

Chapter 1: The marriage crumbles.

My wife and I moved to the UK some 5 years ago from Denmark. I admit Denmark is not a particularly "heaven on Earth" type place, I have issues with Denmark, especially around the weather. But even so it is a place built around equality. After my twins Kath and Alex were born I got paternity leave on full pay for eight months. My wife Nora had managed to swing a part-time job with a radio station announcing the news at 8 in Arabic, and I had convinced her to do a PhD while the kids were young, hell... my firm even sponsored her and paid her fees! So a friend's daughter - Kay - and I looked after the babies while Nora went back to work. But neither Nora (being originally Egyptian) nor I (a Yorkshire man) wanted particularly to stay in Denmark and so I got a senior place at a UK University and we moved. At this point I must say that it was not easy for Nora because as a non-UK national, with no UK address or NI number, she was not able to buy a house without fairly serious complications. That "honour" fell to me and that her name was not on the deed irritated her for years afterwards. Despite that, this actually freed her up for potential "first time buyer" advantages and in the years afterwards we looked many times at several houses to buy – either together or as investments in her name – but she never forgave me for being the house owner. That may have been the start of the rot.

The rot was that my wife started moving in circles impenetrable to me. Through her new job she got to know the Arab émigré society. These were people I didn't know, and that I (as a non Arabic speaker) could not understand. They held quite different cultural values, e.g. that it is shameful for an Arabic woman to be married to a non-Arab - yes folks, that's me they're talking about! - and sure enough this social circle later did a little matchmaking and Nora ran off with an émigré Palestinian lawyer.

THINKBOX 1

Be aware of the background temperature of your marriage. If your wife starts developing a parallel life with other people of different views then the one thing they will inevitably discuss is YOU ... and not always in a complementary light! This is a sure sign that your marriage is in trouble.

Unfortunately there is not much you can do, since forbidding your wife to see her friends will only hasten the process and you don't want that, you want to hang on to your family and stuff for as long as possible and to have time to put other concrete measures in place.

My wife was trying to seriously enrich herself at my expense and refused any mediation or discussion. I ended up paying going to court 4 times and paying £35,000 in legal costs. Obviously if a sensible alternative solution, like mediation, is acceptable, then the whole thing can be settled reasonably and cheaply (or at least as far as legal costs are concerned) but don't expect a better split of your assets. Look up mediation services on the web.

Nora had always had a spitting bad temper but her working shifts made her constantly tired and her foul moods became truly vicious. At that time I was paying the mortgage, food for 5 (remember the

live-in Au Pair), and everything else. In total this sum was somewhat higher than my salary, so I was naturally inclined to persuade my wife – who after all was earning £2000 a month after tax – to contribute. After a bitter battle she agreed to take over some of the smaller bills, like the gas and electric. But now she kept repeating she wanted both our names on the house. To this I replied OK if she would pay half the mortgage too.

So you see, I was thinking that the situation could be controlled with reasonable sane logic and that everyone must eventually agree, simply because no one can continue paying out more than they get in. Indeed according to basic logic and fairness the solution was blindingly obvious for all to see.... Unfortunately I had a bad case of “I’m safe because I’ve done nothing wrong” syndrome. From now on I’ll call this dangerous attitude DNW-syndrome. Thanks to this syndrome I had deluded myself but in fact all the alarms should have been flashing and ringing.

THINKBOX 2

“I’m safe because I’ve **done nothing wrong**” syndrome (DNW-syndrome) is the most deadly form of self delusion. You are in denial. It is essential that you keep your senses open, detect it and combat it.

As the situation deteriorated Nora started making more demands, and backing them up with a threat that I found very curious; namely that if I don’t give in she would “take my house, my kids and my money”. Deeply self-deluded by DNW-syndrome I was rather bemused by this and asked “how”? But I got no answer save a knowing smile. I basically shrugged and forgot it, thinking she was unable to answer. But obviously the truth was that she was not only thinking divorce, but had already been taking concrete advice as to how best to completely fleece me. For those men with DNW-syndrome the fact that a mum can simply leave at any time and be amply and fully rewarded for it, is simply unthinkable.... but don’t you believe it, they can do it and they do do it!