Vignette of a Couple

Robert and Sophia are in their early 30’s and have been married for five years. Robert’s parents moved to the U.S. from Germany when he was 15 years old; he is an only child who felt very isolated during high school and college. Sophia is from a large Italian family that has been living in the U.S. for several generations. Sophia was abused by an uncle as a child, but was too afraid and ashamed to tell anyone.

Both Robert and Sophia work long hours at demanding jobs, and they feel exhausted and stressed at the end of the day. Typically, they drink a bottle or two of wine with dinner, and often argue about the amount of time Sophia spends with her family, Robert’s frequent business trips out of town, or when they should start to have children.

Three weeks ago, Sophia discovered that Robert had an affair with a co-worker the previous summer. Robert refuses to discuss this except to say that it was “a mistake.” Robert admits he has felt unhappy in the marriage and depressed for over two years, but he does not think talking about it will help.

Sophia feels betrayed and furious. For the past week she has been unable to concentrate at work, can’t sleep, and feels irritable much of the time. She pleads with Robert to tell her what he needs, but he is silent and withdrawn. His drinking has increased and he is becoming more depressed.

Sophia has been going through Robert’s computer and mail when he is not at home, and she discovered current messages he had written to another women describing his hopeless feelings about the marriage and thoughts of suicide. Two nights ago Sophia confronted Robert with this correspondence, and she became so angry that she threw a glass at him, which shattered and cut his arm. This incident frightened them both, and they have decided to get marriage counseling.