

Seven years ago I wanted to die. With apparently everything to live for—four healthy children, a hard-working, faithful husband, a successful writing career, and a beautiful, easily maintained new house—I could see no reason for living. The ministrations of my husband, friends, family doctor, and parents were no help at all. Self-help books were worthless. What helped was a process the very name of which had always terrified me: psychotherapy.

Although a breakdown frequently seems quite sudden, the seeds have usually been sown years back. For this reason I will tell a little about my early life with my husband. We went through high school together not paying very much attention to each other, and then went on to colleges in nearby towns. By junior year we knew that we wanted to marry each other, and we were married a year after graduation. Neither of our families was exactly jubilant. Both felt that we were too young and inexperienced and much, much too poor. (Between us we made fifty-seven dollars a week.) But we were wildly in love, and they gave us their blessing.

Even now—eighteen years later—I can remember the way it felt to see my new husband hurrying towards me at night for our slow, laughing walk home together through the long, blue shadows of New York City's twilight. Once inside our apartment we'd fling ourselves into each other's arms, grateful and joyous to us, seriously believing that no one had ever felt this way before. In a way it was a bit like playing house. Everything we had was so new and pretty. It was such fun to cook the things my darling especially liked, such fun to entertain our families and show them how beautifully we were managing in spite of their forebodings. All such fun and so completely unrealistic. The stuff of the slick fiction I was beginning to write, of the movies I reviewed for a movie magazine.

I can remember very well that even in the very beginning we handled our small problems immaturely. We always seemed to be short exactly three dollars between paydays. I would borrow this sum regularly from my boss, pay her back on payday, and borrow it back again about three days before the next payday. Often, instead of using this cash for the food we actually needed, we would blow it on a bottle of wine, a huge bunch of greens for the table in the foyer, or a Dinner Out. I would then inveigle the corner grocery man to extend us a small amount of credit. Instead of coming to grips with our financial situation, we tried to forget about it, to *pretend* we were solvent.

There were other pretensions that were strictly my own. I always pretended to be ballet to my husband's Romeo whenever

my family was around, and pretended to be just darling around my husband for fear of losing for one instant the illusion that ours was the world's happiest marriage. Somewhere along the line I stopped believing in the religion of my parents, but I pretended that I still believed (even pretended to *myself*), lest the Lord strike me down for my impudence or—far more important, to my childlike way of thinking—lest my family hate me for my defection.

Other signs of our immaturity were our exclusiveness and our tremendous emotional dependence upon each other. Later, when the war came, I followed my husband wherever he was sent right up to his point of departure—not from true wifely devotion, I realize now, but because I *needed* him in some hungry, childish, senseless way, and to a lesser extent he needed me.

The war ended, and my husband came home. Right from the start I realized that he had changed almost completely. He had grown up, of course, although not as completely as it appeared to me at the time. He was decisive, rather domineering, tremendously sure of himself. My tender brown bear, my darling bunny, had disappeared somewhere in the South Pacific, and here was this stranger who drank too much, spewed profanity, and made love violently and without affection.

During his absence I had become a successful short story writer. I met lots of new people, lunched with lots of magazine editors. I grew up some too, but with me it was mostly superficial. I had poise and a little bravado, but my inner stability had been based on the illusion of a fairy-tale marriage. Now that my beloved had stepped into another world, I felt abandoned, left behind in my never-never land of dreams and increasing anxieties.

He Stopped Needing Me

Unconsciously I tried to win him back, tried to re-establish everything as it had been in the beginning. And at the same time—like a juggler with a dozen balls in the air—I continued to pretend to my family and friends that we inhabited a private Utopia. Let other women discuss their husbands' faults. Not I. I had married a dream prince. I tried ceaselessly to make him notice me and praise me and love me—all in the manner of a small girl, instead of trying to understand his feelings and needs—in the manner of a woman.

I wrote more stories, and I had a baby. More stories and another baby. All this time my husband was occupied in finding himself a place in business, attempting to make up for the lost war years. Ultimately he secured a good job in advertising that he loved and from which he derived tremendous satisfaction. He invested so much time and energy in

his work that he stopped needing me entirely. Or so it seemed to me. His job was his life. Home was a place in which to sleep—usually too full of martinis or too tired to care where he was. I never knew when he would be home, or *if*—and oh, those dozens of calls to the police station to see if there had been an accident reported! The weekends were periods that had somehow to be lived through, with me trying to keep the children out of his hair, and apologizing to him constantly for everything: the state of the house, the behavior of the children, the way I looked, the fact that I wasn't writing more. When I think of it now, it seems incredible that I could have been such a complete dope, but I was.

Debts Pile Up

Just before our third child was born we moved into our new house. A noted architect had designed it for us, and it was, and *is*, a lovely house. However, it put us in such terrific debt that there was little joy in living in it. Everything I wrote and sold went immediately to pay off notes and loans. We were up to our ears in bills. Between us we made a lot of money, but we were always broke. Our finances didn't worry my husband at all, but they worried me terribly. My writing stopped being fun. It seemed to me that I was always under pressure, always writing to pay for something that should have been paid for months ago. Why didn't I refuse to co-sign some of the notes? Because I had no faith whatsoever in my own judgment.

After our fourth child was born, I felt as though I was in every way oversubscribed. I felt swamped and panicky. I hadn't the physical strength to care for four children, nor the money for help, nor the wits to write any more, nor the love I craved to sustain me in my weariness and mounting terror. I felt used up, finished. I believed—to me the most fearful thought of all—that I was losing my mind, and I wanted to die.

I tried to tell my husband how I felt, but it was like trying to talk to someone who spoke a different language. He would look at me in bewilderment. "*Why* are you so worried? *Why* are you so tired?" My fear that there must be something terribly wrong with me increased. After all, he was doing a bang-up job in business, evidence that he was functioning well. Everyone considered him a great brain and a great wit. Obviously he was right about this crazy extravagant way we were living, and I was wrong.

It seemed to me about this time that if we could just go away for a couple of days by ourselves and somehow re-establish some personal communication I would be all right, and he promised to take me to Cape Cod over Labor Day. Then a man at his office invited us to

"My continuing dream was to find a doctor who, like a magician, would make me well."