



“Gone Girl” (Photo: Theodore J. Cohen)
Collage, Susan A. Cohen, ca. Spring, 2018

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Gone Girl

Theodore Jerome Cohen

He had been through the five states of grief—shock and denial, pain and guilt, anger and bargaining, depression, and what should have been the upward turn. His friends, though their number had dwindled over time—the couples seemed to have drifted off, leaving him with a small group of widowers like himself—rejoiced in what they thought were signs he had “turned the corner” following her death more than a year earlier. Still, despite his smiles and seeming agreement with their expressions of encouragement,

there lingered in the back of his mind the awful feeling that if only he had recognized earlier what was happening to her—that *something was wrong*—she would still be alive.

In his mind it could have been yesterday when the first signs of her illness appeared. That's how fresh everything was. He remembered again how, when her symptoms first surfaced, flashing through his brain to alert his *unfiltered* mind something wasn't quite "right," logic immediately took over and explained away everything in a manner that made what he had witnessed or heard seem normal.

Like how he had observed her starting to forget to turn out the lights in the bathroom when she finished brushing her teeth at night. *Oh well*, he thought at the time, *she probably is focusing on the mid-term elections and what's being discussed on the television show we're watching*.

Or how, on returning from shopping Friday mornings, she had begun leaving the garage door up after pulling the car in. No big deal. She may have been tired from running to two stores to find the things on her list and upon returning, simply wanted to get on with her day.

Then, upon reflection, he thought again about a trip she had taken more than two years earlier, when she traveled by train to Manhattan to spend a few days with their eldest daughter. Why had she become confused leaving Penn Station at the 7th Avenue exit? After all, she was born and raised in the city, had been in and out of Penn Station hundreds of times, knew the procedure at the turnstiles well, and yet, had been unable to use her farecard properly to exit the station. Their daughter was both puzzled and upset by what she observed. But like her, he had chalked his wife's behavior up to a momentary lapse, a "senior moment" some people experience—especially the elderly—in settings outside their daily routines.

During this time, for all intents and purposes, he and his wife's day-in and day-out routines had proceeded apace: up early, breakfast while watching their favorite morning television show, and then, off to the gym. Aside from the occasional struggle his wife might have had understanding one political argument or another, which he simply chalked up to her not hearing something correctly, he never thought much about her comments in response to what the various television personalities were saying. On hindsight, some of her utterings made no sense at all.

It wasn't until both daughters came to visit one weekend, however, that he finally was forced to recognize how dire her situation truly had become.

Neither daughter had visited them in almost four months; now, here they were—together. Both were shocked by what they found.

Their mother—his wife—had developed a slight droop on the left side of her mouth. He had noticed it. In fact, he had taken her to see two doctors about it, both of whom surmised it was caused by a mini-stroke and recommended she see a neurologist. An appointment had been scheduled with one, *but she wouldn't be able to see him for 3 months*.

Their daughters were shocked. Pulling him aside, the eldest, with fear in her eyes, stated in no uncertain terms: "When we leave, please, *please*, take Mom to the ER. Something's wrong. She's not herself. She looks terrible. We're worried."

He did. The hospital was 15 minutes from their home. Upon telling the triage nurse his wife may have suffered a mini-stroke, they immediately performed a CT scan. Within hours she was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor.

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Now, as he looked back, he wondered: what if—*what if*—he had been able to set aside logic and understand better what the initial flashes of insight he perceived almost a year earlier were telling him. Would it have made a difference?

Some things he would never forget.

Some things he would never know.