

Growing a Marriage Garden

Looking at the wedding picture, she thought bitterly that that had been the happiest day of her life. She and Peter looked so happy in the picture, excited to begin their lives together and share the bliss that was marriage. Unfortunately, their happiness had gone downhill from there. Peter had gone out after their last screaming match and probably wouldn't be home for at least an hour.

Beth sighed and went outside to water her plants. They were the one bright spot in her life. As she filled the watering can, she mentally reviewed the fight. She couldn't easily identify the spark that had ignited it. Over the past two years of their marriage, they had engaged in increasingly regular shouted battles. There were so few things that she remembered about why she fell in love with Peter in the first place. Though, she and Peter had dated for two years and had a six-month engagement, she now felt like she didn't know him. She thought she had known him as much as anyone did and loved him, so they got married.

Beth started soaking her precious flowers carefully and started a conversation with her petunias about her husband.

"He is so self-centered," she muttered. "He doesn't even seem to notice how hard I work to save money. He only notices to complain when I spend more than a few

dollars, even though he regularly buys frivolous things.” Beth continued to mumble aloud her husband-related frustrations, getting increasingly heated.

“Good afternoon.” The intrusion of a human voice startled Beth out of her disgruntled musings. She looked behind her to see her neighbor peeking over the fence and blushed deeply.

“Sorry for startling you, but I couldn’t help hearing what you were saying while I was weeding, and I didn’t want to overhear something I shouldn’t,” Beth’s neighbor said with a smile.

“Oh, it’s okay, Jane,” Beth replied wryly. “I shouldn’t be talking to myself anyway.”

“Sometimes thoughts and feelings just need to be expressed,” Jane said. “I find that I talk to myself more often than I would like to admit.”

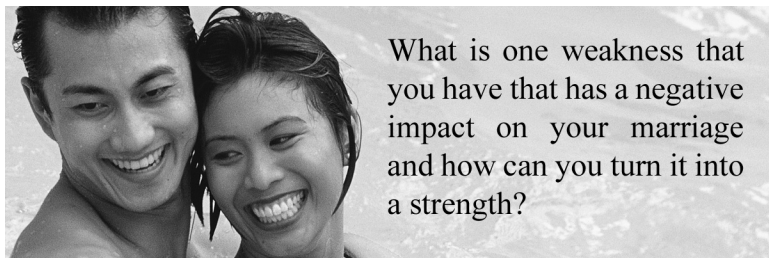
“Sorry to bother you.” Beth started to turn back to her flowers when Jane stopped her.

“Oh it’s okay I was about ready to take a break anyway and check on Emma. Hey, I’ve got some cold lemonade; why don’t you come over and we’ll have some.”

Beth hesitated, feeling the need to be with her plants to work out her frustrations. She opened her mouth to decline the invitation and found herself accepting. Still wondering at why she was going to visit with her neighbor, Beth went through the gate and followed Jane into her kitchen.

“Just have a seat and I’ll get that lemonade.” Jane set down the baby monitor and started opening her cupboards to get glasses out while Beth sat down at the kitchen table. The phone rang and Jane picked it up. Beth couldn’t help but hear half of the conversation.

“Hello...How’s my handsome husband? ...Good. I’ve just been weeding and invited Beth over for some



What is one weakness that you have that has a negative impact on your marriage and how can you turn it into a strength?

lemonade. How is work going? ...Good....Okay. I love you too.”

“What did Jim want?” Beth asked when Jane ended the phone call.

“Nothing in particular. He calls me everyday just to say hi.” Jane smiled and brought the lemonade over to the table.

“Really?” Beth asked incredulously. “Every day?”

“We miss a few here and there but almost every day,” Jane replied, still smiling. “It brightens my day and his and helps us stay connected and in love.”

“You seem to really love your husband. How long have you been married?”

“We have been married for five of the best years of my life.”

“Wow,” Beth said softly. Jane looked at her with concern, and a wrinkle appeared on her forehead. She opened her mouth, hesitated, and then released her breath. She paused again, then seemed to gather up her courage.

“Beth, I couldn’t help overhearing a few of your comments while you were watering,” Jane started gently. “I don’t mean to intrude but is everything okay between you and Peter?” When Beth didn’t respond, Jane continued. “Every couple has disagreements; we’re all human. But I get the feeling that you aren’t very happy in your marriage. Is there anything you want to talk about? I’m told I’m a

pretty good listener.” The silence stretched out then tears started to well in Beth’s eyes.

“I have to talk to someone,” she blurted out. “Whenever I say anything to Peter about what he is doing that bothers me, he just yells back at me.” Jane reached over to the kitchen counter to get some tissues and silently handed one to Beth. “He is such a frustrating, self-centered egotist. He thinks that everything he does is perfect and that I am worth nothing. He never asks my opinion of anything or takes me out anymore. He treats me like a door mat. We keep fighting more and more about everything. We have such different ideas that we never should have gotten married. His family is so irksome and frustrating, and he defends them. He never sees that something might be different from the way he does things.” With every sentence, Beth grew more upset and her voice slowly got louder. The baby monitor on the kitchen counter lit up, and a few whimpers interrupted Beth’s tirade. “Oh, Jane, I’m so sorry I forgot about your baby sleeping,” Beth said in a softer voice, “I should go.”

“Nonsense, it’s about time for her to be up anyway,” Jane replied. “If you promise not to go anywhere, I’ll go get her.” Beth promised, and Jane soon returned with a sleepy eight-month-old.

“I’m sorry I woke her up,” Beth began apologizing again. “I didn’t mean to get so loud or burden you with my struggles.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Jane urged. “She normally gets up about this time anyway.” Jane made a face at Emma who smiled and rubbed the sleep out of her eyes. “See, she’s fine.”

After watching Jane interact with Emma for a few minutes, Beth hesitatingly asked, “Is she why you and Jim are so happy?” Jane looked up surprised and then her