

HELLO MARRIAGE, GOODBYE LOVE

婚內失戀

*A bestseller with over 22,000 copies sold in Taiwan

Even good people can find themselves trapped in a loveless marriage. When that happens, many try to fix things by changing themselves or trying to change their partner. Well-known psychiatrist and Jungian analyst Teng Hui-Wen teaches us to stay away from self-destructive responses and instead work to rediscover our own value.

Marriages can sour, empty out, or dry up for any number of reasons, and even good people can find themselves trapped within one. While unmarried couples can simply break up, marriages often involve complex networks of family and assets that resist division. So what do you do when the love is gone?

In *Hello Marriage, Goodbye Love*, nationally famous psychiatrist and Jungian analyst Teng Hui-Wen analyzes twenty-four examples of common crises between married partners, describing how each partner responds and how those actions contribute (positively or negatively) to the situation. Teng focuses on common misconceptions and reactions felt by those who find themselves in a loveless marriage, and she illustrates how the many of the usual behaviors – blaming oneself or one’s partner, sabotaging oneself in order to ease tension, and many others – almost always make things worse, not better.

By contrast, rediscovering yourself and clearly communicating your desires reaffirms your value and opens a road to positive resolution. Each of Teng’s twenty-four cases includes her experienced, professional suggestions on how the crisis could be positively resolved. Readers of all kinds – no matter what their marital status – will find in these pages a wealth of guidance toward stronger, more balanced, and more versatile relationships.



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Teng Hui-Wen is a renowned mental health psychiatrist and Jungian analyst, radio show host, and author. Her experience dealing with her own adolescence inspired her to build a career in psychiatric counseling; after the publication of her first book, *Bedtime Stories for Love*, in 2006, she has published an average of one to two titles every year.

HELLO MARRIAGE, GOODBYE LOVE

By Teng Hui-Wen

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Preface

A Married "Leftover" Woman?

One occasionally sees a book discussing *shengnu*, women English-speakers once referred to as spinsters. *Shengnu* is not a new term; many people know it's a negative label mainstream culture has slapped on older, unmarried women. But I was stunned when I saw a book cover with its English translation in big print: *leftover women*.

Doesn't *leftover* in everyday language refer to leftover food? Actually, that's not the term's only meaning; it can also refer to various "unused items." Not useless, but unused, such as leftover materials from the manufacture of goods or the construction of a building. In the classic Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Jia Baoyu has a connection to a stone the goddess Nüwa didn't use when she patched the sky, and which accumulated all sorts of complicated feelings as a result. One could say it was a "leftover."

I saw the term *leftover women* while working on this book about married women and inevitably had mixed feelings. A leftover woman's opposite ought to be a married woman, or rather a "marriageable" woman; but once a woman has crossed into the *married* category, has she achieved an unqualified victory? Just how happy is she on the married side of the line?

Taiwan's divorce rate in recent years has been far from low. Put simply, imagine that almost one out of every three couples will divorce. Meanwhile, many women are unhappy in the period between wedding and divorce and may feel even more like a "leftover" than an older, unmarried woman – like unfinished steak grown cold, vegetables minus the flavor, dried-out rice, hardened bread. This food was painstakingly cooked, was presented with due ceremony at the table, and anticipated with great joy the person who would eat and absorb it into his life. In the end, however, that person eats only a small portion of the food, which is left essentially untouched. What remains is put aside, refrigerated, and (if there is no protest) forgotten until it has turned into garbage. Sent directly to the trash incinerator, the leftovers miss out on the opportunity even of being fed to the pigs. But if the leftovers protest, if they shout to be taken out again, if they jump up and down calling out, "I can still be eaten," this too proves mostly futile, and leads only to being ignored with even greater coldness.

Wives in name only, these lonely women turn to beauty therapists, shampoo girls, skincare product counter assistants, psychotherapists – strangers who are willing to touch the women's bodies and minds and talk about the hollowness they can't share with the person sharing their bed. With no means of expressing their passion or their bankrupted ambitions, these women are like fragrant, filmy shampoo bubbles, obliged to wait for the water that will

wash them away. They wait until they have been hollowed out and no longer believe in their own precious potential. Never mind patching the sky; they aren't even a plank someone would wish to walk on.

Still protesting, they resist the process of being turned into bubbles and ask for advice. But the advice they receive all sounds more or less the same: "That's how marriage is," "You're indulging in fantasy," and "Marriage is love's grave."

Is Marriage Love's Grave?

Young people don't believe it when others tell them love dies during marriage. They think to themselves: *Of course my love will continue after marriage. Unending, unbroken, uninterrupted, it will bloom and bear fruit.* As the years of married life gradually add up, they begin to understand that marriage is quite naturally always love's grave; it's just that this saying means something different at different points in time. In cases where friction causes fragile love to die soon after the wedding, marriage is undoubtedly love's grave; but when love and happiness endure to one's dying breaths, isn't marriage just as much love's grave? The problem is not the reality that love ultimately dies during a marriage, but whether or not love kills the person who wants to stay married but has been buried alive.

People who still possess emotions are living in cold marriages. They reach out but catch hold of no one, shout but hear only the echo of their own voices. This is not just loneliness but something more threatening. Life slowly cools; there is a sense of one's existence gradually thinning and draining away. I meet many women like this in my counseling practice – bitter, bored, unhappy, unsure if their dissatisfaction is reasonable, not knowing what to pursue. They turn in circles, and it will be a long time before they carefully, cautiously say, I still want the feeling of being in love.

"I don't want to find someone else. I hope he still loves me." Then, covering their faces, upset, they say, "Why am I so useless? I've surrendered so much control."

Hello Marriage, Goodbye Love?

For women in loveless marriages, the Chinese character that means *to be in love* can make them wince, given that it ties together the characters for *speech* and *heart* with two threads of *silk*: between these women and the men they call husband, there is no "speech," nor any sense of "heart."

Everyone knows the feeling of being in love. The feeling of having lost it ought to be equally clear.

If you are single and he doesn't come looking for you, if he's reserved or obviously refusing to see you, if he has no interest in you to the extent that he avoids making physical contact – you know what the next step will be.

But what was originally a simple judgment becomes very complicated if the person is your husband. There's a voice constantly saying to you, "Husbands and wives are always like this after a while," and "A lack of passion doesn't mean the marriage has a problem." You don't think you should feel unhappy.

If you truly don't feel there's a problem, fine.

But if you're persuading yourself there isn't a problem while constantly putting pressure on your spouse, or you're nursing a secret grudge while expecting him to change; if you're saying one thing but doing another, so that your words and actions are two separate things, then you aren't avoiding the problem, you're creating it. You don't need to ask yet again, "Is it normal for my marriage to be this way, or is there a problem?" No one can define what kind of marriage is normal for you. Marriage isn't a light bulb, normal if it lights up and garbage if it doesn't. Marriage is more like a bowl of noodles: in between being so delicious there's nothing to complain about and so disgusting you want to spit it out, there's an entire spectrum. What you consider a highly unsatisfactory marriage might be pure heaven for someone else. Some people think unequal housework is a serious problem, while others think no sex, no interaction, and even an extramarital affair is normal as long as the spouse comes home occasionally.

Every marriage has a personality, just as people do. So it's neither possible nor necessary to establish that a marriage is abnormal. However, feelings of unhappiness, or even hurt, are worth identifying and worth your attention. Put aside the thinking that "no matter what, he's still my husband"; this is simply a distraction. Try to address the situation with the same intuition you used when you were single, and you will immediately see the problem: the love is gone. Then, all sorts of instinctual break-up survival wisdom and capabilities will kick in. Since spouses still have relationship ties – continued cohabitation, joint care of children, legal status as husband and wife, a dependent relationship at the superficial level – this kind of break up is naturally more complicated and difficult to handle than for singles. But everything must still start with confronting what no longer being in love means. Only then will you have a chance of changing the situation.

Talk about your feelings. Take meaningful action. Refuse to be swallowed up by the black hole of a loveless marriage.

The day I put on a white veil, I thought I would never lose love again.

I neglected the skills to survive on my own, to the extent that I couldn't even recognize that the love was gone.

I regret my inaction, but admit I did all of this to myself.

Love died after the altar.

From now on, I will stop my useless pursuing and recover my self-worth.