

HOME AND AWAY?

Having two homes isn't easy when you have to be a liar in both.

I tell my wife I'm working late, on a project in Manchester or visiting my sick mother. I tell my secretary/lover I will leave my wife in the summer.

Playing away was never ever my intention. Or so I thought. My marriage was a happy one and my young son a joy. How could I throw that away? One night showed me how.

I hadn't chosen my new secretary. She was sitting outside my office when I came back from holiday.

"Hi," she said in a friendly Australian accent, "I'm Louise, I think I'm working for you." In her twenties, attractive and vivacious I was captivated at first sight. She told me she was on a two year trip around Europe and would probably work with me for six months. She exuded a freedom and sense of adventure, the excitement of youth that I'd traded for family and responsibility, and that was a little unsettling. A regret for opportunities missed.

She was efficient and we made a good team. Every day I looked forward to seeing her and didn't complain about her frequent lateness. We had several lunches together when work was off the agenda. And we did have a goodnight kiss when I drove her back to her flat after a work's drink party. But they were the innocent displays of friendship, or so I thought.

The Sales Conference was my undoing. Friday was for business presentations followed by dinner and a disco with a hotel stopover. It clashed with my young son's first football game. I wouldn't be back in time to see him play.

Louise and I sat together at dinner, danced occasionally at the disco and were among the last to leave the bar later. I hadn't been consulted on room allocations but found we were in adjacent ones. Drink and a goodnight kiss were enough to make me stray.

The next week, and for another month, we worked together normally. What happens at a Sales Conference stays at the Sales Conference. That's the best rule until someone shows you a positive pregnancy test.

Now I am spending nights at Louise's flat with no exit strategy. It's a nightmare in which everyone loses.

"Dad, Dad," Billy is pulling off my duvet. I force open my eyes and I can see tears running down his cheeks.

"Mummy says you can't come and watch me play football tomorrow."

I know what to say now. "Yes I can Billy. I will be back."

He runs downstairs, screaming to his mummy. "Dad says he can watch me tomorrow."

Jenny's face is quizzical when I come down for breakfast. "I thought you were staying over at your Sales Conference?"

"No," I say, "I'll come home after the dinner. Somethings are too valuable to miss."