

Let There Be Life!

By Dana Ellington Myles



Conception

I

Some folks believe that life begins when the sperm enters the egg and the cell starts to divide. Others argue that life starts a little later, say, once the fetus acquires a heartbeat. I think everyone can agree that once a baby enters the world, draws breath into its lungs, life has officially begun. Personally, I've learned that just breathing doesn't necessarily mean that you have "a" life. If it did, then folks wouldn't tell you to "get a life" or that "life starts at 40." I've been breathing for a while now but can clearly mark off the different "lives" I've lived so far. And all of them are marked by some heartbreak or another.

But, this one is different. The one I'm living now, the one I call my real life. This one began with a death. The death of my marriage, that is. I'm sure my ex-husband would love to see me tried in a court of law for murder. To this day he believes I am solely responsible for our marriage's demise. I guess he's right. I stabbed it to death with four, simple words, "I want a divorce."

But wait, where are my manners? Hi, my name is Alexis Washington Burns, but my friends call me Lex. I'm thirty-six years old and not so long ago was married to Michael Burns, an attractive example of manhood if he does say so himself. We met at a party my senior year in college. He stood next to the bar with his friends, looking hot in his tight black tee shirt and casually creased jeans. I promise you, it was lust at first site on my part but that was nothing new. His attraction to me on the other hand, even now I'm not so sure what it was. I'm average looking, kinda curvy with medium length hair. Guess it's safe to say the lust must have been mutual and leave it at that. Several dances and a sexual encounter of the college kind later and poof, we were a couple. The majority of our courtship is a blur for me. I think I spent most of it in a sex-induced haze. Michael was a true hottie and up to that point, the best (and only third long term) lover I had had in my life. I turned a blind eye to everything and almost everyone when it came to him thus missing the fact that he was not the Prince Charming I had made him out to be.

In his defense, Michael is not altogether a bad guy. He's well groomed, a great dresser, seems to treat his mother with a decent amount of respect. He surprised me our first Christmas after we were married with a Chihuahua he adopted from the pound. We called it Yippy. He loved that dog right up until it pooped in a pair of his hundred-eighty dollar Air Jordan's. I thought it was kind of funny, but the look on Michael's face scared me. His eyebrows furrowed, his fists balled up and for a minute there, I really thought he was going to kill Yippy. Instead, he scooped him up and, I hope, took him back to the pound. Yet another hint that Michael wasn't the type to stay committed when things didn't go the way he wanted them to. I'm telling you, that man should

never, ever, EVER be in any kind of committed relationship. I'm not so sure he understands the concept.

I honestly believe I was the only person at the wedding who took our vows seriously. He repeated after the minister,

"I, Michael, take you Alexis, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do us part."

He said it, but I promise you what he meant was,

"I Michael, take you, Alexis, to be the doormat I know you are, to work two jobs, in sickness and in health, to pay all of our bills and put up with my crap; from this day forward until I drive you to an early grave." Not so romantic when you think about it, huh?

Why did I marry him, you ask. Well, to be honest, I thought I was supposed to. I mean, after all, he proposed complete with a ring and the one knee thing. You've seen the movies; in true Hollywood fashion, if a guy gets down on one knee, holds up a diamond of substantial size, you as the female in the situation are required to cry and say yes. Who was I to go against this tradition?

So what if there were obvious signs that a different response would have been more appropriate. Like finding phone numbers in his pants pockets when I did our laundry every Sunday, OR hearing stories around campus about him being seen at this or that party when he had told me he was staying in, OR when I met his mom for the first time and she called me some other girl's name.

But, I digress. He proposed I said yes because it never occurred to me that it was okay to say no. I thought I was in love and that was that. When I finally woke up to the fact that I was the only one who had gotten married, it was just a matter of those four little words, uttered the morning of my 35th birthday of all days.

It being my birthday and all, I had gone out of my way and fixed a rather lavish breakfast. The dining table was full of French toast, scrambled eggs, bacon, fresh cut fruit, and an assortment of juices. Michael walked in to the kitchen and passed me by without as much as a kiss on the cheek. He sat down at the table and began fixing his plate.

It wasn't just this oversight that prompted our marriage's death sentence. I had been contemplating how to bring it up for days now. But you can best believe, when he started to eat, still with no acknowledgement of my presence, there was very little hesitation when the words suddenly fell from my lips, "I want a divorce."

Michael looked over at me slowly; his scrambled eggs, bacon, and French toast no longer holding his complete attention. The fork in his hand came to a sudden stop mid -way between his plate and mouth. It would have been funny if I hadn't been so nervous. I scrunched up against the counter in preparation of an explosion of foul language. I'd heard him go off on folks a time or two and just knew he was about to throw down a curse that would "live in infamy."

Instead, he lowered the floating fork and gave a resigned, "Okay."

A sane woman would have been concerned right then because his reaction was too subdued. If this case ever did go to trial, I'd urge my lawyer to cite his simple response as indication he was a willing accomplice to the crime. A beat or two passed and when the foul language still had not begun, I stood up a little straighter and uttered, "Really? That's all you have to say?" As silly as it sounds, even though I wanted out, my feelings were hurt that he wasn't at least going to break down and acknowledge that I had been the best wife EVER and he couldn't live without me. Was it really so much to ask that he grovel at my feet?

I should have known better. There was no way in hell he was going to come out of this looking like the bad guy. He squared his shoulders and proceeded to deliver the most pitiful testimony he could muster. His moment on the stand would have made any judge weep and I would immediately have been sentenced to hang.

"Not really," eyes slightly downcast for dramatic effect, his voice lowered. "I mean, if that's what you want then fine. It was only a matter of time before your friends convinced you to cut me loose. I bet it was Mackenzie. She's always hated me. Bet she's already plotting to get you with what's his face? Your boy, Jimmy or whatever his name is. He's who she wanted you to be with all along. That's why I told you to stay away from both of 'em. I just knew all she wanted was to break us up."

At that point, he sniffed, as if fighting back tears. Now it was my turn to look stunned. My jaw dropped open in disbelief. I didn't think he had ever cried a day in his life. He glanced at me, checking to see if the almost crying had worked. I'm sure he expected me to cry for real and confess that I had been brainwashed, that I'd never have the courage to kill our "loving" relationship all by myself.

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