
Books by Susan Kietzman

THE GOOD LIFE

A CHANGING MARRIAGE

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A CHANGING MARRIAGE

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To Ted, who changes with me

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CHAPTER 1

NOVEMBER 1988

He had never seen her before, even though he walked that same route from his dorm through the student center to class three times a week. She was sitting in the reception area next to the café, in an upholstered armchair. Lit from behind by the morning sunlight blasting through a wall-sized window, she looked more vision than human. Bob stopped walking. She read a book she held in her lap, as if she were alone in her dorm room or sequestered in the library, with nothing but silence for company. Bob took a step closer, and, as if on cue, *A Changing Marriage* she looked up at him. A *A Changing Marriage* second later, he was jostled by a passing student's overloaded backpack, momentarily dislodging his focus. Bumped a second time, Bob looked around, again aware of the moving people, of the noise, of the sense of urgency. He looked at the large analog clock on the wall behind him and discovered he had just five minutes to make it to his marketing class. *A Changing Marriage* As he cut through the lane of scurrying students, he glanced back, but the girl was gone.

Bob took his assigned seat in Mark Gladwin's class just as the professor entered the *A Changing Marriage* room. Gladwin, a short, trim man with wiry black hair and matching bifocals, glanced up at the auditorium rows of students on the way to his desk. He set his briefcase down and ushered his worn cardboard folder of notes to the podium. Bob opened his notebook and took *A Changing Marriage* a pen from his back pocket. Less than a minute later, it was as if both of them had been there for *A Changing Marriage* hours, Gladwin talking and Bob taking notes. He was a long-distance runner, Gladwin, and carried that unusual combination of drive and patience into the classroom. And he lived up to his reputation as a storyteller, offering a relevant case for just about every question that had arisen in class. He was different, certainly, from most of the professors at the mid-Michigan community college Bob attended for two years before transferring into the state university system. But, unlike those other professors, Gladwin appeared to have no concept of transition: He didn't say good morning; he didn't take roll; he never wasted time. He talked quickly, so that even the serious students had to strain forward in

their seats A Changing Marriage to keep up. Bob knew all this; he had been Gladwin's student for more than two months now. But he still allowed his thoughts to wander. Who was that girl?

He had seen her for only a moment, but a picture of her encompassed his entire brain like an image projected onto a movie theater screen. He looked back at the professor and tried to reengage with him, but Gladwin had become like a word Bob couldn't remember, available but inaccessible. Instead, Bob's A Changing Marriage mind had become her prisoner, entangled by her auburn hair. The stillness of her pose juxtaposed with the atmospheric chaos of the student center was noteworthy. How could anyone read quietly and utterly without movement in the midst of madness? And the light from the window behind her had been white, unfiltered. Its intensity A Changing Marriage creating an aura, he mused, an aura of goodness, of serenity, of something intangible and uncommon in busy twentieth-century life.

Bob shifted his weight in his chair in an effort to change gears, to rid his mind of fantastical thoughts and to return to Gladwin, who had turned from the podium to write on the blackboard that covered the front wall of the classroom. Bob wrote in his notebook what Gladwin wrote on the board, even though it made little sense. Maybe his roommate, Evan, knew her. Maybe, if Bob explained where and when he had seen A Changing Marriage her and what she looked like, Evan would tell him her name. What was her name? Bob jotted down several possibilities in the margin of his notes: *Sarah, Jennifer, Catherine, Christine . . . Annette?* Bob liked Annette. It was different enough to warrant her outstanding qualities. He wrote *Annette* below the list of other names and then wrote *Parsons*, his last name, after it.

Not by chance, Bob found his roommate in the library that evening. Evan Blackhurst, who referred to A Changing Marriage himself as a book A Changing Marriage nerd, always sat on the third floor in the northeast corner carrel, walled in by heavy physics books, shed clothing, and assorted caffeinated beverages he smuggled into the building in his oversized pockets. The third floor was the designated quiet floor with absolutely no talking, nothing but the occasional rumble from the heating and air-conditioning ducts for distraction. The third floor, according to Evan, was A Changing Marriage for the A Changing Marriage student who went to the library to study rather than socialize. Yet, didn't Bob find Evan every time A Changing Marriage he looked for him? A Changing Marriage Didn't they have a quick conversation every time Bob hung over the top of Evan's carrel? And hadn't Bob convinced Evan twice already that semester to quit studying and go to the bar?

"How's it going?" said Bob, popping his head over the top of the carrel. Evan didn't respond, didn't even look up. "You about done?"

"No."

"So, how much time do you need? Thirty minutes?"

Evan looked at his watch. "More like ninety."

An annoyed “Sssshhhhhh!” emanated from a nearby carrel.

“That’s too bad,” said Bob, whispering. “There’s a party at the complex.”

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Evan laid his twice-read-already copy of *A Brief History of Time* on the crowded tabletop in front of him. This was Evan’s go-to book when he needed a quick break from studying but still wanted to stimulate his brain. Most walked to the student center for coffee when they sought diversion; Evan turned to Stephen Hawking, his idol. Evan gave Bob his best disinterested look, a challenge for a boy whose thick blond hair, although cut in the traditional men’s style, grew out instead of down. A Changing Marriage And because he hadn’t made time for a haircut in several weeks, he looked like someone out of the 1970s rather than the late 1980s. “Didn’t we go to a function last night?”

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Bob nodded his head. “It was a good function.”

“I’ll grant you that,” said Evan, returning to his book.

Taking Evan’s concurrence as an opening, Bob pulled up a chair paired with a vacant carrel. Evan sighed, putting his head in his hands for dramatic effect. “Let’s go for an hour,” began Bob. “I’ll let you tell me, again, why Mike Dukakis should be our president. Then you can come back here and continue studying.”

“After I’ve had a couple of beers?”

“You don’t have to drink.”

Evan A Changing Marriage raised his head and looked at Bob. “Then why do I want to go to this party?”

“Go to the party and leave us in peace,” said the voice from the other carrel.

“I want to see if you know someone,” said Bob, lowering his voice that he had inadvertently raised. “I met this girl today; actually A Changing Marriage I only saw her, in the student center on my way to A Changing Marriage class. I have to find her.”

Evan removed his glasses, which Bob took as a good sign. “Since when have you needed me to meet girls?”

“This is different. She’s different. She’s absolutely radiant, and I don’t want to mess things up. I thought if you knew her, you could introduce us or something.”

“Tell me you have a crush,” said Evan, the beginnings of a smile around his mouth and eyes for the first time since Bob’s arrival.

“Does anyone out of elementary school use that term?”

“I just did.”

“Then yes, I do.” Evan looked at his watch. “Ev, you’ve been here all day. One hour. It will be good for you.”

“Okay,” said Evan, pushing back in his chair. “I’ll go for one hour. But not because it will be good for me.”

“Thank God,” said the voice.

Harrison Complex was a cluster of dorms connected by glass hallways at the north end of campus. While not the most attractive or desirable place to live—it was a good ten-minute walk from everywhere else—it housed the perfect location for parties. Shay, the northern dining hall, was large enough so that when the tables and chairs were stacked at the perimeter, there was ample room for a couple hundred college students to socialize. It was built in the 1970s, when the energy conservation effort dictated low ceilings, an architectural feature that created an air of intimacy in utilitarian spaces like Shay, which, with support columns, was able to stretch the length of a basketball court. The setup was always the same: admission tables at one end, beer tables in the middle, and whatever the Alternative Club was promoting—chess, Pictionary, A Changing Marriage card games—at the far end.

As Bob paid the two-dollar entrance fee and had his hand stamped, he began to scan the room. Twenty-four hours ago, when he and Evan had wandered into the Delta Phi keg party on their way back from the library, Bob’s sole focus had been a beer blitz on his stress level, heightened by recent midterm exams and finals in a month. Tonight, he was focused on her, the adrenaline rush from his chance meeting with her resurfacing and prompting his heart to beat faster. This could be the night he talked to her. This could be the night he put the lingering unpleasantness of an impromptu, two-week romance with a girl in his dorm to rest. God, he hoped she and her pleading looks didn’t show up. He and Evan walked to the beer table and stood in line. Evan looked at his watch. “We’ve been here five minutes,” said Bob.

“Ten.”

“You walked here on your A Changing Marriage own legs. No second thoughts now.”

“Fine,” said Evan, which is what he always said when it wasn’t.

Bob reasoned that the chances of seeing the girl at the party far outweighed those of another chance sighting somewhere else on campus. Large universities were funny that way. On his way to a class, Bob could see the same person every day for a week and then not at all the

following week. An extra minute in the shower or a room scan for a missing glove was all it took to change the faces on his trip across campus. It was so unlike life at Winslow Community College, where Bob saw A Changing Marriage the same people every Monday through Friday. They parked their cars A Changing Marriage in the same spots. They walked the same wide cement sidewalks to the classroom buildings. They ate the same reheated food in the cafeteria. They sat under the same trees, smoking and drinking coffee, in the courtyard in good weather. While these were comforting features when Bob was first starting out and knew nothing about college life, they quickly turned stale. So much so that Bob had wanted to transfer to the big school after his first semester. It was his parents, citing financial constraints, who kept him home until he completed his sophomore year.

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