

LESSONS IN LOVE

Three writers tell very different stories of modern marriage, hope after heartbreak and why grown-up love is sweeter for acknowledging loss

LESSON ONE: *Lazy marriages can be wonderful...*

Christina Hopkinson, 46, who's married with three children, writes honestly about shortcuts and happiness

A successful marriage requires hard work we're constantly told. But what happens if you're naturally lazy as both my husband and I are? No corner goes uncut, no bed goes made with us. If success in marriage meant hard work, ours would have been over before the end of our honeymoon. Yet we're not divorced, in fact we're about to celebrate our 13th wedding anniversary. (I say celebrate, but I don't mean actually marking it in some way

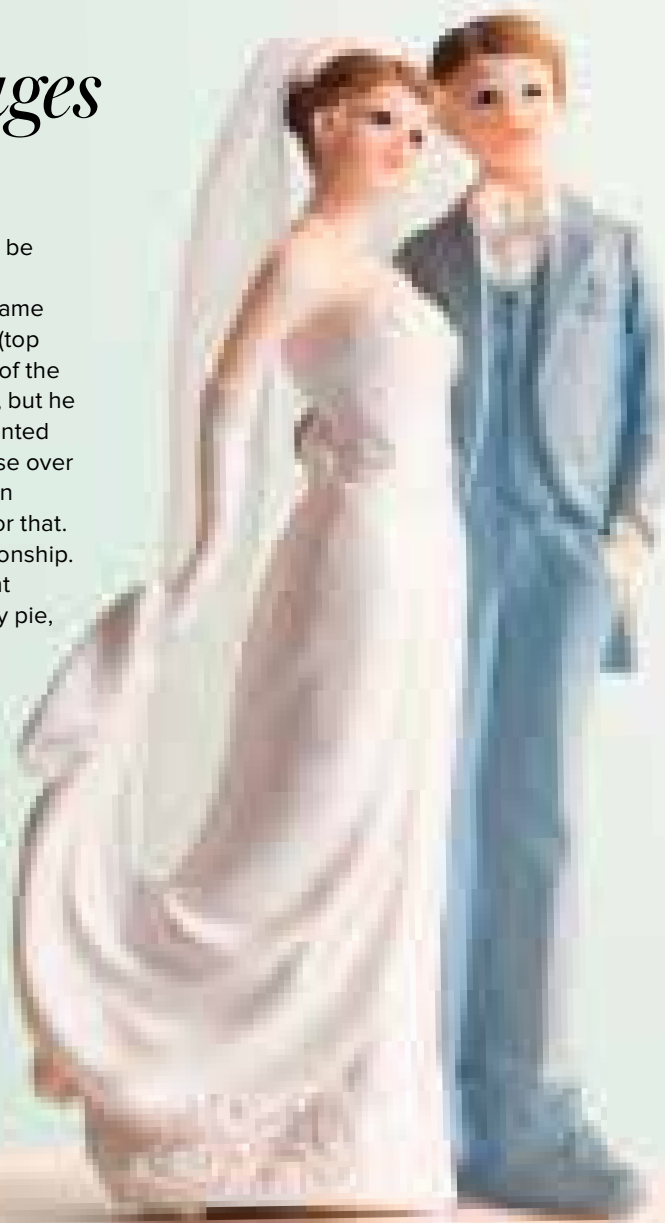


with dinner or a card. That would be way too much effort.)

When I met Alex, he had the same lunch (BLT) and the same dinner (top crust steak pie) every single day of the week. Which sounds deathly dull, but he was and is one of the most contented people I know. He doesn't agonise over all the small decisions that life can throw up and he's a lot happier for that.

The same applies to our relationship. Put the effort into finding the right person, your own top crust pastry pie, and then it's all easy after that. Wanting him to be happy makes me happy so it doesn't feel like a task. If it were a difficult job, then I'd need far more holidays.

I'm not totally complacent though. Last year, I became aware that my benign neglect was veering on malign, but organising a break away seemed like so much hard work. Then I realised that rather than going to Paris for the weekend with all its childcare challenges and expense, we could go somewhere nearby. By



car. For a Tuesday night. A whole Tuesday and Wednesday away at a gorgeous hotel with the children safely at school and a sleepover. We came back giddy and teenage with one another. Who knew you could travel so far from everyday life in just two hours up the M3?

Then my husband discovered an even easier option. We checked all three into a day-long football camp one weekend then went for a long pub lunch and an even longer nap. Try it – you'll feel as if you've gone on an exotic break.

Ah, but what about sex, you ask. Surely we can't get lazy about that? Isn't that the area in a long-term relationship where we need to put in some effort to avoid it becoming a distant memory? I'd argue that a lazy approach to sex means you're far more likely to just do it than if you think that it has to be in some way significant or gymnastic. If

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it's a big deal involving scented candles and hours of foreplay, then it becomes very easy to fall off the to-do list. If you're happy with lazy, quick sex (going for what a friend calls the "comfy position") then you're far more likely to maintain a healthy frequency.

Of course, laziness doesn't work for all areas of a relationship. It's vital not to get slack about saying thank you when your partner does something for you, from as small as making a cup of tea to as significant as always being there.

And in every relationship, there will be hard times when laziness isn't an option: illness, bereavement, money troubles. Being lazy won't cut it when your other half needs you to make them whole again. But given how much energy you'll need when the going gets tough, it makes sense to conserve it when life is easier. I've heard it said that what the widowed miss most is not someone to do something with, it's someone to do nothing with. And for the moment, I'm enthralled by doing very little with the one I love.

Christina Hopkinson's novel The Weekend Wives (Hodder & Stoughton) is out now