

## **They ran out of things to say**

By Donald Hiscock

Martin and Angela gave up talking to each other exactly a week ago. It's their anniversary. It's not their wedding anniversary, for that was ten days ago. It is the first week of their agreed silence.

Their silence with each other, that is.

They both agreed that they had used up all their conversations. There was simply nothing else they wanted to say to each other. They weren't unhappy in their marriage. They are still living together. But not talking.

It was after a meal out to celebrate their nineteenth wedding anniversary that things began to develop. When Martin had asked Angela sometime before what she would like for her anniversary present she said that she would like some honesty.

"For the past nineteen years you have given me the same thing," she had said. "Don't get me wrong, I am not being ungrateful."

For the past nineteen years Martin had given her trust. She had also given the same thing, support, except for their tenth anniversary when she thought she would surprise him and give him some distance. She had always given support. He seemed happy with that, especially since she had spent a lot of the eleventh year of their marriage not quite sure whether he was really happy with distance. No, support was a good thing to give. It had become a tradition. And it was the same for Martin. He never thought of anything else but to give trust, even though he went through the motions of asking. Just to check.

"This year I'd like some honesty," she said, waiting for Martin's reply, which seemed a long time in coming.

"Sure," he said eventually, buttoning his shirt collar. "That's an interesting one. Just leave it to me."

After the meal in an expensive restaurant they had never been to before but some friends had raved about, they were driving home. Angela was at the wheel, having allowed Martin to round off the meal with an expensive glass of rare malt whisky. She was talking about the food and that even though it was very well cooked it probably wasn't worth the expense. Martin agreed. In fact, this was not an

uncommon experience. They agreed on most things. They shared so many views. They had similar tastes.

But then she said: “Thanks for the gift. It was just what I wanted.” She said it at precisely the same moment that the traffic light turned to green.

“No problem. Thanks for yours. It, too, was just what I wanted.”

“I know,” she said.

The conversation tailed off and they finished the rest of the journey home in silence. This wasn't uncommon. There was no need to talk in the car just for the sake of it. Angela was thinking about what she was going to do with her gift. She was unaware, of course, that Martin was thinking the exact same thing. He was wondering what his wife would do with the honesty he had given her.

All the next day it troubled him. It got in the way of his work. His colleagues noticed and asked him if he was feeling all right. He said that he was fine, but they didn't believe him. They could see that his mind was elsewhere.

It was on the train journey home from the office that he decided that he would ask what she was planning to do with the honesty she had received. Besides, she had promised support. He needed to use some of it right now. He would ask and she would listen. Like she always did. He had something on his mind. He wanted to know why she had rejected trust this year in favour of honesty.

It was as if she was waiting for him to spill the beans as soon as he got in the door. She was always home earlier than him, except when she had her evening class. She was waiting for him to put his key in the lock, for she too had something to say to him.

This was not uncommon. They tended to think alike. When one had something on their mind the other one did as well. Except, over the years it had been difficult to come out and say it directly. But for Angela, this year was different, because she had received what she wanted. Honesty.

Martin hardly had time to loosen his tie and do what he always did – hang his keys up on their appointed hook and then stow his briefcase against the left hand leg of the bureau in the dining room - because Angela denied him the pleasure of finishing his homecoming ritual. She asked, somewhere between the key placing and the bag stowing:

“I want you to be honest with me,” she said.

“What?” and he pecked her on the left cheek like he always did. This was after he seemed to ignore the request while he put everything in its place and loosened his tie.

“We need to be honest with each other.”

“Of course. That smells good,” he announced.

“I’m not cooking anything,” she said, blocking his way to the kitchen.

Martin looked into her eyes. This was a very easy thing to do as they were exactly the same height. If he was honest with himself he would concede that she was taller. He was beginning to think that he was shrinking. It was common knowledge that the older you get the more height you lose. He was losing it faster than Angela.

“Something smells good,” he smiled.

“I don’t know what,” she said.

It was at this point that they both looked at the ground and then he looked at her, waiting for her to finish looking at the back of each of her hands and then look at him. Instead of smiling when their eyes met they both looked puzzled.

Angela had the gift. She said:

"To be honest, I don't think we have much to say to each other anymore."

"What do you mean?" he said, knowing what she meant. His question was just a reaction, a conversational tic.

"You look puzzled," she said. "That's all there is to say. We've run out of things to say to each other."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. I've been giving it some thought," she said, smiling at him.

"This has been on your mind hasn't it?" he said, taking an edge of one of her sleeves between his fingers.

"And you've had things on your mind too," she said, watching him rub at the cotton. "I can always tell."

"Yes."

"I'm just using the gift that you gave me. I'm being honest with you."

"Sure," he said, aware that she was smiling in a particularly radiant way. He had probably not seen her face looking so beautiful in a long time. Her pale olive complexion was beatific. Her eyes were liquid. A mirrored blue. "So we've said all that there is to say?"

"I honestly think so Martin. Don't you agree?"

He fingered her sleeve some more. They both knew that it was one of the ways he showed intimacy. She liked it. It was a good sign.

"Yes, you're right."

They talked like this for a while. She asked him eventually what had been on his mind. He laughed when he told her that he was worried what she would do with the honesty he had given her. She joined in the laughing. They talked about irony. And then coincidence. They discussed how they knew each other so well. She called it trust. She said that was why everything was all right. And why it would continue to be all right.

And then they slipped into talking about their days at work. He kept her talking. They were both aware of this. They ate leftovers and drank wine. They sat at the kitchen table. Just talking. Finally, she pushed all the washing up to one side.

"Shall we go up to bed now?" And she said it in the way that Martin understood to mean that she was inviting him to have sex. He was glad. He wanted to join her very much.

"That's a very nice idea."

But he had a question to ask and he thought he'd better ask it while they were still downstairs. Where all the talk had been. For a moment she thought he was hesitating about wanting to join her in the bedroom. He had that look about him. The one she had seen on the occasions when he was not in the mood for sex. It was almost the same look, except the expression in his eyes was different. She knew him too well. He was looking straight at her, in a hungry kind of way. And this

made her feel good. It made her feel wanted. His eyes were ready but his face suggested that he was about to say something important.

“When do we start?” he asked.

“You mean not talking?” She knew this was what had been bothering him. His eyes replied. “We can begin tomorrow.”

After they made love they lay together touching. They talked for a long time. She reassured him that she would carry on loving him. They could have sex whenever they wanted it. She got him to agree that they always knew when each other was ready, so they didn’t need to say anything to each other. They also agreed that, yes, there would be times when they had to talk. She said this to put his mind at rest, just in case he thought he was going to continue his marriage in complete silence. She reassured him by squeezing his hand.

“I think we’ll be making love more often,” she said.

“That will be nice.”

Then they just stopped talking. There was silence for a long time. They were both aware that the other was awake. They had run out things to say.

“Well, this is all very ironic,” he said before deciding to allow himself to go to sleep.

He said this exactly a week ago. This was the end of the last conversation they have had. All week they have both been wondering how the other feels about not talking anymore. The fact of the matter, if they would admit it, is that they talk so much at work during the day that it doesn’t matter that they don’t talk to each other at home.

But despite what Angela said last week, they haven’t made love. She has looked at Martin on at least two evenings but he showed no sign of wanting to join her in bed. The week has gone by so quickly anyway. They are both tired because of the demands their jobs are making on them.

Martin reminds himself, when he sits alone downstairs reading the paper late at night, that they have trust. He mustn’t worry about anything. If things were not working out right Angela would tell him, because she has honesty.

Angela feels that she might have been a bit too abrupt with Martin and is worried how things will develop. But she still feels that she is right about not talking

anymore. She knows that she still loves him. Besides, she spends a lot more time looking at him now. She had forgotten how handsome he is. This can only be a good thing. When they talked she never really made eye contact. But now she really looks closely at Martin. But she's not sure if he is doing the same to her.

Martin thinks it will all be over very soon. That's why he's not worried. He does have a lot of things he wants to talk to Angela about. If she doesn't start a conversation soon he will have to write it all down. At work the other day he thought about sending her an email newsletter. But he wasn't sure if this would contravene her wishes. Anyway, he trusts her.

One whole week without talking. She is not bothered about sharing her thoughts with Martin. She really doesn't have much to say that is important. She really doesn't have much to say that he hasn't heard before. But she is aware that he wants to speak. She doesn't feel bad about this, because he trusts her.

It will end when she decides. Martin knows this. He knows that his wife is in control.

This morning he woke up and he had nearly forgotten about the silence. And then he realised that it was their anniversary. He wondered whether Angela knew this too. But he couldn't say anything.