

simply a question of intellect, although in that respect Christopher again had the advantage, he was without doubt a clever man. It was a question of things withheld, information that he had, and that I did not. In short, it was a question of infidelities—betrayal always puts one partner in the position of knowing, and leaves the other in the dark.

Although betrayal was not even, not necessarily, the primary reason for the failure of our marriage. It happened slowly, even once we had agreed to separate, there were practicalities, it was no small thing, dismantling the edifice of a marriage. The prospect was so daunting that I began wondering whether one or the other of us was having second thoughts, if there was hesitation buried deep within the bureaucracy, secreted in the piles of paper and online forms that we were so keen to avoid.

And so it was entirely reasonable of Isabella to call me and ask what had become of Christopher. I've left three messages, she said, his mobile goes directly to voice mail, and the last time I rang it was a foreign ringtone—

She pronounced the word *foreign* with a familiar blend of suspicion, mystification (she could not imagine any reason why her only son would wish to remove himself from her vicinity) and pique. The words returned to me then, phrases spoken over the course of the marriage: you're foreign, you've always been a little foreign, she's very nice but different to us, we don't feel as if we know you (and then, finally, what she would surely say if Christopher told her that it was over be-