

Medical Divorce

written by

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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 case of Depends!

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
Barb, you don't sound too good. Let
me make you another appointment.

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

NOAH
No it isn't fine. Why won't you let
me make you another appointment.
That's all I'm asking.

BARBARA
Oh stop your kvetching, Noah. We
can't even afford today's bill. I
can't keep shoveling away your
retirement with 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. You have 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
She's too old for you!

NATHAN
Grandma!

BARBARA
She could be your grandma.

Another "shhhh" is cut off as Barbara coughs into her hand. Barbara 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 Nathan 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. She pulls a tissue from her sleeve to wipe it.

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.

RACHEL

Get a divorce. That's what we did. You'll qualify for Medicaid and it will pay for everything.

Barbara and Noah turn around, startled.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Sorry, we wanted to make sure you were okay, and... overheard?

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. It covers everything.

(leaning toward Noah)

Just keep your assets safe and separate.

RACHEL

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

Noah darkens and confronts the two.

NOAH

Commission? I don't give a crap about your commission. 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. People get a commission for somebody else's suffering. 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 Michael and Nathan's inheritance is better protected. I don't know 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. This could work!

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 did I put that damned 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)
You remember that song I sang to you 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 ever 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 love you, and I hope you think
I'm funny...

(voice cracking)

Let's take 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.