

Medical Divorce

written by

Scott Danzig

scott@sneakyghost.com

INT. HOME - DAY

Within the souvenir magnets and travel decorations on a refrigerator, a post-it note reads: "Knish needs to be eaten today, Noah". The note next to it reads "We start spinning classes on Monday"

BARBARA, 70, holds a phone against her white curly hair as she paces about in her black dress. She sticks a third note on the door: "Don't forget your belt, Noah". She then picks up a windowed envelope off a table and tries to extract the letter one-handed.

BARBARA

Michael, the lot fills up quickly.
Michael. Michael, listen! Try to
park in front of the bagel shop,
Michael.

Barbara straightens the freed paper and her jaw slackens.

INT. LIVING ROOM

In the living room, NOAH, 73, balances loose suspenders while finagling with his tie, his attention instead fixed on the TV weather forecast.

BARBARA (O.S.)

Will I see my grandson?
(voice goes unsteady)
Michael, I have to go. Love you.

Barbara steps through the doorway and coughs hoarsely. Noah's face strains.

NOAH

Hey Barb? You okay, my little cuppa
coughie?

A groan precedes the claps of heeled shoes approaching.

BARBARA

Uy, you should worry more about
that tie. Let me get it. Just stop.
Stop!

Noah relents, staring upward as Barbara takes over.

NOAH

Danny always seemed like a hermit.
He should have found someone.

BARBARA

He probably didn't want to share a bathroom. Ah, there we go.

Barbara tightens the tie knot.

NOAH

Nah, ya just need strong bladder.

BARBARA

Or a diaper! HA!

The two share a laugh, until Barbara suffers another fit of coughing. Noah's smile falters. His eyes cast about, lost, but then land on a black suit jacket on the back of a chair. He grabs it and slides his arm through its sleeve.

NOAH

You don't sound too good. I'll schedule another appointment.

BARBARA

You know it's chronic. It's fine.

NOAH

No it isn't. You won't let me make just one appointment. That's all I'm asking.

BARBARA

Oh stop your kvetching, Noah. We can't even afford today's bill. And we're married. We can't get Medicaid. I can't shovel away your retirement every cough.

Noah spins to protest but Barbara cuts him off.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

I won't. Now c'mon, we're going to be late. Got your yarmulka?

Noah pats his head then hurries away.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Clouds drearily hang over a small gathering amidst headstones decorated with faded Hebrew and six-pointed stars. The drone of the RABBI's prayers is occasionally punctuated with an "Amen".

Noah and Barbara take their place behind the stocky, visibly uncomfortable NATHAN, 25, and the wide-eyed, taller HANNAH, 30. Barbara leans over Nathan's shoulder and they whisper.

BARBARA

Nathan, where's your father?

Nathan gestures with his eyes toward Michael.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

(still whispering)

Michael!

A nearby attendee makes a "shhhh" sound. Barbara's attention turns toward Hannah.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

You don't look like Anna. Nathan,
where's Anna?

NATHAN

We broke up.

Hannah turns and whispers a greeting

HANNAH

Hi, I'm Hannah.

BARBARA

No, you're not Anna.

HANNAH

I'm *Hannah*.

Barbara looks her over then leans toward Nathan.

BARBARA

Is this like in those shows you
watch? Are you dating your teacher?

NATHAN

Grandma!

Another "shhhh" is cut off as Barbara coughs into her hand. Barbara's coughs again, more fiercely, and again, and again. The rabbi goes silent. Most turn to watch. Noah glares and moves to support his wife. He waves off a concerned Michael and guides her away.

The ceremony resumes, but Nathan and Hannah continue to watch Barbara in concern. Noah again waves off their concern from a distance. Nathan touches Hannah's arm and they turn back toward the ceremony.

Barbara calms and pulls her hand away, revealing a spatter of blood on her fingers.

NOAH

I don't care about the money. We're going to a hospital.

Another couple from the funeral, SAMUEL, 65 and RACHEL, 60 approach, maintaining a respectful distance.

BARBARA

I'm sure it'll get better. I told you, I don't want us to lose the house over a cough.

NOAH

I don't give a damn about the house, Barb.

BARBARA

Well I do. Unless you're fine with divorce?

RACHEL

That's what we did.

Barbara and Noah turn around, startled.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Sorry, we wanted to make sure you were okay.

BARBARA

Thanks for checking, but it's just a cough.

She notices Rachel eyeing the blood on her hand and hides it.

SAMUEL

Divorce doesn't have to change your life, you know, other than that sweet, sweet Medicaid.

RACHEL

I can refer you to the attorney we used. He offered us a commission.

Noah darkens and confronts the two.

NOAH

I don't give a crap about your profiteering. We are not ending our fifty year marriage over some medical bills!

Barbara moves to take Noah's hand, but he only sees red.

NOAH (CONT'D)

That's what this asinine world has
come to. This country is run by
idiots who think...

BARBARA

What's the process like?

Noah does a double-take. Rachel realizes she's been asked a question.

RACHEL

Oh, well, it'd be uncontested, so
it only takes a few months. He's
even offering a package deal if
you'd also like to refinance your
mortgage or update your will.

BARBARA

Oh, our house is paid off, but
(beat)
It would be nice if our money
didn't end up in the hands of this
new Anna.

Barbara finds Noah's unmoving eyes. Rachel stealthily slips a business card into Barbara's purse.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Look, Noah, I don't want to leave
you with nothing. It's the only
answer we have!

Noah slowly shakes his head and scoffs as he pulls away. Barbara leans to follow, but succumbs to more coughing. Noah hurries back to hold her. He scowls at Samuel and Rachel and they back away.

NOAH

Give up my wife for what, money?
You got some chutzpah -- that's for
sure.

Samuel raises his palms in acquiescence. As Barbara calms, Noah points toward the ceremony.

NOAH (CONT'D)

What would our son think?

BARBARA

He doesn't have to know! No one does. And you'll have a home. It's just paperwork!

NOAH

No, it's nonsense.

Noah shakes his head dismissively and tries to lead Barbara further away, searching.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Now where's that damn car?

Barbara plants her feet and steels her voice.

BARBARA

We're going to do this.

Noah's eyes linger on his wedding band, long and hard, then up at Barbara.

NOAH

50 years...

Noah blinks his eyes, his lips tightening.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Remember that song at our wedding?

Barbara's eyes unfocus as she recalls the memory, then returns to meet his once more.

BARBARA

How could I not?

NOAH

That was the only time I serenaded you.

Noah's nostrils flare as he inhales sharply, then exhales slowly. Another deep breath, and an exhale.

Barbara coughs loudly, startling him. She holds up a finger, coughs one more time, then nods. Still wrought with nerves, Noah takes a third deep breath, and sings.

NOAH (CONT'D)

I love you like a bumblebee loves honey...

I love you like a panda loves bamboo...

Noah covers his mouth to calm himself. Barbara softens. Noah reluctantly drops his hand.

NOAH (CONT'D)

I will love you and hope you find
me funny...

(voice cracking)

Let's have our honeymoon in Malibu.

Noah's knees give out and he sits on the ground, sobbing. Barbara rushes to hold him, soothing him gently.

BARBARA

It'll be okay. It'll be okay. It
will be okay.

Barbara leans her head on Noah's shoulder.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Well, maybe not your singing.

They burst out laughing, long and hard, both crying, but now with happiness.

NOAH

One question?

Barbara nods.

BARBARA

Anything.

NOAH

Does this mean I can see other
women?

FADE OUT.