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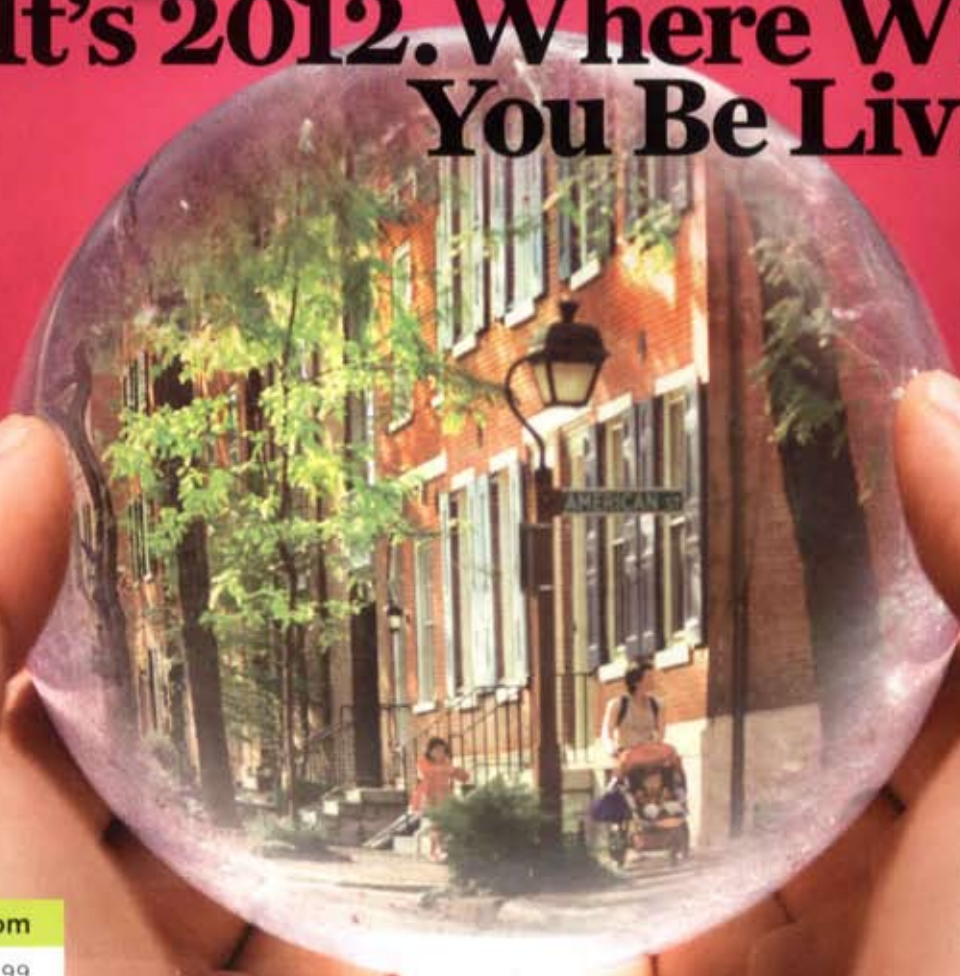
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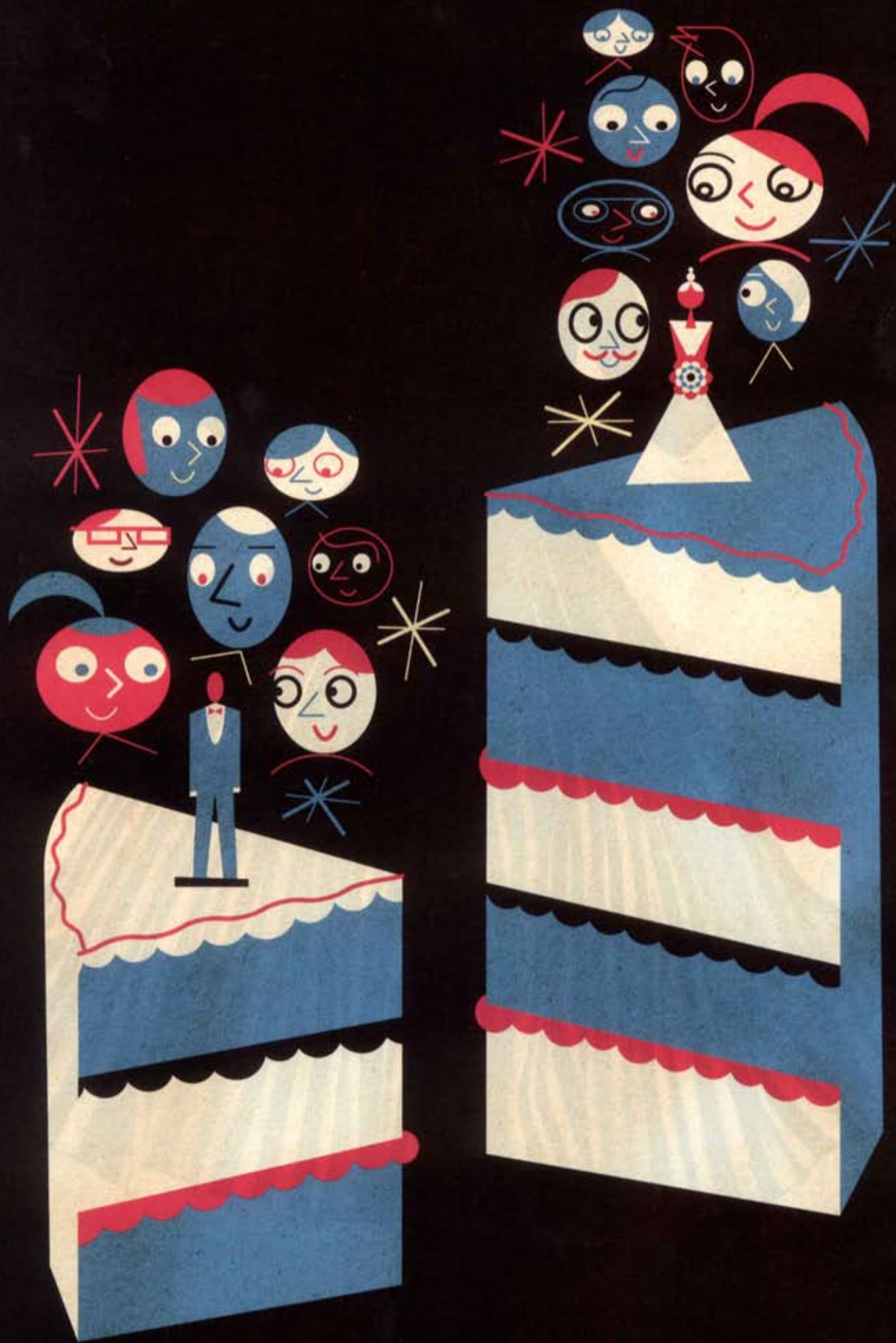
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Remember when all it took
to get divorced was
a shark lawyer?

Today, tony Philadelphians
don't dare split up without a
cadre of pricey experts—
from decorators and plastic surgeons
to chakra-soothing
massage therapists.

Welcome to the age of...

The Divorce Posse

By Amy Donohue Korman

Illustration by Greg Mably

It's hard to be a Rittenhouse Square divorcée.

Take the broken garage door that one of this sleek breed was recently dealing with, in between working full-time, coordinating with her nanny to pick the kids up at school, schlepping the kids to Target in Conshohocken, and getting herself out solo to dinners with friends in Chestnut Hill and on the Main Line. She's also thinking of moving, but can't decide whether to look in the city or the suburbs. Less urgent, but emotionally necessary, is the task of emasculating her current house—that is, remaking certain rooms that scream “man,” like her ex-husband's office, and quietly unloading a few key pieces of jewelry, like the Harry Winston necklace that will in fact help pay for the obliteration of the hated man-decor around the house.

A decade or two ago, our socialite might have had some help from friends and family, but she would basically have had to figure out *Divorced Life* on her own. Today, it's a different story.

“I have an assistant who drives me places now,” says the Square woman. “He takes the kids to Target, he fixes things in the house. Basically, he's like my husband.” In her hour of need, she has also enlisted a stylish army of supplementary hirelings: a decorator to work on the de-man-ification of the current abode; babysitters; a Pilates instructor to hone her newly single body; massage therapists to ease the stress of everything; and a second part-time assistant. (He's the one working on the jewelry problem.)

In our city, it's not that more people are actually getting divorced—divorce rates have remained constant over the past decade, even dropping slightly in Pennsylvania between 2000 and 2004. But the number of people it takes to get you through a divorce is exploding exponentially. In a certain segment of Philly and the suburbs, people who approached a marital split knowing it would be difficult financially and emotionally suddenly find themselves propped up by, indeed needing, an L.A.-ish entourage as they embark on their new singleton lives.

“I never had a shrink before,” sighs the woman. “Now, I have a shrink, and my kids have one.” What's worse, her ex-husband has handpicked his own team of pricey pros, including a personal trainer. “I was always trying to get my husband to work out,” she laments. “Now every time I talk to him, he's in the middle of a workout.”

The rise of these divorce aides-de-camp seems inevitable: For starters, these days all of us need 25 experts to do anything, whether it's wrestle with our anxieties, choose a paint color, do an abdominal crunch, or figure

out where to plant a freaking tree in our yard. Ratchet up this basic 2007 level of insecurity and need for constant reassurance—as happens when one is going through the bitterly lonely devastation of a divorce—and convening a posse of paid helpers begins to make sense.

Particularly if you're one of the paid helpers, for whom focusing on divorcing couples is just a smart way to make a buck. Ask Jon Ostroff, a lawyer who went through such a soul-numbing split of his own that he was inspired last year to start a business, Plymouth Meeting-based family mediation firm *DivorceDoneRight*, to help couples sever ties less contentiously. (Business, as you might guess, is brisk.)

Also driving the trend is the disappearance of any reticence about divorce. What once was a private, somber affair is now seen—or at least marketed—as a very public wiping clean of the slate. “It's the age of the divorced person,” declares Kendall Brown, a former Ballard Spahr attorney who left the firm last year to launch Media-based *Eclatante*, an event-planning firm that specializes in second weddings. The idea for her venture came to her as she arranged for her own remarriage at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and discovered a dearth of non-tulle-and-roses planners for such an occasion. The trend toward approaching yourself post-split as a sort of promising fixer-upper that you can throw money and Botox at and then put back on the market (“well-appointed, updated Gladwyne charmer—just renovated!”) isn't ludicrous at all to Brown. As she says optimistically, “I'd call it the business of starting over.”

When even the bow-tie-addicted Hurricane Schwartz

has enrolled in divorce mediation, it seems there's something going on with divorce. Last year saw countless *Us Weekly* and *Star* covers detailing celeb breakups, and the delicious best-seller *The Debutante Divorcée*, by Plum Sykes. “Divorce parties” complete with three-tier cakes have become standard practice in New York and Vegas, and now even closer to home. “I ran into a divorce party at 32nd in Atlantic City,” says a friend. “It was 10 men getting bottle service and on the prowl for girls, and at least four of them were recently divorced. When they found out I was there for my bachelorette party, they were all joking and yelling, ‘Don't do it!’” Center City realtor

Kristen Foote is planning to mark the end of her eight-month-long marriage with a bang, too. "We're going to Buddakan and renting out the middle table," she says. "I'm taking my bridesmaids and everyone who's helped me through this, as a thank-you and a way to celebrate my new life."

"I definitely felt like there was no stigma to my getting divorced; it seemed almost trendy," says one divorced man in Blue Bell. This may be partly thanks to that volcano of Hollywood divorces—Britney and K-Fed, Reese and Ryan, Kate Hudson and that rocker guy, Pamela Anderson and Kid Rock, even a sad-eyed, 64-year-old Paul McCartney. In our town, of late there's been Fox 29's Kerri-Lee Halkett, banking power couple Marla and Richard Green, tech entrepreneur Pete Musser, and Ballard Spahr chairman Arthur Makadon. Hopefully, they've all got their experts lined up. Because no matter how rich or beautiful one might be, or how commonplace divorce has become, the event is devastating. "I will never get over it," one woman mourned to us. Adds legendary Schnader Harrison attorney Al Momjian: "Divorce is hell."

It's in that hell, of course, that the need for a posse is born. "It's absolutely essential for people who have gotten divorced to see a therapist or read some books or do a seminar, to learn about the relationship and understand the psychology of attachment—why they attracted that person in the first place," argues Sherri R. Edelman, a clinical psychologist who practices out of a lofty Old City spa-and-psychotherapy spot called Triune Chiropractic, Counseling and Wellness Center. Triune is a one-stop chakra shop where Edelman, plus a chiropractor, Pilates and yoga instructors, and massage therapists, awaits to begin the healing. "Our business is thriving," adds Edelman, who charges \$130 an hour; half of her clients are in a "relationship crisis."

Your shrink and M.D. are often the first members of your posse (after your lawyer): All kinds of health issues do seem to crop up as bad marriages are ending. One Main Line woman reports having such joint pain that she couldn't get out of bed as her marriage wound down (thanks to her husband's dalliance with a close friend), and she got progressively skinnier by the week. "My doctor told me I was going to end up dead at the rate I was going," she remembers, though with the help of therapists, she's well (and divorced) now. Edelman's patients tend to suffer from a lot of irritable bowel syndrome and headaches. "Backaches, headaches and neck aches are directly connected to our nervous system," she says. "We have unmet needs and emotional upheaval. ... We tend to shut down and regress into our bodies." One might stock up on Gas-X, then visit Edelman's Triune colleagues, who can help dissolve post-divorce "armoring" with everything from Reiki to raindrop therapy.

Of course, feeling great is one thing, but you also need a posse member to focus on how you look. Newly divorced Foote is now a Pilates devotee. And lives there a divorcee in all the world who hasn't had cosmetic surgery? "I see a lot of divorced people—women and men, interestingly enough," says Kirk Brandow, a plastic surgeon with a Ritz-Carlton-ish suite of offices in Bala Cynwyd. "There's a group that comes in before

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DIVORCE DORMITORIES

What good is a divorce posse without a cool crib to go with it? Here's where high-profile Philadelphians land after the split

THE RITTENHOUSE The richest of the rich, like banker Richard Green, move into this glossy tower during their splits. With Smith & Wollensky in the building, you've got your own convivial cafeteria (and there's Lacroix room service).



OAK HILL The upscale but slightly lonely Penn Valley condo, with a tower and low-rise units, has the superb advantage of being 30 seconds from the Gladwyne exit of the Schuylkill. Not a single stove has ever been turned on at Oak Hill, sources tell us, but it's so well-known to delivery people from Ardmore pizza joints that you'll hardly starve.

CHESTERBROOK ("CHEATERBROOK") Gazillions of acres of townhomes in this Wayne community house exiled spouses from across the western Main Line.



SOCIETY HILL TOWERS I.M. Pei's monument to singlehood is a time-honored destination for the suitcase-toting divorced. "In the olden days, the '70s, they used to call it 'Divorce Towers,'" says Prudential's Joanne Davidow. Realtor Laurie Phillips concurs: "That's always been a big divorce place; if you get wiped out by your wife, that's where you go."

"And the social scene is significant, especially at the pool in the summer," adds Phillips, a onetime Towers resident who met her husband, Barry Milberg, on the building's elevator. "He was one of the divorced guys."

THE ST. JAMES The loft-like Washington Square building has the cachet of the new. "Women tend to move to the St. James, because they end up with more money," says Phillips.



THE PHOENIX The perfect divorced-guy spot, with its lively Tír na Nóg pub and neighbors who include Arthur Makadon. Unfortunately, the building went condo last year, so now you have to go condo, too, to live there.

The Divorce Posse

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they get divorced, and another group that's been divorced six months or so and wants to get back out there." (That pre-divorce group—are they in effect getting their current spouses to help subsidize improvements that their next will enjoy? "They're hoping it will help them get the confidence to leave the marriage," offers Brandow. "I don't encourage them, of course.") Unbelievably (or brilliantly?), Brandow is launching a "Better Than Ever" cosmetic surgery registry, where friends and relatives of the newly divorced can help fund, via PayPal, their procedures. The doctor says that women often go for a tummy tuck or breast lift, men for an I'll-look-better-at-Rouge neck tightening or laser peel. "I try to bring them back to where they were—it really does give them a big boost," he explains, adding that he'll ask patients to bring in youthful photos of themselves as a sort of guideline. Brandow's vision when he joins a divorce posse is more Bryn Mawr than Borgata: "I don't take someone in her 50s who's a nice B cup and make them a D cup," he says.

Posse members can help with more practical, nuts-and-bolts problems, too: With your built-in babysitter—that is, your spouse—gone, both parents now have to scramble for sitters, or at least find a \$500-a-week nanny who'll pinball back and forth between houses. "One parent might be 40 minutes away from the other, so the kids are transported back and forth by a nanny," says Lisa Diehl, owner of ABC Nanny Source, a Philly agency. "We get a lot of summer positions where the husband needs a nanny to cover those months. It's not as uncommon as you might think for Dad to have full custody."

And then there's the psychological uptick one can get from new Scalamandré upholstery: "It's healthier than if people just kind of sit there and do nothing," says Rittenhouse Square interior designer Greg Oosterhart, whose hourly rate is \$185. "At my level, people have acquired possessions of value. ... Somebody gets the house, and whoever's moving out wants to put their own sense of identity on a new place. Guys will often go to a contemporary look, more tonal, and cleaner, less clutter," he notes, with most springing for the predictable: flat-screen TV, embedded sound system, marble-topped bar. His women clients tend to girl up their houses in "the way they really wanted it done in the first place." Some people start with a redecorating party: "I've heard of friends coming in and replacing all the photos of the husband and wife with pictures of all her friends and children," adds Kendall Brown.

It's that emotional support that may in fact be the crux of the divorce posse: It might be literally difficult to drag stuff home from Lowe's by yourself, but the real reason you take your handyman with you is to stave off some of the incredible loneliness of the event. One woman felt like she wasn't invited to many parties post-divorce, which was eased a bit by hanging out with her decorator. If the divorce posse is capitalizing on our misery, well, that's the price many are willing to pay for the relief its members provide. (And is it really so different from paying a shrink?)

The sad part is, you wonder: If people had done all this breast implanting and hard work in the therapist's office earlier—in essence, had convened a divorce posse while still married—would they in fact still be married? Surgeon Brandow says that husbands often balk at their wives' getting surgery, but notes that the women inevitably get their nip-tucks anyway after they split (meaning, the next guy gets the \$6,500 perky boobs). "I tell husbands who complain that this is the best money you can spend," he says. Psychologist Edelman also sighs that couples often wait too long to come in for therapy. Could these marriages have been saved with Pfrimmer massage and Restylane?

Maybe not, judging by a recent hour spent with Alison and Adam, who are in mediation right now to help end their marriage of 21 years. This polite couple in their 40s, sitting in DivorceDoneRight's Plymouth Meeting office suite, with cheerful brown-orange walls and soothing sailboat paintings, look perfect together. They're attractive, successful, and seemingly compatible: He's a pharmaceutical executive, she's a banking consultant. (We've changed their names to protect their identities, and because they have sons ages eight and 12.) But they're splitting nonetheless, and enough issues have come up that they've found themselves with a mediator—an attorney named, incongruously, Maribeth Blessing.

Mediators are an increasingly integral part of a divorce posse—some counties, including Montgomery, have made them mandatory before any court hearings. And in this couple's case, it quickly becomes apparent that they really, really need a mediator in their entourage.

"We wanted to go the traditional route," says Alison, who has a scarf elegantly knotted at her neck and a Gucci handbag next to her chair. "We went to see lawyers, but I was uncomfortable with the attitude—'We're going to take him for everything he's worth.' So I did some research and found Maribeth's bio, and talked to Adam."

Adam remembers things differently.

The Divorce Posse

decade; now a freelance assistant-for-hire (at a rate of \$50 per hour), Fisher also aids people in their upscale fire sales. "In a situation where women want to liquidate some assets and remain anonymous—you know Philadelphia, it's a fishbowl—I'm helping them with that," he says.

Getting rid of stuff is always cathartic, and in Philly, many do it at Freeman's, à la Hillary Musser, who held a much-talked-about sale of her couture clothes before she jetted off to Palm Beach following her split from tech guru Pete. Musser never lent her name to the auction, but word got out that she was the Chanel-wearing gal in question, who had shed tons of weight in the months before the auction and no longer could wear her larger couture items. It was a more subtle approach than last fall's Ellen Barkin \$20 Million Fuck-You Jewelry Auction at Christie's, at which Barkin sold the jewelry Ron Perelman had given her. Barkin no doubt realized what a lot of Philly women already know: No guy wants to hit on you at Tír na Nóg (where, according to our recent calculations, there are at least 14 men for every woman), or even Brasserie Perrier, if you're still wearing diamonds from your ex.

The amazing thing is that most ex-spouses recover from divorce. Not to say that the first year or two of separation and divorce aren't heartbreaking, which is why having a group of experts to come in and pay attention to your hair, body, psyche and sofas might keep your mind off the pain for a while and, over time, truly make you feel better. So much better, in fact, that you might even find yourself in love again, and getting remarried.

But on this wintry evening at DivorceDoneRight, Alison and Adam both acknowledge that splitting up was way more complicated than they had originally expected. "You see movie stars, and then two minutes later, they're divorced," says Alison. "Next time around, prenup," grumbles Adam. Just then, the guy who's now making a living helping them negotiate divorce, Jon Ostroff, mentions casually that he got married for a second time last month—without a prenup. Lovestruck, he still believes in marriage for the long haul, in the dream of happiness. He grins at his clients in a sweet, honeymoon-ish way as he reveals this, and any notion that he himself could one day need an entourage seems impossible.

Alison and Adam both stare at him and wait a beat, momentarily speechless.

"You're a dummy," says Alison. **T**

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