing to his lover that he wants to be appreciated. (See Chapter 7, The Hidden Lover's need for Appreciation and Respect.)

WHY CAN'T MEN JUST TELL WOMEN THESE THINGS?

There are lots of reasons men feel they can't tell women the things that are in this book. Some men don't know how to put these things into words. Some men feel their mate just couldn't handle the truth, that she'd be hurt, overly sensitive or angry if she knew some of the things that are revealed in this book. For those reasons many men feel they should just grin and bear it. They take a "why bother" attitude and keep their feelings inside for the sake of peace. But it's not healthy for a relationship to have issues that are rumbling just below the surface and threatening to ultimately rip things apart. When an issue stands in the way of a couple's growth or cohesiveness, the "why bother" belief will only make the problem worse. It's better to get things out into the open: the good, the bad and the ugly.

I've written some pretty bold things in this book. It rips the cover off political correctness in relationships and dares to expose the raw feelings that men have about some things. Please don't take this as a whine fest or a gripe-a-thon; nor is it intended as a list of excuses men use to avoid being intimate and accountable in relationships. The men who are whiners and gripers are not hidden lovers.

they're just lazy and looking for excuses. This book is about the men who want to connect, but have serious and very real obstacles to doing so. To that end, I feel it is necessary to be blunt and, where necessary, to go outside the bounds of political correctness.

IT'S NOT JUST A MALE ISSUE

Anybody, male or female, can be a hidden lover. The issues of the hidden lover have more to do with how people act in a relationship than with their gender. When I was on tour promoting my book *Understanding the Tin Man*, many women told me they were "tin women," which underscored the reality that intimacy issues aren't a problem just for men. These issues have to do with each person's unique life circumstances and experiences. Of course, we don't have to choose to be controlled by our emotional history; we can change. To that end, although this book is addressed toward the issues of men, it also offers an opportunity for healing to the many women who see a hidden lover in themselves as they read this book.

THE HIDDEN LOVER QUIZ

Label the following comments as true or false. Keep a running tally of your "true" responses. Then score yourself on the scale following the quiz.

I let my significant other know only about half of what I'm really feeling.

I will never completely open up to my significant other.

Honesty is an idealistic goal rather than a day-to-day reality in relationships; sometimes a small lie is better than being truthful.

I would rather not tell her something if I think my significant other is going to want to discuss it.

I usually avoid arguments with my significant other by avoiding things we disagree on even if it means I don't get to express how I feel.

I feel more free and uninhibited around other women than I do with my significant other.

I feel unappreciated by my significant other.

I feel uncomfortable asking my significant other for help, even when I really need it.

I don't feel sexy when I'm with my significant other.

The responsibilities I have to carry in my relationship make me feel more like a slave than a husband or boyfriend.

I have not discussed my sexual desires and satisfaction with my mate.

I have not asked my mate about her sexual desires and level of satisfaction.

My mate's family/friends have an undue influence on our relationship.

My significant other doesn't know about my painful past.

My significant other uses my past to manipulate me.

I feel that I have to try to be superman in my relationship.

I feel that I can't fulfill my part of the financial relationship.

My mate doesn't seem to feel safe and secure with me.

There are some things in our relationship that could tear us apart if we don't deal with them.

I feel that my mate doesn't understand my inner feelings.

My mate knows of my inner feelings but doesn't seem interested in their effect on me.

My mate feels threatened anytime I try to improve myself.

RESULTS

Rate your responses on the scale below.

0–4 “true” responses = Connected Lover

5–10 “true” responses = Hidden Lover

11–15 “true” responses = First-Degree Hidden Lover

16 or more “true” responses = Hard-Core Hidden Lover

SO WHAT CAN WE (MEN AND WOMEN) DO ABOUT IT?

First, hidden lovers have to identify themselves as such and they have to want to change—not only for the sake of their relationships, but for themselves. If they want to change for any other reason, it's change only on the surface. If you love a hidden lover, you have to realize that you can't change him. However, you can play a significant supporting role in his change. Throughout the rest of this book I'll explore the hidden lover and discuss some real strategies for change and personal transformation. But as you read, remember that discovering these issues and working to change them is a process that doesn't happen overnight.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECT OF KEEPING A JOURNAL

While reading this book, it will help to keep a journal. I've found writing in a journal to be a great way to release energy and patch the soul when it is wounded. It is a great creative resource as well. What you write—be it details of your personal life, concepts or snippets and stories from your day—is up to you. A journal can be a great way to let off steam or deal with some pent-up energies.

However, as to how journal writing relates to this book, I have some specific suggestions. Writing in a journal is a particularly effective means to delve into feelings. It's a place to have a one-way conversation about anything you like. You can dump feelings, ideas or fears there without ever having to worry about what someone will say. You can rant, rave or just go off if you want to and you never

have to worry about having someone else attempt to argue with you about it. For the time you're writing in your journal, it's all about what you're feeling.

I encourage everyone reading this book (man or woman) to start a journal and follow along with the journalizing exercises at the end of each chapter. Your journal doesn't have to be elaborate. But it's best if it is something bound because you'll want to go back and revisit your thoughts days, months, even years later. You can pick up a simple spiral notebook from the grocery store; or if you prefer, fancier journals are available at bookstores, department stores and specialty shops.

Keep your journal in a safe place, even under lock and key if necessary! Since it contains deep feelings and emotions, it isn't to be shared with just anyone. And it certainly shouldn't be left anywhere it could be picked up by someone else. Someone reading your journal is the same as someone eavesdropping on you. The person will likely see things he or she isn't supposed to see and doesn't understand, and therefore will misinterpret. Protect your journal to protect your privacy.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Do the questions on the hidden lover quiz remind you of someone you've ever been involved with (or are involved with now)?

Do you feel you are play-acting in your relationships with the opposite sex? If so, where did you learn that role? How can you get out of that role and be yourself?

What are some things about yourself you may be hiding in relationships?

JOURNAL ENTRY

How well do you think you know your mate? List four things (about him) that you know. On this list, mix simple and complex items. An example of a simple item would be his or her favorite food. An example of a complex item would be knowing the story behind a person or event that significantly changed his or her life.

A LETTER FROM THE HIDDEN LOVER, PART 1

I'm going to be perfectly honest with you as I write these letters, even if it means saying things that may not sound so great. The reason I'm going to be so straightforward is that I need to say the things. I have stuff that I carry around with me that stresses me out sometimes so much that I feel trapped. And if that isn't bad enough, those things often have to do with you, the woman in my life, the woman I want to have a close and intimate relationship with.

But having said that, I have to be honest and say that there's a history behind some of the issues we have which goes beyond my relationship with you. Some of these issues and blocks to intimacy and closeness started a long time ago. You didn't really have anything to do with them. Yet they still affect me today, and therefore us as a couple.

On the other hand, some of the things that tend to stand between us aren't connected to my past and are problems or issues that you and I have. I feel that if you were aware of these things, maybe you

could change them, or at least do them less frequently. But we'll get to that in another letter. Right now I just want to keep writing about how I feel. I'm able to write these things to you in a letter better than I think I can say them. I really believe that after I've written these letters and you've read them I'll feel more comfortable about opening up to you. You'll know an entirely different side of me that you didn't know existed. It's funny how we sometimes think we know all there is to know about a person and then suddenly we find out there's a lot more to them than what we knew—and how that changes the way we look at them and feel about them forever. That's the feeling you'll get as you read my letters. You're going to see the man you love in another light.

But don't look for me to change overnight. It's going to take time. Believe it or not, I've been trying to change for a while now. In fact, in my mind at least, I have changed. I can even give you a couple examples.

Remember how you used to get upset because I didn't seem to enjoy holding hands in public? Well if you recall, last weekend as we left the movie it was I who initiated our holding hands instead of you. As usual, I felt a little uncomfortable because I'm not into public displays of affection, but instead of drawing my hand away, I just tuned everybody else out.

Also, though you may not know it, I've been doing a lot of thinking lately. Last year when we felt like we were going to call it quits was an important time for me. That was when I realized that my hard exterior was protecting me and helping me feel strong, but it wasn't helping our relationship. It was weird, but when we talked openly about what we had to do to stay together, though I may have acted unemotional, I was all stirred up inside. I actually liked talking to you about all that. Only I don't want to have to come to the point of breaking up again in order to air things out. I want to learn to get feelings and issues out into the open in a way that doesn't hurt.

I guess this is about me learning to be more tuned in to my senses. I don't like to use the term "getting in touch with my feminine side." I prefer to look at myself in the same light as the ancient poet-warriors. They were strong and fierce fighting men, but they appreciated and valued the emotional and aesthetic side. I've learned from that example that if I become a little more sensitive, it will make me feel like a stronger man because then I won't be afraid of what I'm feeling anymore. My feelings can then be powerful assets to me in my life. Being afraid of my own feelings has made me do some crazy things before and I don't want to go there anymore. Some guys don't think a man can be masculine and sensitive, but now I know I can be both and that's what being a man really is all about.

Last, the fact that I'm writing these letters is evidence for you that I really want to be a man who is more open and intimate in his relationship. I know that for our love to grow I've got to be more giving. I want to be more of my emotional self, to be more than a provider and a protector. This letter is a step in that direction.

You see, my dear, I do want to be close to you. But it's not easy for me. I'm sure it isn't exactly easy for you to reach out and be close either. But for me as a man, it is a really tough task because reaching out or opening up makes me feel vulnerable and that's a feeling that is at the top of the list of the hardest things for men to do. For you, and our relationship, I'm now willing to experience whatever it takes to make me a better man and to therefore improve our relationship.

CHAPTER 2

HOW HIDDEN LOVERS HIDE IN RELATIONSHIPS

The first fact to realize about a hidden lover is that he is a man in a committed relationship—that is, marriage, a long-term relationship, or even a serious dating relationship. The hidden lover is a man who's made a commitment, at least on the surface. Yet inside, he's still tentative about connecting himself to the woman he loves. In essence, he's hiding within himself while in a relationship, and this invariably leads to problems.

Hidden lovers use three methods to hide within relationships. First, they close themselves off; second, they back away from the relationship, using space and time as a shield; or third, they do a disappearing act. Why would a man say he wants to be in a close and intimate relationship and then close off, back away or even just disappear? It seems illogical, but, every day, hidden lovers do it.

When it comes to the hidden lover disappearing into hiding, there are basically two reasons. First, though he was initially attracted to the idea of having a relationship, he now feels overwhelmed by it (please refer to Chapter 6, How Fear of Losing Freedom Affects the Hidden Lover). Second, he has unresolved issues he's dealing with that were triggered by the relationship (please refer to Chapter 7, His Hidden Pain). Disappearing acts of hidden lovers could range from a guy suddenly becoming aloof during a serious dating relationship, or just outright disappearing, to more complex situations in which men in long-term relationships or marriages become closed off or emotionally inactive.

Following are two examples of hidden lovers in hiding.

A DATING DISAPPEARING ACT

Consider the dating situation of Ron and Marie. Ron was a tall, dark and handsome man who'd played college basketball. Though he was now in his late twenties, Ron still maintained his hourglass shape and strong muscle tone.

Marie was an attractive woman with a svelte body, long beautiful legs and a cheerful attitude. She worked in the same office building as Ron but in a different firm. Every morning she would see Ron at the deli sitting alone drinking coffee and perusing the paper. He didn't look as though he was concentrating very hard and many times she'd thought about boldly going over to talk to him. What could I have to lose, she figured. Marie had been divorced for two years and noticed Ron didn't have a ring on his finger.

Yet for a different reason every day she never made a move on Ron. Then one day, as fate would have it, she was running late. She stopped in to the deli to grab a cappuccino-togo. Everything was in a blur because she had an early meeting to make and not a moment to spare. She paid the cashier, grabbed her coffee, and turned quickly to head out. But as she turned she crashed into a tall, dark and

handsome man, spilling coffee all over what was obviously not a cheap suit. As the coffee dripped down to his shiny shoes, she looked into his face. At that moment she was smitten. She almost forgot about the coffee dripping all over him. Ron was even more handsome up close than he was from a distance. He had dimples and innocent eyes.

The incident ended with Marie dabbing Ron's suit with a napkin and Ron using the situation to make a love connection with the attractive thirty-something woman he'd just had the fortune to bump into. Within ten minutes they went from a pedestrian accident, to smiles and giggles, to exchanging phone numbers and setting a lunch date.

Fast-forward three months. Lunch dates, dinners and weekends in the park had become the norm for Ron and Marie. Every morning, they'd try to meet for coffee. Every afternoon, they had lunch together at one of the restaurants in the area. On Fridays, they'd sneak away for a long lunch at a little bistro by the lake. After lunch they'd walk and hold hands, sneaking kisses in the rose garden.

Since they'd met, they were both on cloud nine. Ron loved Marie's soft voice. He loved her conservative but sexy style. Marie couldn't believe that she'd met a guy like Ron. He wasn't just another hard-bodied ex-jock. He could play basketball with the boys but he could also discuss current events and books. He was always showering her with compliments. And she knew he meant them. More than once he'd said he always wanted to find a woman like her and that he wanted to have more than just a dating relationship with her.

Everything couldn't be better, right?

Wrong!

One Monday morning, Ron didn't show up for their usual coffee. That was okay because sometimes one of them got busy and couldn't make it. Marie figured she'd see him at lunch. Lunchtime came. No Ron. She called and left a couple of messages on his voice mail and one at his home number. But by late afternoon he hadn't returned them. Marie didn't hear from Ron all day.

Marie started to worry. Maybe something had happened to Ron. It wasn't like him not to show up for their regular lunch date. It wasn't like him not to call. He was always such a gentleman. Yet in the back of her mind, she couldn't help but wonder if Ron could be trying to give her the brush-off. But she couldn't run with that thought. It just didn't make sense. After three months of constant time with Ron, she felt she at least knew that he was too into her to just suddenly give her the brush-off.

After Ron missed lunch again on Tuesday and still hadn't called, Marie'd had enough. She got up from her desk, told her secretary she'd be back in twenty minutes and went down a few floors to Ron's office. By now the receptionist knew her so well that she waved her on through. Marie went to Ron's office and opened the door; he was sitting at his desk talking on the phone. He waved to her and smiled as though nothing was wrong. When he hung up the phone Marie didn't hesitate to speak.

"Ron, where have you been. I've been worried about you!"

Ron responded slowly. "I've been here. . . I just felt like doing something different today."

“But why didn’t you call and tell me that. We could’ve done something different. And what about yesterday?”

“I didn’t call you because I’m not sure what I wanted to say.”

“What do you mean?”

“Marie . . . I really care for you. But I’ve been thinking a lot and I don’t know if I’m ready for . . .” Ron hesitated. “I mean . . .” More hesitation. “What I’m trying to say is—”

“What *are* you trying to say, Ron?”

“Well, I guess I’m just not ready to get any more serious than we are. I think we should just keep dating but not get too serious about everything. I do want to keep seeing you, just not every day.”

“Why have you been saying that you’ve been looking for a woman like me all your life and that you wanted to do more than just date? You said you wanted a relationship, Ron! How can we just go backwards all of a sudden?”

Ron paused. “I know I did. But I guess now I just want to be involved, but not too involved.”

Marie’s face revealed her total shock. Her budding relationship with Ron had disappeared suddenly and for no apparent reason. What Ron was saying didn’t even sound logical. Did he even believe what he was saying?

Marie was hurt beyond words. She felt betrayed by Ron. And she felt stupid for falling for him so deeply, only for him to turn out to be just like all the rest. Could she even trust her judgment anymore? Here she was with another grown man who was all hot and heavy in the beginning and suddenly afraid of his own shadow when things started getting intimate. She was really tired of the same old thing with men. “Never mind, Ron. Don’t explain. And don’t bother to call me anymore.”

Marie wanted to cry. But being a respected woman with an executive position in that same building she would have to hold back the tears until she could get to her office and close the door. She wanted to slam Ron’s office door so hard that the pictures would fall off the wall, but she didn’t. She wanted to curse him, but she didn’t. She simply closed the door to his office, gathered her composure and walked out, making sure to say a cheerful goodbye to the receptionist. She didn’t need her personal business all over his place of business. But she would leave a good piece of her mind on his voice machine at home.

Sounds crazy, right? Just when things seem that they could get no better, Ron has withdrawn from the relationship. What happened? Was it something she said or did? Is there someone else? Is Ron getting cold feet? Did he just want sex? Read the following section to understand what was going on in Ron’s head.

STAGES OF A DATING DISAPPEARING ACT

Act I: Boy meets girl

In the beginning everything is new and exciting. Everything about the new woman in his life excites man—her voice, her hair, her shape, the smell of her perfume, etc. Even quirky little things about her appearance or personality are considered cute or unique. He's always thinking about her, replaying her words in his head and remembering her smile.

Act II: Fun and games

In this stage a man is starting to incorporate this exciting new woman into his life. Still beaming from the thrill of being involved with this new woman, he enjoys talking to her as much as possible and he sees her as much as possible. That's the fun part. But the games begin as he starts to feel himself become closer to this woman. Perhaps he is starting to feel more obligated than he would like. Or he could be feeling a deep connection forming that he is uncomfortable with. Or perhaps this relationship is triggering some painful issues from past occurrences in his life. To counteract his feeling of being out of control and swept away by his feelings, he may start subtle games of manipulation in order to gain control of the situation. Or he may try to create distance from her as a means of creating a safe zone. He could also be beginning to see her as a real person with flaws instead of the absolute perfection he imagined her to be. For example, some of the things he thought were cute and quirky may be getting on his nerves now.

Act III: The crossroad

As time passes, he finds himself at a crossroad. He really likes this woman. He may feel that he loves her. Now what? Should he commit himself to a relationship with her? Should he dive into a relationship and take on the related responsibilities, the risk of being hurt, and face the unknown? Or should he hide by remaining on his own, where he feels safe and secure? The irony is that he actually does want to have a relationship but his growing apprehension is so strong that he's thrown into a dilemma. He's left with the decision of either making a commitment or disappearing.

Act IV: The disappearing act

Feeling overwhelmed by the apprehension of having a relationship, he disappears. He may do this in one of several ways. The easiest method is the call screen. Another method is to always have an excuse for being unavailable. The most extreme method is to simply vanish, disappear by cutting all communication and contact.

THREE DATING DISAPPEARING ACTS AND WHAT THEY MAY MEAN

Now that we've looked at the dating disappearing act, let's look at some common reasons for the occurrence. (Of course, this is assuming the couple was dating as seriously as Ron and Marie in the example.) I stress the word "common" because there are so many variables that it would be illogical to attempt to speak in absolutes. Despite interviewing many men and being one myself, I can't state an absolute reason as to why each man in each specific situation does what he does. But here are some common reasons.

1. Wolf Man

We all know this guy. He just wanted a consistent sex partner for a while. He got it and now he's gone.

Thank-you-ma'am (some don't even say that much). Wolf man will do whatever is necessary to get woman into bed. He will lie, wine and dine her, buy her gifts. . . whatever it takes. But after he's had as much as he wants, he's gone. Wolf man is different from a guy who disappears after sex once or a few times because he lingers around for months. But eventually he runs back into the woods to stalk more prey.

2. Man in Hot Pursuit

This guy is really a hoot. He goes after a woman hard with all he's got. He's obsessed. All he can think about is her. As far as he's concerned, she's the most perfect woman in the world. He is absolutely convinced that she is the woman for him. But a funny thing happens when the man in hot pursuit gets his prize. After the woman he seeks says, "I'm yours," he hits the brakes hard. After months of trying to get her to notice him, he suddenly doesn't seem interested in her at the level he once was. This guy may have been on an ego trip just to see if he could "catch" her. Or he was only interested in the woman when she was a fantasy of perfection to him. When he got to know her better she couldn't live up to his fantasy notions and he was disappointed.

3. Mr. Freeze

Like Marie in the example, you're dating a guy who seems perfect for you in every way. You've told all of your friends about him. He's met your parents. You're even starting to dream of a future with him. Suddenly, he starts acting funny. It usually happens as a slow process. Not calling as much. Not being as available. Acting fickle or irritable. Slowly he just withdraws from you. When you confront him about his behavior he thinks you're overreacting, or he blames it on work or some other good excuse. But if his behavior persists, it's probably more than that. Men freeze up for several reasons:

He may not feel comfortable advancing to a deeper intimacy (this may or may not have anything to do with the woman he is involved with).

He may be having doubts about the woman he's involved with.

He may be having doubts about his ability to handle a relationship.

He could have a new romantic interest in his life.

Now let's look at the other side of the coin, hidden lovers in marriages and long-term relationships.

HOW HIDDEN LOVERS DISAPPEAR IN MARRIAGES AND LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

The disappearing acts of hidden lovers change after they are married or in long-term relationships. Interestingly, hidden lovers in long-term relationships or marriages often have a disappearing act which doesn't involve leaving the relationship. Instead, it often involves remaining in the relationship in the role of boyfriend or husband while checking out of the relationship emotionally. They do this for the sake of convenience. They don't want to deal with the aftershocks of a traumatic or costly breakup, so they just adopt a coping mentality and disappear within themselves. The following are ways in which hidden lovers disappear from full participation in a relationship while remaining in the relationship.

The emotional shutdown

Often when we think of men doing a disappearing act, we think of it only in terms of them leaving the relationship. But it isn't always that clear a situation; there is another type of disappearing act done by hidden lovers, particularly by men in long-term relationships or marriages who feel the need to hide part of themselves. In this type of disappearing act, the man doesn't walk out of the relationship. Instead he withdraws emotionally while continuing to fulfill his role in the relationship in a perfunctory and obligatory manner.

The problem with the emotional shut-down begins when a man feels that he has an insurmountable problem in his relationship (see list below). This form of disappearance is probably the biggest threat to a marriage or long-term relationship because it can become the root of so many other problems.

Possible reasons for an emotional shut-down:

He feels unfulfilled in his life and feels his relationship is part of the reason.

There is an ongoing serious dispute with his significant other.

He harbors undisclosed anger or resentment toward his significant other.

He is experiencing feelings of sexual inadequacy.

He is frustrated with his relationship in general.

He is having an affair.

Affairs

Though I've mentioned several reasons for an emotional shutdown, probably the most damaging of them all is the extramarital affair. For that reason, I'm going to elaborate further on the factors involved in hidden lovers having affairs.

At first glance, an affair may not seem to be a way of hiding feelings, but in the hidden lover's case that's exactly the case. When a hidden lover has an affair he's not intending to leave his relationship. It's more a situation of his running away from a problem, even though affairs don't solve problems. For hidden lovers, affairs and extramarital trysts aren't simply about having a sexual opportunity the way a woman caught their eye. When hidden lovers have affairs it's because, for some reason, they are not connecting in their relationship and see the "other" woman as an opportunity to escape and hide from the reality of the problems they don't want to face in their relationship. But how does this happen to a man who says he wants to improve his relationship? Like everything else, the roots of affairs start small and grow into a big problem if left unaddressed. Let's look at how hidden lovers get themselves into extramarital trouble.

Anatomy of an affair

Among the hidden lovers I talked to on this subject, one was very candid and detailed about his affair.

I'll call him "Ray." Ray had really thought the situation through and shared his thoughts with me. ~~Correlating this with the experiences of other hidden lovers, I was able to map the anatomy of an affair.~~ Basically, it happens in five stages:

Unmet need—an emotional or sexual desire going unaddressed in his marriage. This could be the fault of one or both of the people in the marriage.

Willingness/desire—an openness on his part to have this desire met by another woman.

Opportunity—meeting a woman who is willing to fill his need/desire.

Relationship—having a strong and intimate emotional interdependence with a woman other than his wife. (Sometimes this step is skipped and men go straight to step 5.)

Infidelity—having a brief or long-term sexual relationship outside his marriage.

Here's a fictional example, a composite derived from several different men. It illustrates how these factors come together.

Ray wasn't looking for a sexual relationship. But he was frustrated with his life and career. He had been married for close to ten years and had two kids. He was a good man who worked hard to provide for his family. But for a couple of years he had been harboring a great deal of guilt about the fact that his wife and kids wanted a bigger, more expensive home in a better neighborhood. This was made worse by the fact that all of his friends had moved up the corporate ladder as he continued to be passed over for promotion. Though his wife worked full-time as well, he felt that he, as the man of the house, should've been able to earn the additional income necessary to move his family up a notch on the socioeconomic ladder. Often his wife and kids would go dream home browsing on Sunday afternoons and would come home with hopeful faces and hand him brochures. Or worse, they'd go visit friends who'd moved up to nicer homes in upscale neighborhoods and return with stories about their beautiful homes. Being a hidden lover, Ray never shared with his wife and kids how unappreciated and inadequate all of that made him feel. Since he never shared his feelings of inadequacy with anyone, he imploded, suffering a great loss of self-esteem and often becoming depressed.

It was his low self-esteem and feelings of being unappreciated that opened the door to an affair with his co-worker Juanita. It all started one day when he peeked into her office to say good-morning. She was sitting at her desk looking sullen. Normally she was perky, so he asked her what was wrong. They started talking and she told him that she and her husband had been arguing a lot lately about any and every thing. Ray shared with her the fact that he was feeling bad that he wasn't able to support his family the way he wanted. They ended up closing the door to her office and spending about an hour talking and sharing. Ray liked talking to Juanita; she'd always been his favorite person in the office. But that was the first time they ever talked so intimately with each other about their lives.

Over the next few weeks, Ray and Juanita continued to talk privately and gave each other advice and encouragement. Ray came to work each morning looking forward to those talks as the highlight of his day. Often, he thought, "I wish my wife were more like Juanita; she totally understands that we don't need to buy an expensive new home." But all of their talks didn't help either of their lives

home. Juanita's marriage was getting worse and Ray's family was still pressuring him to buy a new home. One afternoon when they were supposed to have lunch together they didn't make it out of the parking garage because as soon as Juanita got into the car, she broke into tears. Ray spent the entire lunch hour consoling her. It was the first time they'd ever hugged.

Ray felt something during that hug. He was falling for Juanita and he could see in Juanita's eyes that she was falling for him too. His feelings for her were strong. Ray wondered how Juanita's husband could have such a great wife and not know it. He was even growing jealous of her husband. In his mind he often flirted with thoughts of having a wild secret affair with her, but he fought those feelings, believing they'd pass.

But all of that changed the Friday afternoon they first kissed. Ray and Juanita had developed a habit of parking next to each other in the garage so they could talk as they left the office for the day. Every day, they'd exchange a big hug before getting into their cars. They had become very close. Emotionally, Ray felt closer to Juanita than his wife. On that Friday both of them were lingering, not wanting to say goodbye. It was cold so they sat inside Ray's car talking and laughing. They sat there so long that all of the other cars had left the garage. Suddenly, they stared at each other through an awkward pause in the laughter. They kissed. It was a culmination of all the sexual tension that had been building since they had begun their affair of the heart. For fifteen minutes, they were like two high school kids making out in the car.

Before leaving, they constructed a plan for a rendezvous. Monday, Juanita would call in sick and then go check into a motel. Then she would call Ray at work and give him the room number. They had sex all afternoon. Ray didn't get back to work until 4:30. After that, they met several other times at motels. Each time, they worked together to construct schemes that covered their tracks flawlessly.

But after a couple of months of sneaking around, everything dissolved. As they were lying in bed at a motel during an extended Friday lunch break, Juanita began to cry. She confessed her guilt and said that even though her husband was being a jerk, she wanted to work it out with him or call it quits the right way. She said she didn't want to sneak around and lie to him, or to herself, or do anything that would hurt her kids. Juanita said the affair wasn't helping, only making her life more confusing. Ray didn't fight it; she was right. He felt the same way too. With that, they cut it off without another word. No long good-byes, no closure. Later, Juanita resigned her position at the company. Ray never heard from her after that.

After Ray's delusion of escaping his problems with an affair had dissipated, he was left not only with his original problems, but also with the guilt of having had an affair. Ray could've possibly solved his problem by sharing with his wife how painful it was to him that he couldn't provide a higher quality of living for the family. Then he and his wife could've sat down with the kids and explained economic realities to them, perhaps even helping them appreciate what they already had. But as a hidden lover, he feared telling them his innermost feelings, these feelings that made him feel most vulnerable.

The walkout

The last and most critical form of disappearing act in a relationship is the walkout. When a man feels

he just can't take it anymore and hasn't the tools to deal with expressing his feelings, he may walk out. As I stated previously, this isn't as likely because hidden lovers have so much invested in the relationships. Moreover, this isn't likely for most hidden lovers because they want to work on the relationships. But everyone has heard the story of a friend or friend of a friend whose spouse simply turned to them one day after years of marriage or a long committed relationship and said they wanted out, or simply left. This type of situation ties together closely with the emotional shut-down. Usually a person wouldn't leave without some clues as to how he was dissatisfied with the relationship. When men are in the emotional shut-down mode, they continue an act for as long as they can. Then someone eventually tires of the act and puts an end to it by walking out.

DON'T FORGET TO LOOK AT YOUR ROLE IN THE SITUATION

When examining how hidden lovers disappear whether it is a shut-down or outright walkout, it's important for their mates to look at what role they may be playing in the situation although they may not even realize it. Maybe you didn't pay attention. Maybe you didn't heed the red flags. Was he a silver-tongued devil who charmed you so well that you decided to throw caution to the wind? Is he so smooth that he just outright fooled you, or did you hear what you wanted to hear and see what you wanted to see when it came to this Romeo?

I know lots of women are saying, "I've been there. I know about men and their disappearing acts." But over and over, men talk about how so many women see and hear what they want to instead of listening to what men are telling them.

For example, one fellow told me a story of how he was accused of leaving a woman at the altar. His side of the story is that she was pushing the entire marriage on him from the beginning. He says when he had discussed marriage with her as something he would eventually like to do, he hadn't proposed to her or committed to the idea. Yet, his girlfriend made herself a fiancée and went forward with wedding plans believing that he would eventually come around. She put a deposit down at a church and was starting to negotiate with caterers and florists. She was even setting the date—a date that her man was not prepared to make! As the date approached she realized his cold feet weren't going to warm up and she canceled the reservations and plans. They broke up (but have continued seeing each other on and off—that's another story altogether).

She accused her boyfriend of standing her up, but did he? Or did she just get an idea and run with it? I mentioned this story because it happens, in varying degrees, a lot in the relationship world—whether it's a marriage or just a misunderstanding about a dating relationship. Some women want a particular man so much that they start imagining things that aren't there. It's very important to be on level ground before you look at the guy and say he's wrong. It's true that far too many men are guilty of disappearing acts, but sometimes they were saying, or at least showing you, where they were going and going along.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

In this chapter, the stages of a disappearing act were discussed. At which stage could more honest communication help avoid a disappearing act?

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