

Paperback Book Clement Peterson

A man who lived in Washington, DC was convinced that he was having extremely bad luck. Recently, everything in his life seemed to be going wrong: He'd lost his job and been forced to take a lower paying position at another firm, he'd dented his car's fender by running into a fire hydrant, and he'd gained twenty pounds. Today, even as he walked along the sunny streets in his tree-lined neighborhood in Northwest Washington, DC, he noticed only its negative aspects — cracks in the sidewalk, the occasional overflowing garbage can, and annoyingly loud barking dogs. Moreover, he blamed his marriage for the downward turn his life seemed to be taking. His wife, he felt, didn't understand him; perhaps she never had.

One cloudy day when he was feeling particularly hopeless he stopped into a used book store to see whether he could find something that might help him. He found and bought a paperback book of philosophy, and over the next few weeks, he read it. Indeed, he found the book's insights very useful, and as he read, he underlined key passages with a pen. His mood brightened, and he began to have some small successes at work. Then, feeling he must change his life in a dramatic way, he told his wife that he wanted a divorce. His wife, Mary, was very upset with this turn of events, and she pleaded with him to save the marriage. She encouraged him to remember the time when they, as students in the same class, had fallen in love.

But Richard would not change his decision. He was convinced that Mary had no idea who he really was. She especially would never understand the man he had become after reading the philosophy book that had changed his perspective on life.

After several months of pleading, Mary resigned herself to the divorce, and Richard took his possessions to a new apartment a few Metro stops away. As he placed his books on his new bookshelf, he noticed that he had two copies of the very book that had been so important to him. When he opened the older of the two identical books, he noticed that he had underlined the identical passages that he had underlined in his newer copy. How strange! He hadn't remembered having read the book before, and yet he'd underlined the same passages twice.

But then he noticed the name penciled inside the front cover of the older version of the book: It was Mary's! She had, years earlier, purchased the very same book, and he had, years later, underlined the very same passages. She did understand him! In a flash he remembered the long talks they used to have. As students, they had truly been soul mates, sharing opinions and feelings about so many subjects. He immediately got on the phone and called Mary to explain his discovery and to ask for her forgiveness.

But Mary refused to forgive him. She told Richard that she could never feel comfortable reconciling with a man who was so emotionally unstable.