

The Scars Of Divorce

(A child's testimony about her parent's divorce)

"Please, please don't sign them! Oh, Daddy, don't sign those papers!" My pleadings must have added greatly to my father's burden, but the pen held firmly in his hand continued to write his name on the final papers.

Thus was my world destroyed and I with it, for on that day something died in the heart of a child. A child? In years, yes, but the child pleading in the divorce court that day would never again be a carefree little girl, for now my mommy and daddy were divorced. It was a big word and a hateful one. What it meant to grownups I did not know, but what it meant to me is a story that can never be told.

Right now it meant that the home we had known existed no longer. To us children our home was our world, with both Mother and Daddy essential parts of it. But that world had suddenly crumbled. Like a storm that strikes suddenly and leaves you to pick up the pieces, so life had suddenly turned our home inside out and upside down. Much of the shock lay in the fact that the ones destroying it were the two who had been our very security and life.

From now on the family must be divided. I was told to choose between my mother and father. I could not have both, though I loved both and wanted them, both of them, to love me. Each was so necessary to me; how could I turn my back on one and say I wanted the other more?

I remembered nights when I was sick and my mother kept vigil; how she had fed me and tended to my needs. Surely she loved me! When things troubled me, I had always gone to her, and her explanations had banished childish fears. I had great faith in my mother. How could I doubt my father's love or the close place I had in his heart. Often my brothers had sent me to Dad when they wanted some favor, knowing he seldom refused me. Perhaps I had this special place with Daddy because I was so like him and we understood each other so well. I had deep respect for my father, but how could I compare it with what I felt for my mother? And how could I make a decision that would separate me from either?

This was the down payment in the price of divorce, and the children had to pay. To parents who still count the cost, I plead the cause of your children! If you subject them to the agony of choosing between the parents they love, something wonderful will have to die in their hearts during the unnatural struggle that that choice entails.

Years have passed, but I still shudder at the memory of the day I left our home with my mother. Daddy cried like a child, and then he just stood and stared into space. I have wondered what went through his mind then. He had worked so hard to do right by his family, and now all he had built was gone. Was part of his grief due to the fact that missing from the circle of his motherless

children was his only daughter? Was he thinking of what might have been?

In my mind there is no doubt of what might have been. Theirs could have been a successful marriage had they determined to keep the home intact; had both, or even one, been willing to sacrifice personal feelings.

As far back as my memory goes, I remember my parent quarreling. Like all quarrels, these were born of selfishness and stubbornness, with neither willing to give in to the other. Foolish advice was, "Separate if you can't get along; it will be better for the children," Was it better to crush six young hearts than for one or two to bear small hurts? Was it better the blow should fall on six lives, young and tender, not old enough to know why they must be separated from one another?

Bitter protests and tears were vain, for divorce courts do not consider human hearts when they collect their dues. Mother and Daddy were to be "free," but we children were not. I became a slave to despair. The quarrels? They ceased, to be sure, but cries of heartbroken children took their place, and I, for one, longed to hear those quarrels if only it meant that I could have my mother and father back!

This story is my own. The plea I make is that of my own heart, though my brothers, too, could write their stories, and neighbors in our small town could add to it. Perhaps it is just a familiar story. Daddy was too busy to do the little, things that count so much and had to neglect his six-and eight-year-old boys. My little brother longed for his mother, but his loss and grief was expressed in meanness. He became a problem child in school. My teenage brothers became involved with the law to the extent that they spent a night in jail. I realized even then that this, too, was part of the price, of divorce that the children pay. Perhaps a girl needs her mother even more than does a boy. I seemed to be cut the deepest and to suffer the most. The shock of that day in court was indelibly printed on my memory, but I had only begun to taste the bitter portion dealt to a child of divorced parents.

With Daddy thrust out of my life and my brothers gone, my heart fastened more tenaciously than ever on mother. Therefore, words cannot express the shock that was mine when I found her in the arms of another man. In that instant I knew utter desolation. I had lost my father; now my mother no longer belonged to me! Another man - a stranger to me - had taken her, and this discovery completely changed and embittered my life.

Emotions that had been sealed within me now broke forth in endless weeping. Bitterness enveloped me like a cloud, and resentment made it impossible for me to speak peaceably to Mother. In back of confused emotions was the resolve that no one else should have her; she belonged to me and to Daddy! I became crazed with the idea that I must win her from the one who I felt now was the cause of my sorrow.

A showdown had to come. One day I found Mother and her boyfriend with

other friends in the front yard. Blind despair and a lingering hope gripped me, and for me that gathering became a court session, with a child as prosecuting attorney and the neighbors as jurors. The desperation that filled my heart poured out our need of Daddy, our need of the home we had left, "oh, please, Mommy, let us go back and be happy!"

Artists may paint human suffering, but neither artist's brush nor writer's pen can recapture the horror of the moment when a child realizes he has lost the battle for his mother's love. One day she had been my mother; the next, she was a stranger whose only feeling seemed to be displeasure at the scene her unreasonable child was causing. Neighbors pitied and tried to comfort, but their words did not reach me. I knew only departed hope, I had failed, and no failure had ever involved so much.

I may have been in a state of shock as I found my way back to the old home. A few weeks before I had been in this home, a happy, confident child, but as I entered the familiar yard there was no joy in my heart, no anticipation or eagerness. Daddy met me at the door and seemed thankful that I had returned, but he found, to his sorrow, that it was not the same little girl who had come back. Shock and grief caused youth to flee, and with it had gone laughter and joy.

He tried, but he was not able to save me from the depths of despair to which I sank. I wept until tears no longer came. Many pitied me, but there was no healing for my wounded heart. When we heard that mother remarried, great bitterness possessed me. Grief had so eaten away at my life that I became hard and rebellious. The faith that my mother had destroyed caused me to lose confidence in everyone, even my father, and I felt that everyone was against me. Nothing mattered anymore. When Daddy corrected me, I thought that he too had turned against me, and I rebelled under his authority.

I left him and stayed with anyone who would have me. Later, harsh circumstances compelled me go back to my mother and her husband. I must have been a shadow of the past to them, and I lived with stinging reality that I was not wanted. Yet every fiber of my being craved to be loved. Violent arguments, a war of hate, began between me and the intruder. Strain began to show on Mother's face, and in my misery I found secret consolation in the fact. My strained emotions became a physical illness, for the human system can be overtaxed just so long before something breaks. Clouds of gloom settled over me; nightmares caused me to run through the house. I suffered cruelly, and being alone most of the time, I actually developed a fear of people. I succumbed completely to shattered nerves.

I wish I could take the hand of every parent harboring the thought of divorce and lead him back with me into the valley through which I have come. If the hurt an innocent child's heart, the bitter shock of a tender life, the tears of the unwanted, misplaced child, and the horror and gloom could be called to witness in the divorce courts, no child would again have to walk the dreadful road that starts with the signing of those final papers in the divorce courts.

Instead, the tears would become the parent's own, and in the valley he would realize that the ones who suffer in divorce and remarriage are the innocent children.

Thank God, in my struggles through that darkness I met the Saviour and slowly, very slowly, began to live again. Since that time I have married and at one time it seemed that I would fail as my parents had. But through sacrifice and love I was able to prove that marriage can be made to last. My wonderful husband and lovely children are my reward after having, as Job did, drunk scourging like water.

Many will say, "But my case is different." I contend that every marriage can be made to last if either husband or wife will fight to that end. Mine did not succeed overnight but every effort proved worthwhile, for through sacrifice of my own feelings I brought out qualities in my husband that I had not known existed. God alone knows the joys I now reap from very battle I fought with myself instead of with my husband. I learned to give when I would rather take, to smile when my heart rebelled, and to hold my peace and let God speak for me. But it was worth all it cost when compared with the reward: one of the most happy marriages in the world. From experience I know divorce is not the answer; sacrifice is. You who contemplate divorce, I beg of you, remember me. Hold that child of yours in your arms more closely, and in pity spare him that which I have had to endure and can never forget. - *A Wounded Heart*
