

Introduction

Marriage: a hopeful, generous, infinitely kind gamble taken by two people who don't know yet who they are or who the other might be, binding themselves to a future they cannot conceive of and have carefully omitted to investigate.

—Alain de Botton, *The Course of Love*

During the winter rains here in Portland, Oregon, there are times when my office smells of faint cologne, baking chocolate from St. Cupcake downstairs, incessant coffee, wet fleece, and leather. At the end of a psychotherapy workday, my trash can is crowded with tear-soaked Kleenex and used Starbucks paper cups. The room feels full of a palpable desperation from my patients, who want their lives to get better. There are laughs and light-hearted moments, too, but it's the sadness that stays with me, the painful stories of abandonment or conflict.

Married couples stress me the most with their raised voices, anxious sweat, and tired, angry faces because they don't know how to turn their complaints into something constructive that might stop the bickering at home. Couples worry about their children, their finances, and their self-destructive late-night

habits of hidden cookies, another glass of wine, or clandestine watching of porn in the bathroom. Spouses hide and withdraw from each other, and when they start telling the truth in my office, their conversations are full of blame, hurt, and sarcasm.

At the end of such a workday I'm worn out by the human longing to be understood, rescued, forgiven, cherished, loved, soothed, and to feel hopeful.

One evening at home after a marital therapy day like this, I peeled off my clothes in the bedroom, grateful to let go of all the sadness and frustration I'd witnessed that day, glad to push away the constant hum of need piled up in those Starbucks cups and Kleenex. I sat down on the edge of my bed and glanced at a framed photograph of me taken by my husband, Bob. Although I'd walked by it a thousand times and barely noticed it on the wall, this time, the waning light illuminated it at an angle that caught my eye. I picked it up off its hook, sat down on the bed, and studied it. Although we were only a few years into our marriage when this photograph was taken, Bob had already shot thousands of photographs of me using his Canon AE-1 SLR. That camera was his single most important possession, and I was his favorite subject.

I angled the photograph to the light and noted I was wearing a dress that had been a favorite of mine back then, a filmy black chiffon blouson with tiny red flowers scattered over it. I was perched on the kitchen counter in our long-ago Pacific Palisades house, next to a hot air popcorn maker and a beehive glass honey jar. In this photo, one of my knees is up, that foot resting on a chair, my elbow on that knee, my hand propping up my chin. There is a slight spread between my perched leg and the other one, enough that you get a glimpse of black

stocking and garter. Wide-open love shows in my eyes as I look at Bob. My face is wistful and vulnerable.

That photo was taken decades ago. I ran my fingers over the framed glass and then stopped, resting on the image. I was young. I was trusting. I was in love with my husband and eager to please him. I didn't know then that my need to please him would lead somewhere darker.

No matter how great a marriage is, there's always a shadow side. I was a psychologist doing marital therapy, but my patients might have been surprised at how deep the shadow side was in my marriage.