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Going Back to the Roots

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Going Back to the Roots

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Going Back to the Roots

ALYSSA C. ZABALA

She uncrosses her legs, places her palms onto the mahogany table, presses her lips together. After thoughtful consideration, she responds with certainty: “No.”

He sighs, turning to the divorce lawyer, desperate for any sort of comfort or compromise.

Nothing.

A blank expression paints the lawyer’s face. He appears baffled as he struggles to comprehend the situation in front of him and how these two individuals were married for such a significant amount of time.

Surrounded by outdated encyclopedias and consumed by ‘70’s wood wall paneling, the man stares at the divorce lawyer’s degrees. He smirks, deeming these degrees as useless, evident by the lack of help the lawyer sitting across from him and his soon-to-be ex-wife has provided.

He clears his throat, “Alright then, another no. Except this time, it’s a “no” to co-parenting, making decisions together, which, by the way, would promote stability and consistency. I’m not sure what you want. We’ve been going at this—at each other—for weeks now and have made no progress.”

Her eyes narrow. “I’ve already told you what I want: I want the absolute best for Ethan. I feel that I will make the best decisions for him without any influence—disappointment and disagreeing—from you. For instance, he needs to be consuming at least four protein-packed meals a day. Nothing less. This is what I want.” The patience in her tone slowly crawls away, leaving only isolated anger within her speech.

He throws his hands up. “That’s absurd! He would not be able to handle that amount of nutrition!” When he sets his hands down again on the table, his watch snags his shirt, drawing the woman’s eyes to his Hawaiian shirt.

Watching his watch snag the shirt evokes her numerous, and previously forgotten, memories associated with his Hawaiian shirts: the day they first met, their first date, even their wedding. The emphasis on

his shirts began to fade after so many years of marriage, becoming normal to her, yet this snagging movement floods her with nostalgia.

It's one of his defining features—that and his notorious Seiko watch he constantly wears. It's what drew her to him. When she first saw him, she noticed his Hawaiian shirt and knew she immediately had to ask about it; she was curious as to why he presented himself in such a summer aesthetic during an October wedding. “For irony!” he explained to her. It made her laugh. This led to a whole night of conversing and laughing, and eventually a first date. During their first interaction, she noticed that he twists the bottom button of the shirt when he is anxious, as he did throughout their entire conversation when they first met, and as he is doing right now.

She responds, “Fine, what do you propose instead? And I can assure you that Ethan will not be living at your house. There is not nearly enough light in those rooms, all those north-facing windows, which would deprive him of necessary light. He needs light—good light.”

“North-facing windows are not the end of the world! He would still thrive living with me. He needs to live with me; he must be watched constantly—he's so young! He's too delicate to be left alone, even for the smallest amount of time.”

“But he must live a little! He can't be constantly coddled!” she shouts at him.

He sits there, contemplating. It's difficult tracing back how they developed so much animosity from so much love. Six years of marriage, rooting back to their first conversation at a mutual friend's wedding. He remembers first seeing her; he remembers how she looked: a pale pink bridesmaid's dress with her brunette hair straightened and her bangs clipped to the side. He remembers being too afraid, too shy, too anxious to go up and talk to her, but it didn't matter as she approached him first. He remembers never wanting their conversation to end. After hours of talking, he finally asked her out on a date—his best decision he has ever made to this day, even despite the current chaos and hostility between them.

He decided their first date should involve a cliché “date night” event. He thought she would enjoy it—not authentically, but ironically. He picked one where they plant succulents. It was one of those cheap succulents; it probably didn't cost the organizer more than fifteen cents for each succulent, despite the tickets costing \$27 each. Once it was planted in its terracotta pot, they decided to name the plant, wanting to pick a human name. On the night they met, they'd laughed about couples who named inanimate objects, agreeing that the funniest ones were with human names. Irony had always been something that had made them both laugh. “I feel

like our plant is a boy, we need to pick out a boy's name." He agreed with her, it felt right—the whole date felt right.

The succulent stayed on their windowsill above the sink for all six years of their marriage.

He subtly grins, tears forming in the corner of his eyes. He forgot how much he missed their inside jokes. He hears his name from the divorce lawyer and snaps back to reality. "I'm sorry, what did you say?"

The lawyer sighs. "Do you have any other requests?"

"No, not that I can think of."

"Okay, what about you?" The lawyer turns to the soon-to-be ex-wife.

She considers the question, contemplating her response.

She obviously has other requests; this is an important subject to her that she is not taking lightly. She glances over to her child, sitting there in the gentle sun's glow. His short, thin hair stands up, almost as if he's cold despite the warmth of the rays. The sun illuminates him, revealing his many small sunspots, all which resulted from too much exposure from his continuous basking. He has an olive-green undertone that contrasts with what he's wearing: bright green, which is an indication of his healthiness, his liveliness. He branches out, stretching towards her—towards them. This is all she wants.

Her glance falls back to her soon-to-be ex-husband's hands as he continues to anxiously play with his shirt's button. There's softness in his eyes. He appears defeated and vulnerable; his eyebags display his exhaustion. She feels it too.

Is this worth it?

Her silence lingers over all of them as they are all unsure of what obscene requests will be next. Finally, she responds, "I have nothing else."

This shocks the man and the divorce lawyer—even the woman herself.

The man and woman both turn to face each other, displaying their exhaustion and frustration in their eyes. Then, they both turn to face their child, Ethan: the succulent they planted together on their first date. They are both desperately fighting to cling onto the last remainder of their love—a physical reminder of what they once shared for six years.

Maybe their love isn't dead after all.