

Bricks

By Julia Van Der Giet

Peter has been happily married for years. It hasn't always been perfect, but he is content. Nowadays he couldn't imagine a life without his wife. Nicole. She is a part of him. Just like his job, his house, his club are parts of him.

All these things make him the man he is.

Peter Brick. A fulfilled man with both feet firmly on the ground.

Here in the village everyone likes him. Why wouldn't they? Peter is outgoing and friendly. He can chat with anyone, and he laughs at all of your jokes. The village is a part of him, like his wife, his job, his house, his club. He has lived here all his life and belongs to the village as much as the village belongs to him.

It's a different story with Nicole. She comes from a different village with different customs. There, too, the people belong to the area, like trees belong to the forest. Nicole thought she would spend her whole life there. But Peter belonged to another village. And she belonged to Peter more than she belonged to her village.

Nicole learned to call two places her home. Every weekend, she and the kids went to visit her brother. At first, anyway. Sometimes she talked about moving somewhere in between. Not soon, of course. Someday. When the kids are older. When circumstances are better. Now the kids had settled into their surroundings. They didn't want to visit relatives every weekend anymore. But that could change again. There might be an opportunity. One day.

Still, she was happy.

Today, Peter and Nicole can look back on more than 20 years of partnership. They are an integral part of each other's lives, though they have few things in common. They complement each other. Are a well-

coordinated team. A perfectly oiled machine. Peter can rely on Nicole, he knows that.

She has no manual skills and doesn't understand his profession, so she does the bookkeeping. And although she can't understand his work – and thus can't empathize with his exhaustion after long days – she complements him perfectly here, too. She makes sure he can finally relax in the evenings. After a long day of chatting and laughing at the jokes of customers, he doesn't feel like talking when he comes home. He finds the best distraction in his club with his mates. And even here, she complements him. The members' wives are her friends, and they meet every Wednesday for coffee.

By now, Nicole is a part of the village. Her former village stopped being her home long ago. She belongs to his village. Just like she belongs to his work, the house, and his community.

Peter and Nicole have belonged together for 23 years. Peter is convinced that he can rely on her well into old age. Of course, not everything goes perfectly. Every now and then they argue. That's just part of marriage. Peter is willing to fight for his happiness and, at the same time, keep her happy. When she asks him to work less, drink less, and talk more, he tries. He tries hard. When she asks for it, he finishes work earlier and doesn't leave the house right away to go drinking with his mates. Instead, he tells her about his day and sometimes even asks about the kids. And it works. Every time. The couple stays happy. They haven't fought in a while. Currently, everything is going well.

She no longer asks Peter to drink less or work less. The other day the two went for a long walk and Nicole talked a lot. She wants to go back to her old job. She tried that six years ago but failed. This time, their oldest daughter helped her write her application. Nicole managed to find a suitable job! Peter is happy for her, of course. But since the kids have moved out, she seems... withdrawn. Not to a

worrisome extent. But a little bit. Maybe the new job will bring her somethi—

“I want a divorce.”

Nicole belonged to him. To his work, his home, and his community. To their shared life. 23 years! You can't just throw away 23 years! Without any warning? From one day to another?

“Don't worry about the house. You can keep it. I'll find something new.”

New?

In Peter's village, people are moving with the times. No one reproaches Nicole for her decision, even though most of their mutual friends assure Peter that she will come back to him. Just a phase, they say.

Their younger daughter, who helps her father with the household chores, is rarely seen at village parties. She has never been much of a party animal. But now the neighbor Anna suspects this could be a sign of depression. And that's not all. Anna's daughter is friends with Nicole's daughter and recently saw her kissing another woman. Anna is genuinely concerned about Nicole and her daughters. Not that there's anything wrong with homosexuality. Her father's neighbor's cousin is gay and very friendly. In general, Anna only knows friendly gays.

In this village people move with the times. Nevertheless, Nicole wants to leave. Maybe she will be lucky enough to move to another, equally progressive village.

