

# **The Unobserved Grief**

**N. W. Clerk**

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**... of every man whose wife has left him**

*N. W. Clerk*

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## The beginning, or perhaps the end

*August 19, 2011*

I went to the doctor with two symptoms: trouble getting to sleep and a constant high-pitched whine in my ears. So he asked about what's going on in my life and I gave him a brief background to my wife leaving me. Over time you'll get a more complete story from me and understand that it's a bit more complex than that, but the doctor could see from my tears that stress was as good a diagnosis for my symptoms as any.

Have you been there too? I think there are plenty of us -- middle aged men who have given their lives to wives they treasure, only to be abandoned.

The doctor asked if I had any thoughts of suicide. Part of the required script I suppose. But though I am devastated beyond belief, I am not desperate. It does pose a key question though: how can I survive such loss?

— Nat.

## Saying goodbye

*August 24, 2011*

I have discovered that the real pain of saying goodbye is not the leaving but the sad expectation of returning to nothing.

At times in our marriage I have bemoaned H's lack of excitement when I come home. She normally did not see me off in the morning nor throw herself at me when I returned. But at least she was there and whenever I was away I could look forward to being home again. On business trips, the evenings were always the worst. Being alone. Now home has become merely a house and every departure is a reminder that there is no wife to return to. I return but am still alone.

Juliet was right to say "Parting is such sweet sorrow". For lovers, the sorrow of parting is the seed that promises their re-embrace. Without the parting there can be no joy of returning. The parting creates a delicious glow of anticipation. But for me, goodbyes are now empty of any sweetness.

— Nat.

## **The back story**

*August 25, 2011*

Everyone's story is unique and would require a lifetime to retell. But I guess I need to fill you in on how I got to this point.

I fell in love with H twenty years ago. In a whirlwind, we were engaged after a week or two and married three months later. It was a dream come true. H was 21 and I 30.

Our honeymoon was strained, and the ensuing year nothing less than traumatic. The details can wait for another time, but it has been hard work ever since. There have been good times, of course, but although we get on fine and seem pretty successful at raising a couple of kids, our marriage has been unsatisfying to both of us. H has never been a real partner. Rather than allowing herself to relax into real intimacy, she has built barriers to protect herself from me.

At 40, H has reconsidered the whole situation and informed me that she regrets that we got married. This is not a case of having lost the spark, but rather an admission that from the very beginning she didn't want to be married. She knew before we were married that it was the wrong thing, but too unsure of herself, maybe too ashamed, to call it off. She has tried to cope with the consequences of that, and tried to avoid the hurt that she knows being honest would have caused me.

I have loved and cherished and adored H above all else for almost 20 years, and now find that she doesn't want me. Never did want



me.

We have been separated for 6 months and I am heart-broken. Not as tearful as I was a couple of months ago, though that keeps returning in uncontrollable cycles. We still live in the same house, which works well financially and for the kids, but it's no great fun seeing the one you love and constantly being reminded that she is not yours.

— Nat.

## All options are dead ends

*September 01, 2011*

At the moment, my future looks bleak. I know, I know ... I'll work through the grief process and get to a point of acceptance, ... and some new opportunities will open up, ... and God will bring some good out of it. But in the midst of it, they is all useless platitudes. Knowing about the grief process is virtually no use at all when you're in the middle of it. Don't ever tell a grieving person that it will be alright -- we know with a great sense of immediacy that IT IS NOT ALRIGHT.

I can see three equally difficult and unappealing options: work through all the difficult issues to re-establish a relationship with H, take the risk of starting a new relationship with someone else, or becoming a lonely old man. The first doesn't seem at all likely and is out of my control. Could I trust her again anyway? A dead end. The second is almost (but not quite) inconceivable. I have given my heart fully to H. Even if that beaten and broken heart can be repaired, how could I possibly give it again to someone else? I don't want to. I want H. She is irreplaceable. A dead end. The third seems more likely, but unbearable. Can I actually survive without a partner? Without intimacy? Without sex? Another dead end.

— Nat

## A good day

*September 03, 2011*

Not every day is as bad as the others, and today was a good one. The sunshine while kayaking with my son, helping run a barbecue at a fundraiser for SIDS, an afternoon nap -- these help to push the pain of loss away for a while.

One of my strategies is certainly to keep busy. And the last few months have been unusually creative for me. Having been shocked out of my normal life and habits, I am trying to reclaim some interests that have been lost along the way, and find new opportunities.

Busy-ness is an interesting thing. It can be productive, meaningful and helpful for both ourselves and others. But we can also use it to avoid doing things or thinking about something uncomfortable. For myself at the moment, I think it's about sublimating the frustration and pain and sexuality towards something positive. Turning that inner energy outwards, rather than letting it consume me.

I hope you'll be able to do the same, because it can create the possibility of a good day amidst all the hard ones.

— Nat.

## **Last thing at night**

*September 06, 2011*

For me, the end of the day is normally the worst time. The quiet after my kids are asleep emphasises my aloneness and emptiness. I put off going to bed as long as I can in the hope of being so exhausted that I'll be able to fall asleep straight away. A friend of mine, divorced many years ago and still single, is a share trader. He said to me a few weeks ago that there are lots of lonely men up late at night watching foreign markets, trying to keep their sadness at bay.

The sadness of lying in bed alone makes me recall other times and reminds me what I am missing. With nothing else to do, my brain focuses on my loss, and I either cry or get angry. I haven't cried myself to sleep for 35 years! On a few occasions I have taken sleeping pills, with limited success. Last night I watched a movie on SBS purely because the introduction claimed it had a sex scene. (It didn't.) What I find more useful is some deliberate relaxation exercises, and a firm resolve not to end the day negatively.

Is it a tough time for you too? Any good strategies you can share?

— Nat.

## Ground Rules

*September 09, 2011*

When H first said that she wanted to go her own way, many emotions demanded attention simultaneously and I was very confused about how to act towards her. But from early on, I set myself three ground rules: no begging, no impositions, no criticism. That resolve was mostly motivated by the well known aphorism: "If you love something set it free. If it comes back to you, it's yours; if it doesn't, it never was." It looks like she never was.

Later, as we discussed how to navigate the separation, we agreed that even though the marriage had failed, we would at least try to *fail with grace*. We would continue to be generous to each other. Continue to work together in caring for the kids. Continue to care for each other's well-being, accepting with patience that it was a hard time for both.

I have heard of rare cases where a couple can split "amicably", when both are happy to go their own ways. That's not us. I am shattered to the core and angrier than I have ever been. But neither my pain nor anger nor wishes nor love will bring H back and in reality my only option is to release her. Release her from any obligation to me, so that she can not be bound artificially to me by guilt. And release her from my heart -- much harder -- so that I too can move onwards.

—Nat.

## Documenting my anger

*September 13, 2011*

I probably have never been so angry as this. I feel so mis-used and betrayed. But who am I angry at? And where do I direct that anger?

I thought it would help -- and it did -- to write down what I am angry about. I listed 30 or so things where the anger was directed at H. Another half-dozen directed at God. And two directed at myself. (I wonder what that balance says about me, and I wonder how that balance might change over time?) The ones about H are the juicy one's that I'm sure you'd love to know. But it seems to me that the other categories are the more interesting ones.

Here are the two things I am angry with myself about...

- How is it that I have deceived myself about my own character? It seems that some attributes I held to be my highest virtues are actually failings that have damaged H and our relationship. What pride has preventing me from seeing that before?
- How could I not have seen that H was not ready for marriage? Although we've been married 19 years, our problems go all the way back to the beginning. We were married too quickly and she did not yet have a solid enough self-identity to make a real comitment to me. I can't blame her for leading me on without also thinking that my own wishful thinking and my excitement at finding my "dream come true" was another example of

self-deceit.

If there's one thing I am going to be firm with myself about, it is that this pain is going to fuel a time of growth for me rather than a time of despair. So what can I learn from that self-directed anger?

—Nat.

## The role of the penis

*September 19, 2011*

[Explicit Content Warning. Kiddies stay away.]

When we were first married and started enjoying sex it seemed to me that my penis was at last doing what it was designed for. I experienced a deep deep joy, a sigh of contentment, a belief that my sexuality was at last able to be expressed in a wholesome giving to another. A sense that a longstanding longing had found its true resting place. That my half had become a whole. That my sexuality could be the missing jigsaw piece in another's puzzle. That I could offer to H the ideal gift: one that comes from my heart (all good gifts are an offering of one's self) to nourish the joy in her heart.

Now it's back to pissing and wanking.

The very essence of sexuality is dialogue. But now my sexuality is restricted to a solo act performed in secret and shame.

My poor imagination leads to H continuing to be the focus of my sex life. But unsatisfiable fantasies are hardly satisfying! And rather than provide any real release this just reinforces my loneliness and loss.

— Nat.



## Help make this a group effort

*September 20, 2011*

I am pleased to see the pageviews counter pass 200. On the other hand, I wish there were more comments. Since it is not my intention to simply record my journey through grief, can I encourage you to make this more of a dialog?

I believe there is great value in sharing pain, because through that we can also share joy. I'm not saying that sometimes we can share our pain and that in other, happier, times we can share our joy. Rather, the sharing of pain can itself enable a deeper kind of joy. The joy of releasing rather than suppressing. The relief at finding others who understand. The joy of giving and receiving comfort.

You don't need to sign up and comments can be completely anonymous.

Please also feel free to contact me via [email](#) if you'd like some off-the-record conversation.

— Nat

## Another N.W.Clerk on marriage vows

*September 24, 2011*

I can't believe that there's another N.W.Clerk writing a blog! Well, he was for a short time back in 2007 anyway. What he wrote [on marriage vows](#) is quite insightful, and since his blog has faded out and these words may be lost forever, I quote them here (mis-spellings and all) ...

When I promised myself to my wife, I merely articulated reality, that I was hers. I don't think it would have been possible to be otherwise. I be ready to make a vow of marriage, is to be already married, is to already have given yourself to that person. That commitment is always already present. Thus, I haven't yet kept my marriage vow, they've been descriptive rather than prescriptive.

One cay i may find myself in a place where my vows aren't descriptive, where I dont long to/want to be hers. At that point, and only at that point, does my marriage become living and active. Neverthelss not my will, but my word be done.

I was talking to my brother about a friend who has walked out on his wife. "You can live with a girl and no one cares, but if you're gonna marry her then you're in for the long hall" he said. Precisely. When men walk out on their wives (and vice versa) because they "don't feel in love" or "don't love her like

## "Can you still be my friend?"

*September 28, 2011*

H hopes that we can continue to be close friends. In fact she said once that she has probably thought of me more as a friend than as a husband the whole time. She says that losing me as a friend would bring more grief to her than losing me as a husband. She can't understand why I find that difficult and although I have said I am not able to engage in that sort of relationship, she continues to want it to be that way.

A while ago I showed her the lyrics to Lobo's "[Don't Expect Me To Be Your Friend](#)" and later asked her to watch a YouTube clip from the movie "[Starship Troopers](#)" (from about 6:21 to 8:30). She replied "I don't understand how men can't be friends". At least [Kate Miller-Heidke](#) understands, so it's not just a male-female difference.

There is no confusion in my mind about the possibility of being friends; no thought that maybe it might work. I simply will not do it and think it is unreasonable for H to expect it. I am angry about her believing that a transition out of marriage into a friendship could be so easy.

H doesn't like how I use the word *betrayed*, but that is how I feel. Betrayed, defrauded, discarded and crushed. Even if she doesn't understand why I feel that way, I wish she could accept that this is really how I feel. I am not exaggerating or being overly melodramatic or figurative. If you can imagine being treated that way by a person you have given your all to, would you want to be

that person's friend?

Do you guys have similar experiences? Anyone on the other side --  
i.e. who want to be friends with an ex-wife but she doesn't?

— Nat

## **The desire to be known**

*October 07, 2011*

I have a ridiculous, never-ending whining in my ear, constantly reminding me that something is not right. It cannot be shared with anyone else and no-one but my doctor would want to know about it anyway. The doctor says there is no apparent cause and no remedy.

Whenever I am not active, the wish for someone to hug, like the incessant whining in my ear, invades my consciousness. I am alone in both maddening experiences.

I love so much the feeling of being known. Of not needing to hide. But who wants to know me? Maybe just my mum and God. Why did I marry someone who is the opposite, who wishes for privacy and felt the constant need to protect herself from me rather than open herself to me? And now she's off on her own journey, no longer even wanting the façade of travelling together.

Regardless of supportive friends, I am totally alone in the ways that are most important to me. Not least of which is the wish that someone was interested in me sexually. I don't mean someone interested in having sex with me – though that is also an ever-present wish. I mean someone who would actually like to understand how I experience and express sexuality in the broader sense. A female who enjoys my masculinity and who appreciates my converse interest. Someone with whom to discuss desire and with whom to explore passion and pleasure.

At the moment I am neutered sexually, forcing myself to be celibate. Forcing myself to endure alone-ness, hidden-ness, and this ridiculous, never-ending whining in my ear, constantly reminding me that something is not right.

— Nat

# Carrion Comfort

October 09, 2011

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;  
Not untwist – slack they may be – these last strands of man  
In me or, most weary, cry I can no more. I can;  
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.

I studied those words of [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#) in high school and wonder now what sense I could have made of them then. How, protected from any of life's arrows, I could have grasped anything of the anguish and triumph in those words.

Will you indulge me in a little paraphrasing ...?

To give in to despair is an empty comfort, like feasting on a rotting corpse. I will not accept that option. Even though I am hanging on to whatever it means to be human by no more than an unravelling thread, I WILL NOT let go. I will not say "I can't go on". I can go on. I can at least take one more step forward. I can last the night and hope for a better day ahead. I will not give up.

Even though my marriage has ended as roadkill, the fly-blown carcass of my dreams will not define who I am or dictate what I will do next.

The concept of Despair has captured my interest ever since reading the words of Stephen Donaldson, in a commentary on his own "Chronicles of Thomas Covenant" novels – "*In reality as in dreams, what matters is the answer we find in our hearts to the test of Despite.*" I wish I could write a book that expounds on that brief

sentence, but in the end it would be a dry discourse that did no more than point to the astounding insights in the parable Donaldson has already written. In the series of novels, virtually every character faces Despair – despair personified – in their own way, whether it be giving up, maintaining an allegiance to some law or vow, fighting to the death, or sacrificing themselves. I am forced to ask myself how I will deal with Despair.

“Despair”, said someone to me, “is a Western luxury.” Can’t recall if they were African or perhaps South American, but the point was that in their context, there is no option but to struggle, to live, to continue. One cannot collapse in self-pity because it would achieve nothing. In a Xhosa song I wish I had the lyrics for, the guiding theme is that no matter what befalls us, we will walk, we will walk, and we will keep walking.

— Nat



# **I must be a complete idiot**

*November 20, 2011*

H. says that her friends think I am amazing in the way I have given her the freedom she needs and patiently coped with her. But what sort of crazy man continues to live with the woman who has broken his heart?

Putting aside my wish that it could be so, there is no reason to think that she will treat me any differently in the future. No reason to think that she will want intimacy with me. No reason for her to suddenly become more sexually expressive. No reason she will not continue to see me as a threat and need to protect herself against me. No reason to think that she will become interested in me *qua* me.

So why do I persist?

Well it is almost certainly the best situation for our wonderful children. This isn't an explosive conflict situation and they aren't seeing us at each other's throats. So being able to avoid the logistical and emotional nightmare of shuffling them between two houses has been very good. Neither of us want to hurt them and the practical challenges of any alternative are a bit daunting. If I lived elsewhere and we took turns looking after the kids, how could I maintain a full-time job and still do all the transporting etc that they need? (How does any single parent manage?)

I understand that although my situation, like everyone's, is unique, it is certainly no more difficult or tragic than the hardships faced by millions of others. I am still well off in terms of money and caring

friends and family and health, with all the unfair advantages of being born a white, English-speaking male. But it continues to hurt almost beyond bearing. And I must be a complete idiot to continue trying to bear it.

— Nat.

## Emancipation and Emasculation

*November 20, 2011*

H has cut off my balls. No, that's too clean. She has crushed them. More accurately, she has slipped a rubber ring onto me, like onto a sheep, and watched for years as the restricted bloodflow killed my manhood. Why have I let her do it?

Why does she act as though her emancipation requires my emasculation? That is a central mystery to me. Why has she seen us as enemies? Why weren't we able to work together towards a solution?

— Nat.

## **"As you wish" doesn't work**

*December 08, 2011*

In my relationship with H, an early commitment was to be her servant. But my intention was never for that to be one-sided. I did not want a relationship where she felt indebted, nor one where I was trampled on. In my mind this was clear from the first, traumatic year of our marriage: I would serve H in the hope that when she felt loved and secure she would also serve me. (Is there any difference between mutual servanthood and mutual love?) But instead, she has experienced my service as oppressive – perhaps as a debt she cannot repay – and built a wall of protection around herself, founded on a mistrust of my best intentions, that prevented any mutuality at all.

I've always called it servanthood, but as she rejects that core element of my self-image, my self confidence is shattered. Is it just she who has misunderstood, or do others share the same perception that I am arrogant and judgemental? Have I built my life on a bad idea?

Perhaps generosity is a more helpful image of essentially the same desire. I love being generous: generous with my money, with my time, and in the way I interpret other's motives. I love the giving of myself to others, and never more than to H.

The whole of our marriage has been made hollow by a lack of intimacy, which makes me wonder what it is that I have lost by now being separated. It's not as though past intimacy has suddenly been

taken away. What's different now? Even though H didn't allow herself to be intimate with me, I embedded myself in a sort of one-way intimacy. Always generous to her. Always hoping she would one day see and appreciate it: like Wesley's repeated "[As you wish](#)". Always serving in the hope that she would one day reciprocate. But my Buttercup never came to that life-changing moment when her eyes opened to the realisation of what mutual love could mean.

What's different is not any change in what I can expect from H, but that I can no longer express my generosity, my intimacy, with her.

No, that's rubbish; unhelpful rationalisation. What's different is that I can no longer feel her warmth next to me in bed, can no longer feel her softness under my hand, no longer exchange a kiss, a cuddle. No longer delude myself that she wishes those things from me.

I knew that she was taking advantage of my generosity, though I mostly chose not to know it. She would never engage in a discussion of it and I drifted in a quicksand of optimism, dreaming that one day she would understand. I should have listened to a counsellor who, very early in our marriage, warned that servanthood [I assume he meant servanthood that is not mutual] is not a good basis for a relationship.

— Nat

## Sexual frustration and the role of marriage

*December 24, 2011*

[This post has taken me a long time to write and perhaps it is too long, too raw and too personal. But I write honestly, in the hope that it also reflects others' experience and that by me writing it down publically, others may feel some vicarious release.]

Sex has never delivered to me the promise it seems to offer.

In my youth I chose to be a follower of Jesus and inherited from the Christian tradition a commitment to sexual abstinence before marriage and absolute fidelity in marriage. The two go hand-in-hand: abstinence before marriage is really just one aspect of fidelity to a future partner. Monogamy – I mean lifelong monogamy, not what's become known as “serial monogamy” – is not only unpopular these days, but for many it is a perplexing option. Indeed it is fast becoming *unimaginable* to many people.

Sex was once reserved as an expression of long-term commitment. Although that wasn't always the reality, it was the ideal. It seems to me that two changes have happened to that ideal in my lifetime. In the 1960's and 70's the view took hold that sex was an expression of love rather than of commitment. If you were in love with someone, why would you not want to have sex with them, and why should it not be legitimate to do so? More recently, sex has become something exploratory prior to any declaration of love. I recall the stars of *Sex in the City* debating how many times one should have sex with a new “partner” before expecting one or other to say “I love

you.”

Those two changes seem to me to constitute a radical reconceptualisation of both sex and marriage, and certainly show that I am way behind the times. I have always thought that the frustration inherent in the “constraint” of monogamy was worthwhile because it would lead to a deeper joy, though it is fair to say that I am disillusioned with that principle at the moment.

### **BC – Before Consummation :^)**

In teenage years, with no useful role model, I simply repressed my growing sexual desires, thinking that they were somehow wrong. But I found that denying them is both impossible and self-destructive.

During my twenty’s I understood a lot more about sublimating sexuality by rechanneling the energy towards other endeavours. That was an extremely productive and rewarding period. Not only was I involved in (what I took to be) meaningful projects, but the self-training in restraint, the commitment to treat women as real subjects rather than objects, and the discipline of delaying gratification were all important in making me a man, and I think, preparing me for marriage. I think I did that in a healthy manner, though it did mean a lot of conscious turning away from “temptation” and unconsciously presenting an image to girls that said “I’m not available or interested.”

Although I didn’t actively seek marriage, or sex, I yearned deeply to find someone to whom I could give my self fully and without reserve.

In marriage I sought someone with whom I could form a true partnership. A relationship in which both of us could feel not only the warmth of love but also the total security of lifelong commitment and the freedom to be ourselves without fear of rejection. And I hoped we would discover and explore the pleasures of sex together.

### **During Marriage**

When I found the woman of my dreams and we were married, I mistakenly thought that the time to enjoy my sexuality had come. As I wrote [previously](#), it seemed to me that my penis was at last doing what it was designed for. I experienced a sigh of contentment, a belief that my sexuality was at last able to be expressed in a wholesome giving to another. A sense that a longstanding longing had found its true resting place. That my half had become a whole. That my sexuality could be the missing jigsaw piece in another's puzzle. That I could offer to H the ideal gift: one that comes from my heart (all good gifts are an offering of one's self) to nourish the joy in her heart.

But those feelings didn't progress.

I remember an older friend saying that the problem with short-term sexual relationships was that there was not enough time to learn how to enjoy sex. He claimed that sex only became really satisfying after 15 years with the same person. Well that didn't work for us! Sex didn't provide any deep satisfaction – to either of us – at any point in our 19 years together. My yearning for intimacy banged up against the invisible wall of H's passivity and self-protection. In sexuality, probably more than any in other area of our relationship, I



have felt rejected to the core.

As is stereotypical of guys, I wished for more frequent sex that H did, and often felt the pain of my advances being rebuffed. She was the gatekeeper with total control over when we had sex. But that's commonplace. In many cases she would wait until I was clearly desperate before throwing me a bone out of pity. I remember once, after three months with no sex, crying and begging H to understand what she was doing to me. There was no joint journey of discovery and our sexual repertoire was limited to two positions under the covers with the lights off.

But more important to me than the frequency or blandness of sex was her lack of any real interest in my sexuality. Rarely any discussion of sex. No response to my requests. There was no encouragement from H if I was doing anything right, or suggestions from her about what I could do better. There were very few times in the whole 19 years together when H would initiate either sex or even a romantic event. She never tried to seduce me and never even undressed for me. In short, I had H's *permission* to have sex from time to time, but rarely her real assent or engagement.

One of the lies that marketers of sex propose is that good sex depends on physical beauty. That's why we men all irrationally think that the glamorous models we see in the media would be the most satisfying sex partners. Through my relationship with H, I've come to believe that it is not good looks, but real desire that makes for the best sex. I enjoyed sex most when my wife seemed to actually want it. The converse, having sex with someone who doesn't seem to

want it, is disappointing and demoralising. Sex that is not mutually desired is empty. (I find the idea of rape not only obnoxious but very perplexing. How can there possibly be pleasure in forced sex? That is absolutely foreign to me. It would be like rubbing one's penis against a brick.)

All of that is not to discount the pleasure I, and occasionally we, enjoyed. Sex with H has been the most pleasurable experience of my life. Nothing else comes close. It is the activity more than any other that I would wish to repeat.

My biggest frustration is that throughout our marriage there seems to have been the potential for so much more fun and deep joy, if only H had sought it. I lived with the hope of unlocking that potential for maybe 14 years before coming to the understanding that this was all H had to offer me; that she was not able to engage in any deeper intimacy.

### **AD (After Divorce)**

But then H started to be more honest about her experience of our whole history together, and admitted that she had never wanted to marry me and had lived with the shame of doing so from day 1. She felt trapped and smothered. The lifelong commitment I took to be my most valuable gift to her, she saw as a chain. Instead of seeing the complete giving of myself as a blessing, she experienced it as an oppressive constraint that imposed on her an obligation she could not meet.

It is horrendous for me to hear from H that in the latter part of our

marriage she would frequently want to cry after sex. I think something like that pain actually goes back a long time for her. When we used to have sex, the show would be over as soon as the first one of us climaxed. I was never told “Wow that was nice, let’s do some more”. She would turn her back to me and go to sleep. That was always disappointing to me, but now it sits like an accusation against me, and a judgement on my manhood, questioning the validity of the pleasures I once felt.

She has also spoken of how she too longs for a more intimate and sexually expression relationship. But I am not the man with whom she wants it.

H clearly enjoyed sex on some occasions, but for some reason I don’t understand, it was not the sort of pleasure she sought to repeat. I am angry that she didn’t perceive the potential joy that I so clearly see in sex, and angry that she has not understood my desire, my craving for it. And now as our marriage dies, I am angry that she has removed that pleasure from my reach.

It is true that I could probably find someone willing to have sex with me for pleasure or money, perhaps eventually even someone who wishes it out of love. But for now I continue the commitment to monogamy I have held for 35 years, a wasted fidelity to H that started well before we met. I grieve the fact that I cannot give myself to another in the way I gave myself to H. That is not just psychologically difficult, it is literally impossible. I cannot become a virgin again. I cannot say to another lover that I have saved myself for her. I cannot say that she is the only one.

Despite that, I still maintain a voluntary commitment to the constraint of monogamy and would recommend the same to my kids. The problem is that I can no longer justify that commitment by the belief that short-term restraint is made worthwhile by deeper future joy. The promise of that deeper joy is a fraud.

Since we stopped having sex, moved to separate bedrooms and then formally separated, my sexual options have become more limited, and the frustration has increased. After a few months of masturbation and porn at least daily, I hated the way that desire could control me. It is unrelenting, corrosive and demeaning.

So now I am trying to put my sexual desire aside. Sublimating that desire now, however, is a more difficult struggle than before I was married. That struggle takes two forms. One form relates to changing the way I respond to beautiful women. When I was married, I could transfer the desire created by that person over to my wife. But that strategy can no longer work. In time, I will re-enter the so-called “dating scene” and start building relationships with women that may lead to new intimacy and sex. I’m not there yet, but that doesn’t mean the natural appetite is dormant. In the meantime, is there a healthy and respectful outlet for such desire? (Perhaps “respectful” is not the best word, but I use it here as the opposite of “lustful”. Lust treats a woman as an object whose sole value is to satisfy – in reality or in our dreams – one’s desire. Lust demeans the woman and as a consequence demeans one’s self.)

The struggle to put sexual desire aside also takes a more purely

physical form in the need for orgasm. I do not think it is possible for me to not have orgasms. But nor do I want to allow that inevitability to turn into an addiction, and I know that to be a real risk.

The trouble is that suspending the natural and God-given desire for sex means I am killing part of myself. I can turn the energy into other pursuits but when I'm not busy I am lost. I miss the touch of lips, the feel of the skin between her legs, the softness of her breasts. I ask God to fill the gap that H has left in my life but what could possibly replace that physical touch?

Is there no middle ground between killing this desire and letting it control me? Yes, of course there is – releasing the insistence of sexual energy is one of the primary purposes of marriage! A monogamous life-long marriage is precisely the societally beneficial and God-planned context in which the natural seed of sexual desire can blossom.

I am so freaking angry that the opportunity has been lost.

—Nat

## Sexual frustration my own fault

*December 31, 2011*

In the [previous post](#), it was probably clear that part of the reason for my dissillusionment about sex is a direct result of choices I have made myself, especially my expectation about having just one sexual partner. If I dropped that expectation, many other potentially fulfilling options would be open to me. But there's another reason I have to accept blame for how things have worked out with H, and I thought it was worth writing about that as an addendum.

For many months after H told me she didn't want to be my wife, I thought of myself as being defrauded. When we married, I believed, and still believe, that a normal expectation of marriage is the mutual discovery of each others' sexuality and a shared joy in pleasing each other physically. I felt that in marrying me she was agreeing with that, and yet my expectation has not been fulfilled.

BUT, I have realised that these sexual expectations I have always held during our marriage have been unfounded. I accept – unhappily, but truly – that H had not considered the implications of marriage 20 years ago. She had not projected her imagination into that future, had not longed for a husband, nor children, nor making a new home, nor settling into one location. I assumed that by saying she wanted to marry me, she anticipated and wanted to explore and enjoy sex with me. But we got married so quickly that there was no time to check that assumption, and I didn't even think to try. I should have, because if I'm honest with myself there were signs prior to marriage that the assumption was wrong.

(When I write that we got married quickly, I mean we knew each other for several months before "falling in love" one October, we were engaged two weeks later and married in January. That was a fundamental mistake that I could have avoided.)

From this vantage point, I can see that a very harmful effect of my unwarranted expectations has been an imposition on H from which she could see no escape. I regret that this is another consequence of us getting married before allowing time for us to get to know each other more deeply. There are really no justifications for my expectations that she would be interested in discovering our sexuality together or being interested in understanding my sexuality. And hence no justification for me blaming her for not fulfilling those expectations.

—Nat

## Spoil myself?

*January 09, 2012*

Still pondering what I wrote [a couple of weeks ago](#) about monogamy. Can anyone tell me what value there is in sexual restraint once the opportunity for a lifelong partnership has been lost?

It seems to me that a large chunk of my reason for being chaste is no longer relevant. Once upon a time I thought my sexual desire would be uniquely expressed with one person; discovered and explored and nurtured and enjoyed and cherished in one contented and sacred relationship. Now I'd rather be chased than chaste :^)

I spent an annoyingly sleepless night wondering what it would be like to spoil myself with a high-class escort: a long night with a professional who knows how to please and able to act as though she enjoyed it. "Spoil myself" of course has a double meaning. It would seem a luxury, a treat. But would it taint or damage me? It doesn't seem to me that it would – I am already "damaged goods" so to speak. The thought that such an indulgence would cost \$3,000 or more is perhaps all that protects me from that option at the moment.

If I met someone else and we decided to marry, would it make a difference if I had numerous previous sexual partners? I think it makes a big difference the first time around – being a virgin allows that first relationship to be unique in the total giving of one's body to the other. But now? Would either I or my imagined future partner be



concerned if there had been 2 or 3 or 10 before?

—Nat

## Carrion Comfort (part 2)

*January 11, 2012*

Back in my post about [CarrionComfort](#), I only got as far as commenting on the first four lines. So let me pick up that theme again.

Here's Hopkins' complete poem (virtually guaranteed to confuse and perhaps bore any but the English majors among you) and my very poor attempt at a paraphrase (virtually guaranteed to annoy the English majors).

Make sure you read the first verse loudly, with anger. It voices the defiance of every human against the burden of existence and against the God who causes, or at least allows, our suffering.

<i>Gerard Manly Hopkins</i>	<i>Nat Whilk Clerk</i>
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<p>NOT, I'll not, carrion comfort,  Despair, not feast on thee;  Not untwist—slack they may  be—these last strands of man  In me ór, most weary, cry I can no  more. I can;  Can something, hope, wish day  come, not choose not to be.  But ah, but O thou terrible, why  wouldst thou rude on me  Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a  lionlimb against me? scan  With darksome devouring eyes my  bruised bones? and fan,  O in turns of tempest, me heaped  there; me frantic to avoid thee and  flee?  Why? That my chaff might fly; my  grain lie, sheer and clear.  Nay in all that toil, that coil, since  (seems) I kissed the rod,  Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped  strength, stole joy, would laugh,  chéer.  Cheer whom though? the hero whose  heaven-handling flung me, fóot tród  Me? or me that fought him? O which  one? is it each one? That night, that  year  Of now done darkness I wretch lay  wrestling with (my God!) my God.</p>	<p>To give in to despair is an empty comfort,  like feasting on a rotting corpse. I will not  accept that option.  Even though I am hanging on to whatever  it means to be human by no more than an  unravelling thread, I WILL NOT let go.  I will not say "I can't go on". I can go on.  I can at least take one more step forward. I  can last the night and hope for a better  day ahead. I will not give up.  But what the fuck's going on here? What  sadist is playing this game with me?  What's the point of kicking the world out of  orbit and sending lions to attack me?  Why stare at my brokenness as though  feeding on it, why mock me lying here like  a pile of shit when all I want to do is run  away and hide?  [The next day?] Ok, so I can see that  suffering builds character.  I've come to accept that principle and  although it has been hard going, I have  nevertheless been given strength and joy  and even laughter.  But who should I cheer now that I've come  out the other side of such suffering? Do I  praise the one in heaven who mistreated  me?  Or do I give <i>myself</i> a cheer for persevering  through such mistreatment? Maybe it's a  bit of each.  I survived a godforsaken night that  seemed like a year, fighting an unknown  assailant for no apparent ... Oh shit! <i>That</i>  <i>was God!</i></p>
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I won't attempt any more detailed exposition, except to note the important allusions to Genesis 32:22-30, Matthew 27:46 and Psalm 22. What I do want to comment on is how I feel mistreated by God through my marriage and its ending, and the impact that is having on my faith. But that's for the next posting.

—Nat.

## God gave me a stone

*January 22, 2012*

In [Carrion Comfort](#), Hopkins alludes to a Biblical passage in which Jacob wrestles overnight with a stranger. Neither can get the upper hand, but Jacob is left with a limp. Hopkins interprets Jacob's struggle as a metaphor for his own, and in the morning after the struggle, both Jacob and Hopkins understand that at its core their struggle was with God.

It will be clear to readers of this blog that I approach my failed marriage from a Christian perspective, and yet that presents more of a challenge than a comfort. I hope that my story is relevant to all men whose wives have left them, and that my Christian faith does not obstruct a feeling of solidarity about such loss. But each of our stories is unique and it is inevitable that mine is infused with God.

On the surface, the breakdown of a marriage is a struggle between husband and wife, and as I have written before, I have been intensely hurt by H and angry with her mis-use of me. But like Jacob and Hopkins, I recognise that beyond (beneath?) my grief is a struggle with God who also seems to have mis-used me. It seems to me that God has led me into this mess and my anger about the whole situation is directed at God perhaps as much as at H.

Jesus once said "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for fish, will give him a snake? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts

to those who ask him?" I prayed earnestly for years during my 20's that God would help me become a good man, fit for the right wife. I was willing to never marry if God saw that to be best for me. When H and I were considering marriage I fasted for 4 (or was it 5?) days because I knew it was such an important decision. But if God guided me at all through that time it was to lead me into a commitment that has ended in this debacle. The marriage God seemed to have given me has been a cold, hard stone that has provided no nourishment.

Jesus also said "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be satisfied." I may be arrogant in the extreme, but I claim the same standing as Job who, especially in Chapter 31, claims he is blameless. I have sought after righteousness since early teens. But I am nowhere near satisfied.

I am \*not\* claiming that since I have been so good (ha!), God owes me something in return. Whether I deserve better or not has no bearing at all. My complaint is that I have not found God's self-portrayal to be accurate. I have believed in a God who cares for me personally; who has my (and your!) best interests at heart; the good shepherd; the ideal parent. I have entrusted that God with my complete allegiance.

What's more, I have, at numerous times in my life, given that God permission to do whatever God pleases with me. I have prayed John Wesley's radical [Covenant Prayer](#) and put myself at God's disposal in many other ways. So perhaps I have only myself to blame.

But why didn't God warn us before we were married? Why, when H and I had the very best of intentions, did God not mediate between us to fulfil the apparent intention of marriage? Why does it seem that God is now leading H away from me? How can any of that be good for me?

I no longer believe that God looks out for my personal interests. It seems more likely that although God cares for all people, the complexity of reality makes it impossible to bring about everyone's best interests and in this case I have become the fall guy carrying the consequences of H's best interest. Of course I write from the limited perspective of someone in the middle of the shit. God can yet bring some good out of it for me, but that's evidence of God's ability to redeem even the worst situation, not evidence that this miserable agony is in any way good. God has not delivered what Jesus promised.

—Nat

## Wesley and Wesley

*January 23, 2012*

Just as I was finishing the last post, a weird connection came to mind about my two recent references to Wesley: the [Wesley](#) who, in *The Princess Bride*, says “As you wish” to his beloved Buttercup, and [John Wesley](#), whose Covenant Prayer says “Put me to what thou wilt”. I have been saying, in different forms, “As you wish” to both H and to God. And in neither case does it seem that my eagerness to serve has been honoured.

Now I'll have to go away and think about what that means ...

—Nat.



## One is the loneliest number...

*February 07, 2012*

For a change, I'm not going to write about how lonely and painful losing my wife is. Instead, I want to repeat my invitation to become part of this blog. It's getting lonely being the only author here.

As I've [written before](#), the intention of this blog has never been for me to be the sole contributor. I write with the hope that I can voice my own grief, for sure. I also hope that my words might express the grief of being left by a wife, on behalf of countless other men. But my greatest hope for this blog is that it becomes a place where men struggling through this horrible time in their lives could do so in solidarity with each other.

Would you like to share your own story, or observations on mine? Are there other people you know who might like to join in?

—Nat

## The reason for sexual purity

*February 10, 2012*

A good friend has suggested that I think more about the nature of my commitment to sexual purity. Was it a commitment to my wife, for the pragmatic reason that relationships works out better on that basis? Or was it a commitment to God, for some higher, more principled reason?

Seems to me, as is clear in [this other post](#), that I have held to the former idea. And consequently, now that my marriage has failed, the commitment to sexual purity seems pointless. But my friend's question deserves further thought and prayer. How does my allegiance to Christ inform the expression of my natural sexual desires? What's the spiritual purpose of abstinence?

I do not believe that God's instructions to us on holy living are arbitrary or designed to frustrate us. And yet I don't know if I can continue to cope without sex. My attempts to curb my physical sexual urges have not been successful over the last year and I do not see how it is possible to continue for another year. It brings no joy and seems meaningless. How can this be God's intent? And where is the "way of escape" promised in 1 Corinthians 10:13?

For several weeks I have been seriously investigating the option of [turning to an "escort"](#) and imagining how it would play out. What would it achieve? At what risk? Several people have advised me that this is a time when I should be looking after my own interests and caring for myself: I think they'd be surprised to know the

direction of my thinking in that regard!

Today, that option seems less attractive than it was. Although it seems like fun, it does not yet seem right. So that plan is on hold -- for now. But something must change. Abstinence is killing me.

Hate is not a normal part of my vocabulary, but I absolutely hate this situation I am in. And I am angry that H has forced me into a position where I am considering such as option. I hate the waste of time and energy I am spending to mutilate a part of me that should have been a source of joy and blessing.

In this and other matters I am really lost. I don't know where I am or where I am heading, and I have lost track of where North is. I am carried along by the momentum of my past discipline, but without my past confidence or peace.

—Nat

## **You shall have no other gods before me**

*February 14, 2012*

This post is way out of time sequence: it's based on stuff I thought about months ago, but seems more relevant now in the light of my [complaints against God](#). I claimed to have given God my complete allegiance, but to be honest, I have allowed H to displace God. That's a type of idolatry and has damaging consequences for both her and myself.

When there has been a conflict (perceived or real) between what H wants of me and what God wants of me, I have often chosen H. I have set aside what I took to be a clear call from God to peacemaking in xxx. I set aside my commitment to live simply. I gave God less of my time and money. I stopped putting into practice my understanding of ecclesiology.

In part, I was conscious of the conflict and believed that I was doing the right thing by making our marriage a #1 priority. Over time I just fell into a habit of putting H first. Had I made the opposite decisions, as though my relationship with H was not itself a godly pursuit, would things have turned out any better? How is that balancing act supposed to work? Would God call someone into marriage and then call them towards something incompatible with that marriage? I thought not, and chose to comply with H. Now H is seeing a similar incompatibility and choosing God. Perhaps she is making the more holy choice. But if that is the case, then God is a mean bastard.

My idolatry is shown not only in those compromises, but also,

perhaps more significantly, in my expectation that I would find satisfaction/joy/happiness in H rather than God. I have treasured her above all else – and believed that I was doing the right thing. Sadly, rather than making H feel good, those attitudes of mine have made her feel smothered and inadequate.

Sin always has its consequences, and the wages demanded in this case seem to be the death of my marriage.

A friend suggested that the issue may be my elevation of the concept of marriage rather than my elevation of H. That was the case for Sheldon Vanauken, who describes the idealisation of romantic love in his auto-biographical "[A Severe Mercy](#)". He and his wife had the "perfect" marriage that was cut short by her untimely death to cancer. In a letter to Vanauken, C. S. Lewis described the death as a severe mercy, suggesting that if the idol of their marriage had been left unchallenged, the spiritual consequences for both husband and wife might have been something worse. I don't think that applies to my view on marriage, though certainly may apply to my attitude to H.

I can see how making an idol of H has made me less happy. I have become naïve in the sense that Robert Bly uses in "[Iron John](#)" (that's such an accurate description of me I shall leave the details until the next post). This idolatry has also made me lose track of what I enjoy. I have held as a principle "Glorify God and do what you want", but the second phrase only works in the light of the first. Having displaced God, I have undermined the ability to seek what I want.

There have been consequences for H as well. To the extent that I thought my happiness depended on her and treated her as an object of worship, I have created an image that she could never live up to. I don't mean that I have idealised her and then felt let down by the reality of her faults; I mean that placing her at the centre of my life has imposed an unholy burden of responsibility on her. She has felt unworthy in that position but unable (until now) to escape the burden. She says she felt smothered by my affection and judged by my goodness.

One thing that is clear to me is that I must make sure not to fill the hole left by H with anything other than God. I am purposefully keeping myself busy so that I don't cycle into depression or isolation. But what I must avoid is seeking meaning or happiness in those things, or worse, in other people.

—Nat

# Naivete

*February 17, 2012*

[A few days ago](#) I mentioned Robert Bly's book "[Iron John](#)". It's unlike any other book I have read, which makes it difficult for me to summarise or even categorise. Bly is part of a movement that seeks to re-establish a proper sense of manhood and in this book he approaches that goal mythologically.

There is much in that book I do not understand, but also a lot that strikes me as deeply insightful. One of the most relevant sections for me is about naïveté. I have never considered myself to be naïve, but in the sense Bly uses the word it describes me uncomfortably well. Not all that he says applies, but these extracts are both true and distressing (p. 63ff):

The naïve man feels a pride in being attacked. If his wife or girlfriend, furious, shouts that he is a "chauvinist," a "sexist," a "man," he doesn't fight back, but just takes it. He opens his shirt so that she can see more clearly where to put the lances. He ends with three or four javelins sticking out of his body, and blood running all over the floor.

He feels, as he absorbs attacks, that he is doing the brave and advanced thing; he will surely be able to recover somewhere in isolation. A woman, so mysterious and superior, has given him some attention. To be attacked by someone you love – what could be more wonderful?

The naïve man will also be proud that he can pick up the pain of others. He particularly picks up women's pain. ... He is often more in touch with women's pain than his own, and he will offer to carry a woman's pain before he checks with his own heart to see if his labour is proper in the situation. I think each gender drops its own pain when it tries to carry the pain of the other gender. I don't mean that men shouldn't listen. But hearing a woman's pain and carrying it are two different things.

We all have special relationships but [the naïve man] surrounds the special person with a cloying kind of goodwill. The relationship is so special that he never examines the dark side of the person. ... He accepts responses that are way off, conspires somehow with their dark side.

Sincerity is a big thing for him. He assumes that the person, stranger, or lover he talks with is straightforward, goodwilled, and speaking from the heart. ... He puts a lot of stock in his own sincerity. He believes in it, as if it were a horse or a walled city. He assumes that it will, and should, protect him from consequences that fall to less open people.

A naïve man acts out strange plays of self-isolation. For example, when an angry woman is criticizing him, he may say, quite sensibly, "You're right, I had no right to do that."

The naïve man will lose what is most precious to him because of lack of boundaries. ... He confides the contents of



last night's dream to a total stranger. ... He rarely fights for what is his; he gives away his eggs and other people raise his chicks. We could say that, unaware of boundaries, he does not develop a good container for his soul, nor a good container for two people. There's a leak in it somewhere.

The naïve man often doesn't know that there is a being in him that wants to remain sick. Inside each man and woman there is a sick person and a well person; and one needs to know which one is talking at any moment. But awareness of the sick being, and knowledge of how strong he is, is not part of the naïve man's field of perceptions.

The naïve man often lacks what James Hillman has called "natural brutality." The mother hawk pushes the fledglings out of the nest one day; we notice the father fox drives the cubs away in early October. But the ascender lets things go on too long. At the start of a relationship, a few harsh words of truth would have been helpful. Instead he waits and waits, and then a major wounding happens farther down the line.

His timing is off. We notice that there will often be a missing beat a second or so after he takes a blow, verbal or physical. He will go directly from the pain of receiving a blow to an empathetic grasp of the reason why it came, skipping over the anger entirely. Misusing Jesus' remark, he turns the missing cheek.

As a final remark about naïveté, we might mention that there

is something in naïveté that demands betrayal. ... When a woman lives with a truly naïve man for a while, she feels impersonally impelled to betray him.

—Nat

## Patience

*February 23, 2012*

[A sonnet by G. M. Hopkins](#) includes the line "Patience masks our ruins of wrecked past purpose." Patience watches, with bloodshot and tearful eyes, our unfulfilled desires. She protects us from despair but also deceives us with false hope. Patience invites loss and yet persists in obedience.

In the famous passage in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul claims that "Love is patient ... always perseveres ... never fails." On the contrary, I have to say that love has failed to sustain my marriage, that patience has simply masked the failure and that further perseverance is useless.

—Nat.

## Over a year now

*March 12, 2012*

Well it's been over a year now since we were separated and the time to lodge a divorce application draws nigh. It seems inevitable, but still hard to grasp. H is still certain that she does not want to be married, but uncertain whether she wants to divorce. From all I know of her, she will not change that commitment to independence, but she will still feel that I am rushing her into a decision.

Surely I should be able to "move on" as they say. Surely by now I could start writing something positive in this blog, like how I can see that the pain has been worthwhile, or how a return to singleness opens new possibilities. I am extremely blessed with family and friends. There are people who care deeply for me. Some I can honestly share joys or fears with. Some who I know would drop whatever they were doing to help me when I need it. People praying for me.

But regardless of the wonderful people around me I am desperately alone. I get a few hugs, even some kisses from my wonderful children, but they're not the hugs or kisses of a lover. There's no-one to dream with and I am tearfully broken, lost and crumbling inside, constantly aware of a hunger for sex that has no possibility of satisfaction. *Fuck you H. Why have you marooned me in this desolate place? And fuck you God. Why did you arrange for her and I to meet in the first place?*

How could I possibly start a new relationship in such a state of

brokenness? Who would risk falling in love with such a limping man who's still deeply in love with his ex?

—Nat

## Perhaps the final one

*May 22, 2012*

My lack of recent posting is mostly due to lack of time. But I think this blog has come to an end. My hope that other people would post their experience and insights hasn't come about. I'm disappointed about that, but nevertheless I hope that something I have written will help someone.

My story isn't over of course, and perhaps it is unfair to end with the negativity of the [last entry](#). Over the past few months I have moved from grief to confusion -- though perhaps confusion is just another stage of grief. I no longer feel so weighed down or tearful or angry. But what dominates my thoughts now is doubt and worry. As I wrote [earlier](#), "I am really lost. I don't know where I am or where I am heading, and I have lost track of where North is." I have lost the clarity I used to have about who I am. I worry about my children.

It's unlikely that I'll post any more here, though I'll keep the site active and will read any comments you make. I welcome any email, which you can send to the address you'll find [somewhere else on this site](#).

—Nat

## Post script

*April 24, 2016*

I keep thinking about whether it is worth renewing the domain registration for this site, and then I notice that it is still being read -- I imagine by people in the midst of the same darkness I was in. If this site ever disappears, the archive will probably still be at [unobservedgrief.blogspot.com](http://unobservedgrief.blogspot.com) anyway, but nevertheless I will keep it here for now.

I wish I could say to you that all will be OK and that you just need to be patient. But as my own journey continues I know that is neither comforting nor always true. Not being the father I hoped to be, understanding the depth of pain I caused H, a series of false starts as I try to find a new partner, feeling let down by God, missing the touch of a lover ... it all adds up to a continuing sense of doubt and incompleteness.

I have changed and resolved some things. No longer feel stuck. But my own path forward is unlikely to be the same as anyone else's so I won't project my resolutions into this blog. My best advice is to stay fit, eat well, sleep, embrace brokenness rather than run from it, and look up more often than you look down. If you want to chat privately I would be happy to listen and give you a virtual hug or two.

-- Nat.

## Denouement

January 16, 2018

During the emotionally difficult times of my separation and divorce, music was an important part of how I managed my grief. I found several songs that resonated with my grief and even seemed to carry the weight of that grief for me.

One song with that sort of sustaining effect was [Josh Garrels' Ulysses](#).

*I'm holding on to hope that one day this could be made right  
Cause I've been shipwrecked and left for dead and I've seen  
the darkest sights*

Those lines captured my confused state perfectly. Sadly – I think tragically – H and I still hurt each other far beyond what either of us wish. It is still a devastating shipwreck. But I have also held an almost naive hope that redemption was still possible.

Although much of the rest of the lyrics do not reflect my situation, the anguished tone does. He notes that there are false hopes to be resisted, like the deadly sirens in Homer's *The Odyssey*:

*Sirens call my name, they say they'll ease my pain, then  
break me on the stones*

But after six years, I bring good news. A month ago I remarried!

I will say straight away that we cannot expect that will always be the outcome. Some of you guys will continue alone. Some will embrace



and enjoy that singleness and for others it will be frustrating, lonely and like being half a person.

Nevertheless, for me, this is a very exciting new adventure. Also scary. The risk of marriage seems so much greater to those of us who know how badly it can go wrong.

A few months before our wedding I was reminded of one of my favourite songs from the 70's – Steely Dan's [Home at Last](#), which also draws on the imagery of Ulysses, tied to the mast of his ship to avoid the lure of the sirens.

*Well the danger on the rocks is surely past  
Still I remain tied to the mast*

After the brokenness and self-doubt, I appreciated that thought. Perhaps the danger was past and I could relax again.

*Could it be that I have found my home at last?  
Home at last.*

I'm beginning to think I am.

... and so they all lived happily ever after.

I hope.

--Nat.

