

IT'S HELL ON EARTH-FOR THE FIRST TIME

Two weeks after my return from the World Congress, my relationship with my wife deteriorated again. She began to look withdrawn and gloomy and I could not get her to talk to me about it. Then she went off on her own for the day and when she came back I was impressed by her changed mood as she described me as “more like a brother to her than a husband” and how she was “now feeling dishonest about our relationship.” Although “she did not want us to separate for practical reasons,” she “wanted us both to feel free for whatever the future might bring...” Previously she had been secretive, brooding, tense, cold, uncommunicative; now she was confident, articulate and sure of what she wanted to say. And yet, after her talk, I felt as if something inside me had been taken away. There seemed to be no feeling between us at all. It all felt so final that I felt as if there was no point in my arguing or saying anything. It was simply as if something had now been irretrievably broken between us.

Sleeping apart now brought sleepless nights and worry about what was going to happen. The tension in the house was strong for both of us and there was no place to escape. My best times were now at about 2 am! Then I would wake up feeling overwhelmed with feelings of beauty in the room. If only those feelings could have stayed with me all day but they did not. Sometimes, though, they carried real inspiration for me. They made me see that what was happening was inevitable and unavoidable: my wife simply wished me out of her life... **BUT** there was also the clear reassurance that one day I would be completely independent of her and –this surprised me- I felt I would then be more successful in other areas of my life! At school, I felt I would be more organised, more varied in my approach to teaching and more effective...These words just went so authoritatively through my mind that, for those moments at least, I could not doubt them.

Then I had the clearest experience of hearing an “inner voice” that I was ever to have in my life. Aware that my wife was looking for somewhere of her own to live, I went to visit my father’s grave. As I did so, I felt almost overwhelmed with self-pity and looking for sympathy, full of “poor me” thoughts. I could not have been more shocked as, instead, I got a sharp telling off: “Pull yourself together, boy. Lots of people get divorced. Look at what happened to me!” Talk about being pulled up sharp. At first, I simply could not register this. But then I

realised the truth of it- of course lots of people go through what was happening to me and yet I was carrying on as if I had been singled out and was the only one ever! But more than this it was the last sentence that struck me: I saw now for the first time in my life something of what my father had gone through. His tragic drowning had brutally separated him from his wife and young son. And, worse, within a year he had to witness his “wife” marry another man who was clearly not the sort he would have chosen to look after his family. Wow, I had not realised this at all! My father had gone through all of this and I had not had a clue-until now. I was both shaken and humbled by this experience and I have never forgotten it. It also gave me a bit of perspective on my situation which I had not had before.

Then things came to an alarming head as I went to bed one night particularly exhausted and worried about my future. This time instead of waking in the early hours, I had a dream: a frightening dream that I was drowning! I even felt as though I could taste the salt water! My whole body was shaking and I could hear myself saying “Oh dear! Oh dear!” over and over again. At the same time as I was gasping for breath, I had what I thought were crazy thoughts about my wife having an affair with a mutual friend. I was obviously in a terrible state because I then became aware of my wife shouting over me: “What is it? What’s wrong? Shall I call the doctor?!” and the desperation in her voice alarmed me even more. Then I had the idea that I was going under the water for the third time and that would mean I would drown.

With a growing sense of desperation, I shouted out into the darkness: “I am getting all these crazy ideas about you and -----“ And then I went on to tell her more about the two of them as I had “dreamt” it. Immediately I did this, everything changed. My wife let go of me, I became more conscious and saw that she was as pale as the moon. “It’s true!” she said “It’s all true!” At that point all the craziness left me. Fully awake I felt...*grateful!* Grateful to her for admitting to all this! I felt sure that if she had chosen to deny it I would have gone mad with panicky feelings as if I had literally drowned. I can remember so clearly even now that my overwhelming feeling was gratitude to her for saving my life no less, simply by her admitting to what I thought was my craziness! I still believe this today and I still feel the gratitude. The truth was now out at last and it brought a huge relief- I was not going mad and I was not going to drown either!

The morning after this experience I remained in something of a “super-charged” state, so that when the phone rang I “knew” immediately who it was: my wife’s lover. I got to the phone before she did and *before he had chance to say one word* I found myself telling him that I knew it was him on the phone, that I now knew what was going on, that I had no alternative but to accept him into my children’s lives in a way that I did not want to, that things would not go as easily as he thought, that my daughter would accept him but that my son never would...I had no idea where all this came from but I did learn later that he was so shocked by all this that he went off on his own for a few days to get completely out of the way in order *to think!*

At last came the night before my wife was to move out: it was bonfire night. We had got into a routine over the years of sharing a bonfire, fireworks and hot potatoes etc. with the neighbours and this was no exception. The evening was extremely muted and sad, of course, as everyone, except the children, knew all too well what was about to happen to my little family. In fact, the whole evening became almost surreal as fireworks were lit, hot dogs passed round and everyone tried to put on a brave face. There had been so many happy nights around such bonfires; I was all too conscious that there would not be one quite like this ever again. Towards the end of the evening, we took the children to see the huge bonfire in the next village along from us and it was there that my feelings seemed to change. They became more accepting; I felt all was completely out of my hands: these moments were to be our last together and I simply had to accept them as such. These feelings grew as the evening came to an end with the two of us sitting on the sofa, together, for the last time. Not a word passed between us and for once the silence was completely comfortable. It was as if it was all done; everything was played out between us; there was nothing more to be said or done. And in that there was some relief. We sat aware of this as long as long as we could until tiredness took over. It was as if our final goodbye to each other was deeper than words (or at least, I thought so). In the silence of that evening I accepted, too, that it was to be the only time we would comfortably share anything again.