



BUSINESS PROPOSAL



NATHANIEL K. GEE

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Chapter 1

The Professionals



Eye contact is a powerful thing. Empathy, love, passion, confusion, distress, panic, and a plethora of other emotions can all be conveyed between the nose and eyebrows. Pure disdain was the message Mr. Johnson's eyes were sending since the moment he walked into the office of Dr. Byron Lewis. But, to ensure the message wasn't lost in translation, Mr. Johnson sent it over and over again.

The forced presence of husbands in their office was something all marriage counselors were accustomed to. But in Byron's experience, Mr. Johnson usually dealt with this by simple indifference. No, something was clearly on the man's mind beyond his disintegrating marriage. This was something more.

As Mrs. Johnson told a story about how Mr. Johnson ignored her during their last therapy assignment, which was to discuss why she was originally attracted to him, Mr. Johnson did a superb job of reenacting his indifference to her. He focused completely on the doctor. Byron was usually a very conscientious listener, but it was hard to focus on Mrs. Johnson's words with Mr. Johnson's glare demanding so much attention.

Byron pressed on, "So, Mr. Johnson, why do you think Mrs. Johnson feels you weren't listening?"

Mr. Johnson paused, then said, "I'm not sure. Does your wife ever assume you're not listening?"

Clients often tried to get Byron to interject his personal life, some were innocent, but increasingly, these requests were less about curiosity and were

more of a sinister nature. But, treating it as innocent, he said, “It’s important we focus on your situation.”

“Oh, okay. Well, since you don’t want to talk about your situation,” Mr. Johnson’s tone had not improved, “I guess this is my session so we will only talk about mine. So, why didn’t she think I was listening? I may have not had good eye contact. Isn’t eye contact important?”

His eyes continued to pierce into Byron, proving that at least under certain situations, Mr. Johnson’s aptitude for eye contact left nothing to be desired. “Yes, that is important, but could it have been more than that?” Byron was doing everything in his power to avoid what he knew would turn into an awkward situation. Yet deep down Byron knew what was coming, it was happening more and more recently.

“Or maybe I was stressed. You ever have a stressful day?”

Byron at that particular moment was very prepared to answer this question, but before he could tell himself to hold his tongue, Mr. Johnson added. “What do you do when you get home all stressed and your wife wants to talk?”

“Again, Mr. Johnson, let’s focus on your situation.”

“Okay, but I want to know what you do when you are in my situation.”

Directly trying to maneuver away from his personal life was clearly not going to work so he tried the old, answer-the-question-they-should-have-asked response, “Your wife deserves open, honest conversation. So, if you need a break after work to de-stress, be open about it.”

Mrs. Johnson at this point began to interject, “But this was on a Satur—”

“How would you know?” Mr. Johnson cut her off, demanding all the attention the little office could offer.

“What?” Byron expected some confrontation, but this was more than he imagined.

Recomposing himself a little, Mr. Johnson clarified, “How would you know? Have you tried it?”

Byron straightened up and made himself as big as he could get. “I have a doctorate from the University of Connecticut, worked for one of the most prestigious clinics in America and counseled hundreds of couples. I am very qualified to discuss these situations.”

Mr. Johnson's face relaxed. He smiled and sat back into his chair and said, "And yet with all that, no real experience. Come on, Jen, let's get out of here." He stood and did the only thing he ever wanted to do from the first day he had walked into this office: walked out for the last time. Mrs. Johnson looked at her husband and then back to Byron, then back to her husband and once more to Byron. But the heap of mangled ego that was left of Byron was far from the pillar she would have needed to help sway her decision. The only strength was leaving the room and she followed it.

It was not the fact that a disgruntled client walked out that left Byron so worn. He had faced it before and would face it again. It was the increased frequency of such occurrences. It was no mystery to Byron where Mr. Johnson had discovered the fact that in matters of love, Byron was a bit of a novice. He had always avoided bringing his personal life into his work. He told clients that they didn't see family photos in his office because he didn't want to focus on his situation but theirs. But that all changed when a client, who blamed Byron for his failed marriage, had used his knowledge of Byron's bachelorhood to flood the internet with scathing reviews like, "Why does a man who has never said, I do, get to tell me what to do in my marriage." If Byron hadn't been so devastated, he would have had to admit, that one was pretty clever. Since these had picked up, his clients had dropped off. There were always men who were looking for a way to get out of counseling, but Byron prided himself on the fact that if they just gave him a chance, he could help. He had saved so many marriages that started their counseling with reluctance. Would they stop giving him that chance now that they had their out?

Inaction was not something Byron ever accepted. Every problem had a solution, as the Johnsons' footsteps faded away suddenly it was crystal clear. The solution was easy. "Yes, it wasn't mainstream, but that didn't make it wrong," his mind quickly countered. He always counseled his clients not to make life changing decisions under the duress of hurt feelings. His counsel echoed in his mind as he found himself rationalizing an irrational life choice. He felt himself dig in his heels for the same reason many others had ignored his counsel: because he wanted to. The only question was the method to deliver the message. The internet made the options and reach almost unlimited. Foreign market was fairly good. No, better keep it close to home. It

took only a few minutes to create a new Hotmail account and, surprisingly, no one had taken the handle yourhusband@hotmail.com. Next, he went to the Gazette Classifieds and put out an ad, “Local professional seeks wife.”

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