

# **TIGHTENING THE KNOT**

**By Alice Whitson Norton**

"WELL, Dot, I guess it's time for us to settle down now and begin tightening the knot. That's just an old saying in this community, but you might find it both amusing and helpful to glean the meaning of it for yourself." It was big Dean Alford speaking with good-natured affection after returning from a joyous honeymoon.

The young wife thought on the matter as she went about setting the cozy house in order, but reaching no sensible conclusion, she finally questioned Mrs. Carter, her next door neighbor, as to just what her husband meant.

"Tightening the knot," laughed Mrs. Carter, "is a familiar saying in this particular locality, one which I believe has been handed down from generation to generation among the families who have grown up here."

"But what does it mean?" Dot asked, with a bit of curiosity.

"It means just this," chuckled the older woman: "Things that men and women do that bind them closer together as their years of married life increase."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dot, in a tone that clearly revealed she knew very little more than she had a moment before.

"It's like this," Mrs. Carter went on: "We pride ourselves on the congeniality of our homes and the infrequency of divorces in our community, and one and all agree that it has been through the tightening of the marriage knot that such a condition exists."

"I guess I'm a little dull, Mrs. Carter," Dot answered, "but perhaps I will learn later on what weight tightening the marriage vows carries."

"I had to learn," laughed Mrs. Carter, "when I first came. But Mrs. West, the bride who came to live in the valley just before me, advised me to visit with the neighbors and draw them out on the subject, and-well-" she finished softly, "doing just that opened my eyes considerably."

"But I'm not acquainted here," Dot argued.

"Just the same," answered the woman, "visiting the folks living here and observing them closely will make you think seriously on the neighborhood you have come to live in."

Dot was timid, but she was a keen observer, and she soon made discoveries:

Esther Cooper, a placid type of woman, living on perfectly congenial terms with her husband, attributed the fact of her happy existence to keeping herself calm when her husband came home in a dark mood.

"When Dick is like that," she explained, "he isn't the man I married, but only a tired, harassed business man who will recover his amiable disposition ever so much quicker by leaving him alone."

"Oh, yes," she admitted, when Dot questioned her about it, "it took a little time to learn that. But once I did, I found that it tightened the knot considerably. You see, by one of the two remaining unruffled when the other is glum or nervous, no arguments can arise. And after all, many a home begins its undoing by arguments. By refraining from that one feminine attribute," laughed the soft-voiced woman, "I have a very happy home today, and my husband rarely comes to it now in a dark mood."

The tightening of the knot took on an entirely different aspect in the next case. Quite an elderly couple were Mr. and Mrs. Burke, whose comfortable home Dot and big Dean frequently enjoyed. Here Dot discussed the matter with Mr. Burke.

"Oh," he replied good naturedly, "I couldn't have accomplished even the half I have, if it hadn't been for my wife. She has what one might call foresight, always looking ahead and planning, and because I discovered early in the game that her judgment was better than mine, we've worked wonderfully together!"

ANOTHER character in the community attributed his success in married life to the rose-colored glasses his wife wore. No matter how dark and threatening the clouds might be above their heads, she could always catch a glimpse of the silver lining.

"That," said he, as he went about serenely planting a row of bulbs along the old-fashioned walk, "tightened our marriage knot."

Mrs. Tremble, the very busiest housewife in the whole neighborhood and mother of seven children, attributed her happy life to the fact that she lived on what her husband provided, without complaint, and taught her children that the alert use of their mental equipment made them the equal of anybody, and they had never known that money was considered wealth.

But it was from little Mrs. Joiner, who shared her home with both her mother- and her sister-in-law, that Dot learned the greatest lesson. Such congeniality among three women Dot had never seen. Down in her heart she pondered much on how it came about, since her own relationship with her husband's mother and sister was strained and uncomfortable. Finally the opportunity came and Dot sought an explanation.

"I really give myself credit," laughed Mrs. Joiner when Dot questioned her about it. "You see," she said very softly, "I came from another community which, I am sorry to say, carries no such reputation as this; and when I arrived I was quick to sense I was unwanted in a family that without me was harmonious. My husband realized I wanted to be friendly with my in-laws and shared the truth with me. His mother and sister, he told

me truthfully, resented sharing his attention and affection; they were jealous of me and my place."

"Well," said Dot, "you seem to have found a way around it, all right."

"Oh, yes," explained Mrs. Joiner, "but it took both time and patience. My first move was to send John home frequently for a visit with his mother and sister. It was hard for me to do, but it gave them a chance to discuss intimate things of which they felt at that time I had no share. Then I began inviting them to our home, and making them so thoroughly comfortable that they had no excuse for thinking I wanted to hog my husband's affections or to break him away from his home ties. I made it a point to call his mother every morning, sometimes asking her to tell me John's favorite dishes and frequently requesting her, when she had told me, to come over and prepare them for the evening dinner. Then I began asking his mother to let me drive her when she wanted to run into town; sometimes I invited his sister to use my car, which was a wedding gift from my father. At first I was keenly aware that they were puzzled over my attitude, but when they realized I was sincere in the matter, well-" she added softly, "I simply became one of them, and we've lived on pleasant terms ever since."

After that bit of information, Dot went home to do a little thinking on her own behalf. Three miles up the valley lived her husband's people. She had been to see them twice, and they had returned both her visits, but between them there was a chilly atmosphere. Dean's mother was not her mother, nor was his sister her sister. They lived in their house-and she and Dean lived in theirs-yet there were times when Dean had a far-away look in his eyes, and his firm lips drooped a bit at the corners.

In a flash Dot understood why, and resolved, as Mrs. Joiner had done, that she too would wipe out any sign of petty jealousy and become part of her husband's family.

This took time, patience, and sacrifice, but today there is not a happier home in the valley than that of Dot and Dean Arnold; simply because Dot learned from her neighbors what it meant to tighten the marriage knot, and of her own accord tightened the one binding her to the man of her choice.

Originally Published In:  
Improvement Era Magazine  
March, 1940 – page \_\_\_\_