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Surviving Marriage

Is there love after wedding? After the honeymoon passes, some newlyweds may feel less passionate about each other. Along with shared home and sex, come new responsibilities and accountability that can kill romantics; series of repeating days with constant presence of each other can interfere with the freedom and privacy each of partners may be used to have. One can feel so restricted and disappointed in a partner or in the whole idea of marriage that a divorce may seem an option to get back to a comfortable single lifestyle. No wonder, many prefer cohabitation or dating with no strings attached. Although marriage is often associated with added responsibilities, limited freedom, and house-chore conflicts, it is a centuries-tested social institution, based on love and trust. Marriage is encouraged only if relationships are voluntary, mature, abuse-free, and, in case the two want to split, the exit door is always open.

Voluntary nature of marriage assumes that two people choose each other and decide to marry on their own. In USA, a free country (at least, according to its constitution), people choose their mates based on hormone-based attraction. However, not everybody in the world can enjoy such freedom. Parental expectations, religious pressure, and traditions can force people to marry with no love and against will.

In Korea, set-up dates arranged by parents are normal situations, which is shown in Korean movies, such as “Coffee Prince” and “I Do I Do” (MacDonald) For this reason, while adult children of Korean immigrants in USA prefer career building to marriage, their parents of old catholic views go above and beyond to settle their offspring. They go as far as hiring

professional “match-makers” and advertising their sons and daughters on special events arranged in Koreatown. Despite great careers their children made, Korean parents feel that their primary duty is to bring their kids to altar, writes Victoria Kim in her article published in LA Times.

Marrying people against their will rarely brings happiness to any of spouses, and one may go as far as murdering the hated partner. In Pakistan, the 21-year woman named Aasia, married to her cousin by her parents, went as far as poisoning the man with tainted milk. Alas, the milk ended up being drunk by seventeen other people, including children, all of whom died. The girl and her accomplices were charged with mass murder. (Asim) Despite the tragedy she caused, I feel sorry for Aasia. Being trapped in involuntary marriage, while in love with the other and having passion for life, can provoke a person to apply radical means to get out.

The example with Aasia demonstrates how deadly the involuntary marriage may turn out. Despite outside pressure, people should be allowed to seal their union based on their feelings for each other, and not because somebody else wants to see them together. As the one who values personal freedom, I believe that people are entitled to pick their lifelong partners, or choose not to marry at all, since they are the ones responsible for their own happiness.

Although wedding at-will may seem a promising start of a new family, age is also a big factor determining how balanced the marriage will be. Obviously, the parties should be old enough to live independently from parents, support themselves financially, and be fully responsible for their actions. Today, in most American states, the legal age to marry is eighteen, but teenagers may marry starting at sixteen with parental consent. In extreme cases such as pregnancy, or if a couple already has a child, marriage of even younger teens is permitted in most American states. In Massachusetts and New Hampshire, for instance, teens as young as twelve can marry. (LII)

In highly religious developing countries like South Sudan and Nepal, poverty and traditions push parents to marry off their children early. In South Sudan, fathers and uncles take girls "to village." Be "taken to village" for a girl means that she is about to be sold to a stranger, often much older than her. Daughters are exchanged for cows, which play a role of currency in poor desert regions of North-Eastern Africa. In his article, published in LA Times, Robyn Dixon estimates that around 17% of South Sudanian girls are married by fifteen, referring to 2010 governmental survey, and the majority are traded for cows. The higher the economic value of a girl, the more cows are requested for her. Virginity, physical attractiveness, and fertility add price to a girl. Brothers of sold girls are then use the cattle to buy brides for themselves, and this economic cycle continues. In other words, daughters are considered an economic engine, a roughly twelve-year period investment that can be returned in a form of cattle.

Despite the geographical distance from South Sudan, Nepal is not much different in traditional views. Boys and girls there are married off at as early as nine. Although Nepalese legislation does not allow marriages before eighteen, many parents violate the law. Marriages are often arranged by parents, and children do not know their future spouses. To poor parents, marrying off a son means getting rid of a burden. A boy gets a dowry, which can be in a form of a motorbike or a jewelry, from a bride's parents. In other words, girl's parents "buy" a groom for her. A twelve-year-old married boy is released into adulthood, to take care about himself, his young wife, and children, who are sometimes only slightly younger than their parents. (Bengali) Child marriages stem from poverty, traditions, lack of legislation or its enforcement. It results in incomplete education, lost opportunities, and compromised health. Early marriages seem to exacerbate poverty because married children must leave school to provide for their families. Wedded minors stay educationally and economically disadvantaged for the rest of their lives.

Back to the progressive western world, are American much different from those far, third-world countries when it comes to child marriage? In her article *Why can 12-year-olds still get married in the United States?* Fraidy Reiss tells the story of Michelle DeMello from Lincoln city, Oregon, who was pushed to marry her boyfriend when she was just sixteen and pregnant. Feeling guilty, she believed that she had no say in this arranged matter. “I could be the example of the shining whore in town, or I could [...] save my family a lot of honor,” says Michelle, now grown up woman. During the first decade of this millennium, more than 160 thousand children, as young as twelve, were married in USA. (Reiss)

For an underage girl, marriage can generate negative health, career, and economic effects, while increasing her risk of being abused. This includes increased risk of heart attack, diabetes, and cancer, due to added stress. As well as in poor countries, unfinished education means lost economic opportunities, potentially leading to poverty. Women who marry before eighteen are more likely to be beaten by their spouses than those who wed later. (Reiss)

Lack of domestic violence is another condition of balanced marriage. Not only arranged and child marriages are prone to abuse. Even adults who tie the knot freely may slip into the road of intimidation and even beating. Legal, economical, or physical differences between two partners may make one spouse dependent on the other. For example, in a citizen-immigrant couples, the foreigner spouse is usually restricted in rights to work or move within a new country, which puts a person in an inferior position. Likewise, large differences in income or health may become a problem in marriage. Situations like this can potentially create imbalance in relationships, and a more powerful spouse may start dominating over the partner. The outcome can be as sinister as murder or even worse, lifetime disability.

In many African countries, domestic violence is common, but the story of Jacklin Mwende shocked even the patriarchal Kenian community. She had been married for five years to

a man she initially loved, and she was over twenty; in other words, she was not a child. Over the years, her husband started blaming her for not having children with him. One day, he took machete and cut... his wife's hands; he also sliced her face in attempt to kill her. (Kyama) Thanks to neighbors, who called the police, Jacklin's life was saved, however, broken forever. World Health Organization estimates that around 45% of young Kenyan women were physically or sexually abused, and mostly at home. (Kyama)

Domestic violence, involuntary or child marriage seem to be serious grounds for divorce. However, for different reasons, one of or both spouses might be reluctant to divorce, even if the marriage is unhappy. The weaker spouse may feel unable to support oneself financially due to lack of education and skills, especially after long-term unemployment period. On the other perspective, a money-maker spouse may not like the idea of giving half of assets to a poorer spouse, so a richer person may prefer to save lousy marriage. When children are present, one of parents may be afraid of losing parental rights, especially if one's individual income is not great. For this reason, some people make prenuptial agreements so that potential problems in case of potential divorce are resolved in advance, before a family life is even started.

Many other reasons exist for people to remain in sour marriage. It can be fear of judgement by family or community; especially, in villages and small towns, where everybody knows everybody. In South Sudan, for example, girls who escape their husbands, are shunned or even killed by their relatives, so runaways either endure involuntary marriages or end up in brothels. (Dixon) Jacklin from the previous story did not divorce her husband because she did not want to be a burden for her parents. (Kyama) Even in free countries like Russia, some people associate being divorced with being a failure, so an unhappy spouse may stay in marriage to save his or her reputation. Finally, two people may be just get used to each other and continue living

as siblings, in different rooms. One or both might be afraid to stay alone, or moving away from a cozy house may seem worse than living with unloved partner.

In addition to previously stated reasons, divorce may be impossible because it is simply illegal. Even if separated people can support themselves individually but live in Philippines, they are unlucky to get “stuck with lousy spouses.” (Santos) Leaving aside Vatican, Philippines stays the only country in the world where divorce is not legal, and the best suffering spouses can count on is legal separation. Since about 80% of Filipinos are Roman Catholic, the church has large influence on people’s mentality, viewing divorce as something evil. Even after the Congress approved a divorce bill on final reading on March 19, 2018, the conservative Senate and the president Rodrigo Duterte, opposing divorce, may try to delay passing the new law. (Roxas) Nonetheless, I am full of hope for those unhappy spouses who finally anticipate their freedom, because when divorce is impossible, difficult to obtain, or strongly avoided, marriage feels like a trap, making people doomed and miserable.

Involuntary, underage, abusive, and locked marriages are disastrous situations depriving people of opportunities and happiness. On the other hand, when two adults feel for and respect each other, their wedding may be the best event in their lives, and they are more likely to pass the healthy family values to their children. Unfortunately, with time, even happy relationships may turn cold, so knowing that divorce is at least possible, makes both spouses more confident and responsible for their marriage. Although one may like the idea of having someone in his or her life, to love and to share, until the death tear them apart, anybody must be allowed to choose that someone, if any, so should everybody have an option to leave. All in all, loving couples may not mind belonging to each other; at the same time, nobody deserves to be anybody’s property.

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