

Just So Boring

The hard bench is uncomfortable, but it creaks so loudly under me I don't want to move. The judge's face is not very forgiving, and she might very well find me in contempt of court if I do. The city must've skimped on a cheap hardwood for the family court gallery.

The pews in the church where we got married? Now *that* was some quality wood. Sanded and polished to a sheen I could see my face – covered in far more makeup than I was used to – in. Brazilian walnut, mahogany, maybe? I don't know my hardwoods. I don't know much of anything, as evidenced by the fact I'm about to be a twenty-five-year-old divorcee as soon as my case gets called from the docket. I wonder again if the respondent will even bother showing his face, trying not to turn around every five seconds to see if he has snuck in behind me, for fear the bench will creak and I'll draw the ire of the judge.

There are other couples in here getting no frills-divorces. Years of bad TV led me to believe this would be a days-long proceeding where every misdeed I ever misdid would be aired in open court by a scowling lawyer in black stilettos and a blonde chignon, but the reality couldn't be any less cinematic. Each proceeding takes about ten painfully boring minutes, the judge reviewing a case file folder no thicker than the fingernail halfway broken off my left pinky with the agreed upon details in one tidy petition before declaring the petitioner and respondent are no longer husband and wife. You may now kiss other people.

My lawyer has prepared a similar pinky-nail case file with a tidy dissolution for me. She isn't wearing stilettos or a tidy chignon. Her beige Naturalizers, JC Penney suit, and low ponytail easily betray the kind of lawyer she is: the kind of lawyer a twenty-five-year-old soon-to-be-divorcee working her first job out of college can afford, a friend of a friend of a friend who just landed her first junior associate position fresh out of law school.

She wouldn't be airing or defending my misdeeds to a jury of my peers like Jim Carrey in *Liar Liar*. There wasn't even a jury box of equally cheap hardwood in the courtroom. Though there had been some misdeeds on my part, they all came after the separation. The first thing I did was close all our joint accounts to the tune of eighty dollars, leaving him to flounder without eighty dollars to his name until his next paycheck.

I'd gone on the Carnival cruise to the Bahamas we were supposed to go on as a couple with two other couples, putting the eighty dollars from our joint account toward the final payment. I'd danced topless on a bar in Nassau in exchange for weed from an older couple I met on the ship. It was good weed. They'd invited me back to their stateroom for some fun after our shore excursion, but I'd been high, so I forgot the stateroom number they gave me, and I never ran into them again. I told them I was a PhD student in philosophy celebrating finishing my dissertation. They didn't question why I'd brought my couple friends along, and my couple friends had gone off snorkeling with sting rays while I'd added my bra to the ceiling of the bar along with a thousand other former tourists.

I'd fucked an actual PhD student in economics from Dothan, Alabama on the lido deck after we shared the cheap vodka I'd smuggled onto the ship in my bag. We'd met an hour earlier, the music of the god-awful cruise ship band ringing in our ears on the dance floor where he fingered me. Thank God he had condoms; I hadn't thought about condoms since I was nineteen. I told him I was a sales rep for a contact lens manufacturer going through a breakup. He also didn't think it was weird that I was with my couple friends, but maybe that never came up, unlike the cheap vodka – several hours later.

I certainly couldn't tell them the truth: that I was a junior compliance officer at a Catholic hospital who was married but separated and soon to be divorced. I was too young to be divorced.

They'd all assume I'd done something horrible or couldn't hack it as a wife. Everyone would assume that, until I reached an age where it was socially acceptable, glamorous even, to call yourself a divorcee. That age was not twenty-five.

And I hadn't done something horrible. Maybe on the cruise, yes, with the partially-nude dancing and the near-throupling and the stranger fucking and the lying about myself. I had never done any of those things. I was a rule follower. I never even danced fully clothed on a bar in college, when people accept and even expect bar-dancing from marginally attractive young coeds, because I was too busy studying at the laundromat where I could focus and do all our couple laundry at once. I never had a one-night stand with someone I just met because I had only ever had sex with my husband, back when he became my boyfriend, after we'd been dating for over a year. I'd been surprised at how easily the lies about who I was and why I was high on a cruise ship eating ice cream at 2:00 in the morning came; I was usually such a bad liar. I couldn't even lie about calling in sick because I worked in a hospital and assumed everyone there, including my boss, knew everything about medicine even though I worked there, and I knew nothing about medicine.

And I had *hacked it* as a young wife. I assembled our IKEA furniture, following the illustrated instructions exactly. I hung our wedding portraits in tasteful frames and symmetrical rows and columns with a bubble level. I made kale smoothies for breakfast and casseroles for dinner that included some variation of chicken breast, rice, and cream of something soup. I wore the sexy lingerie I'd gotten as gifts at my bachelorette shower before our thrice-weekly sex. I gave blow jobs on birthdays, anniversaries, and random holidays like Flag Day just to show how fun and spontaneous I could be. I took the pill at the same time every day because we weren't going to be ready for children until we both finished college.

He had never finished college, and I wasn't the only person he ever had sex with, before or after those perfectly level wedding photos were taken. He had numerous misdeeds that could be aired in this courtroom with no jury box, but they wouldn't. His misdeeds weren't part of the pinky file. As the judge dismissed a pro-se divorce case and the parties shuffled out, I turned to see if his smug face was lurking behind me, the not-mahogany creaking under my deteriorating ass. The divorce diet was doing wonders for me on the scale, which had gone steadily up as our marriage progressed. Didn't all married people gain weight? I didn't need him to point it out all the time, just like I didn't need him to tell me how thin I was looking now. It didn't matter. He wasn't there. He didn't have a lawyer, so no proxy was there on his behalf, either. He'd said he didn't need one, and had warned me he might make it to court because he had just started a new job. He was always starting a new job. He "just wanted a clean break."

I may have only been twenty-two at the time, but I was serious when I said his was the only dick I would touch for the rest of my life. I'd forgiven him for his workplace affair that had started out emotional and turned physical soon after he proposed. Much like our engagement, that job hadn't lasted long – they never did with him – and the woman had moved back to Kentucky or wherever it was she came from. Problem solved, and we were getting married, where he'd have to vow before God, our parents, and the caterer to be faithful only to me. Those were the rules, and if he fucked with the rules, he'd have to contend with the compliance officer.

But this compliance officer had been metaphorically asleep at the wheel the night her husband – soon to be ex-husband – had physically fallen asleep at the wheel. He'd been out drinking by himself (an increasingly frequent activity there at the end), misjudged his own ability, and attempted to drive home. He'd called me from the empty parking lot where he'd somehow managed to wrap his car around the only light pole in it. Instead of thanking me for not leaving him drunk and stranded in a

Kohl's parking lot, he spent the whole ride home describing the gorgeous physical attributes of the thin brunette with whom he was cheating on me, no matter how many times I told him to shut up; we'd talk about it in the morning.

It was the last straw, I told myself. He couldn't treat me that way and stay married to me, eat my casseroles, and receive my spontaneous blow jobs. I told myself these things the next morning, pacing our apartment while he overslept (another increasingly frequent activity that pissed me off; even McDonald's didn't serve breakfast this late). I began packing a bag but didn't manage to fill it with anything useful for staying with my parents for an unspecified length of time. My parents – in front of whom, along with God and the caterer, I'd promised to stick by my husband in good times and bad, at the wedding where someone had recited that part of Paul's letter to the Corinthians that kept ringing in my head: *Love keeps no record of wrongs*.

Of course, that wasn't how wrongs worked. Records were kept, and my brain had filed away many of them into long term memory, but I'll admit that I lost my resolve pacing that apartment. I back-swiped the call screen with my mom's phone number pulled up, and went and unpacked the bag, careful not to wake the husband who reeked of cheap whiskey and slept through the whole thing. It was cruel irony - twenty-five was simultaneously way too young to get divorced and way too old to go crawling back to my parents. And I'd said "for better or for worse."

Eventually he woke up, and agreed with me when I said "we need to talk." I had memorized the speech I'd prepared in my head and was ready to launch right in, leading with how I demanded to be treated going forward, when he interrupted me.

"I guess I'm leaving you."

He said I could have the apartment, that he would stay with some friends. He said we'd been together so long that we'd grown apart, we had nothing in common, that we wanted different things

in life. Then, before I could get a word in edgewise or beg him to stay (but did I really want him to stay?), he went for the jugular.

“And life with you is just. So. BORING.”

A week later he texted me to say I could file for divorce whenever I felt I was ready. Because of course that would be my job and not his; I was the one with the hard-on for proper procedure and paperwork. He said he'd sign whatever my lawyer came up with. He never said anything more about the thin brunette or her perfect heart-shaped ass, and I never did figure out how he managed to get his boxes over to his undisclosed friend's house with his car impaled on a light pole. I drove through that Kohl's parking lot on my way home from work every day for a week, even though it was out of my way, just to see if he'd come to take care of removing his car, or at least cleaned it out. His cars were always full of random crap. On the seventh day, I saw a tow truck hauling it away, the days-old bright orange notices on the broken windows waving goodbye in the wind. A month later, I got an exorbitant bill from the tow yard, the car title having both our names and the address that was now solely mine on it.

My lawyer had thoughtfully included the balance of the exorbitant storage bill in our dissolution agreement as something RESPONDENT would be responsible for, along with picking up the rest of his months-long pile of mail and forwarding it to his new address “posthaste” (an unintentional pun I giggled at while poring over the petition he'd signed without reading). I'd driven by his new address after seeing it appear on a later version of our initial dissolution agreement, wanting to see if a thin brunette with perfect physical attributes would make an appearance. She didn't, not that day anyway. I wasn't brave enough to try again. I wondered how they would enforce these terms of the dissolution agreement. There was no “or else” clause at the end. I already knew he was never going to come collect the rest of his stuff from our apartment and at some point, I'd have to deal with

it, even though it was his responsibility as per the signed agreement. How could you make someone who didn't follow the rules follow the rules?

If – when – it came to that, I'd probably have to hire my low ponytail lawyer again, after I financially recover from hiring her this time. She already knew the exact amount of my/our *marital assets*, them being “too low to enumerate” on our agreement as she billed me in ten-minute increments. Was I being charged for every ten-minute pro-se divorce I had to sit through today while waiting for my name to be called? Maybe he'd had the right idea after all, not hiring his own attorney.

Naturally, that's when my name was called – *Richardson vs. Richardson*. I couldn't wait to take my maiden name back, though I had been calling myself “Mrs. Richardson” since my junior prom. I thought maybe if I took my name back, I could pretend that my entire life with him had never happened, that I was just a normal single twenty-five-year-old woman too focused on my getting my career off the ground to seriously date. Maybe I could even convince other people the way I'd convinced the strangers on the Carnival cruise ship – future boyfriends who would appreciate stability and fastidiousness, casseroles and Flag Day blow jobs. Future other dicks who wouldn't think life with me was just. So. BORING.

I take my seat next to the judge's box in a chair as plain as the ones used in the hotel ballroom where we'd held our wine-and-beer-only wedding reception. I fight back tears even as I think about the wedding my parents had paid for and the possibility of touching another future dick. I wasn't supposed to be here. This wasn't supposed to be my life. I wasn't supposed to be a twenty-five-year-old divorcee. I was supposed to be the Mrs. Richardson I'd dreamed of becoming as I scribbled the title on my spiral-bound notebook. I was promised *for better or for worse*.

The judge cleared her throat and tapped the papers of the pinky nail file on the dais. Part of me expected him to come bursting through the courtroom doors in a Hallmark-level last-ditch effort

to save our marriage, to announce that this whole thing had been a big mistake and he'd lost the best thing that had ever happened to him. Maybe he'd recognized my bra on the ceiling of that tourist bar in Nassau and it made him realize I wasn't boring after all, that he was ready to be faithful and honor his vows, open his own mail, pay his towing and storage fees.

But of course, there was no dramatic McConaughey-y grand gesture. There was just me and my low-ponytail lawyer in a room full of other no-frills divorce-seekers, with my paperwork in the judge's hands. She flipped through it, barely pausing on a given page long enough to consume its contents, occasionally phrasing a word-for-word sentence in the agreement as a question to my lawyer. I'd spent *hours* reading, red-lining, revising, paying for that agreement, an agreement so boilerplate the judge didn't even have to stop to wrinkle an eyebrow like the judges on TV before she declared my maiden name was restored and I was now pronounced a divorcee. You may touch the dicks. It was all just. So. BORING.