

Family Council

Editor's note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, three editors and a women's editor. Each article is a summary of a family disagreement presented to the council. The council deals with problems, major and minor, encountered by guidance counselors and social workers, edited by Mrs. Alma Denny. (Copyright by General Features Corp.)

Glenda U. - He barks at me and his sarcasm is like a knife.

Alfred U. - She screams at me and gives me nothing but scorn.

Glenda U. - I'm 44 years old, married to a man I'd known only 63 days. I'm his second wife and, in the 16 years of our marriage, he's been taking out his anger against his first wife on me. He never trusted her, so he assumed he couldn't trust me either. Add to that his disgust with me when I ask for reasonable things like a coat or a trip to the movies, and you can understand why my home is a torture chamber.

His latest insult is to hide the check book so I can't write any more checks, and all because I made a \$2 error. He says I'm a poor manager. The incident sent him into one of his rages where he dragged up his grievances against me and my family over the years. It happens my family was very nice to him, lending him money and helping him.

Anyway, this sort of life is a disgrace. If it doesn't improve, I must get out and hope for something better.

Alfred U. - This woman would drive a man nuts. She won't go to work because she's afraid it would spoil me. Yet she's forever throwing it up to me that she wears hand-me-down clothes from her sisters, and we sit on a second-hand sofa.

I used to knock myself out trying to please her. My income was good as a machinist, but work wasn't steady. So I preferred to buy second-hand things for the house and fix them up in my spare time. But she didn't appreciate this. Well now I have a civil service job as a guard and my salary is small. I must watch every dollar. I was nice enough to keep the check account in both our names. But she gummed things up and I'm out plenty of money.

Lately I've been shutting myself up in the extra bedroom for some peace. After a couple of beers, I forget about her screaming and scolding. This mess is her own fault.

The Council: This case was presented to us in the form of an interminable letter written by Glenda. She went on and on for pages, listing every little injury almost to the day, every money squabble to the penny. Our first reaction was: "What morbid bookkeeping. Can't you forget a few things, Glenda?"

But then we noted back-handed compliments to Alfred creeping in. Our space allotted presentation didn't permit us to include these. And we began to see a pattern of two people who could have a good marriage if they'd come right out and admit the good things about each other. Both Glenda and Alfred are thirsting for a kind word from the one to whom they have pledged their all.

We may deal with this marriage in a future column, for Glenda raises a dozen questions. She mentions her lifelong quest for security and acceptance, and bemoans the fact that, married to Al, she still hasn't found it. She's a frightened woman, and taking away her right to pay the family bills simply made her feel more like nothing. It added to her fear of just not counting for anything to anyone.

To improve matters, however, Glenda must make the first move. Her husband has given up. He knows what to expect from her - recriminations that her sisters have more, complaints about his periods of unemployment, nagging about his "beers." How about an appreciation campaign, Glenda? You seem to have lost the capacity to be grateful. Thank him for bringing home that semi-monthly pay check, no matter how small. Thank him for putting up a shelf. Thank him for buying you a dress, even if it's a sleazy one. At present we bet you'd say, "Hm, can't you do better than that piece of junk?"

And to show you're trying to be a partner and not a persecutor, take a job, Glenda. Call what you earn "our" money. Alfred won't faint. But instead of being so "tight" as you claim, he may begin to grow close. When he feels appreciated, you'll feel "safe."

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