

Divorce: Shame + Self-Love + Loss + What Comes After

BY LAUREN WAGONER

I stepped out on the porch after midnight – I was home alone – my bare feet felt the cold slate, dampened by the rain.

I was sitting there, watching the ember of a cigarette glow and burn as my tears fell in my lap – I told myself, “You’re going to remember this moment,” and I do- still today. That night was the night I decided my marriage was over.

I felt my life playing out, like a confusing screenplay – each scene seemingly more disconnected from one to the next. I was trying to connect the dots. But right then, at that moment, in my mind I had failed. I had failed at the one thing society shames you for failing at.

Nobody talks about divorce in the midst of it. Nobody talks about it, because of the societal pressures and judgments built around it. So I, too, remained quiet. I went over the logistics hundreds of times. In my mind, I would gather up all the things and people I knew I would lose, in an attempt to hold them close for a bit longer.

I didn’t know what was ahead, but I knew this decision would affect so many and for the longest time, the weight of that was based heavily on what was best for everyone else.

This place was a prison, and at the time, the thought of leaving was too hard. Too uncertain. And fear held me hostage.

At the end of some days, beneath silent tears, I’d fall asleep, to the thought, “Maybe it will get better.” In sincere hopes that it would.

But it didn’t get better – and still, I remained motionless,

harboring the heaviness of this alone. I just wanted happiness and understanding...was that so wrong? I knew it wasn't, but to me, divorce felt like a stain – like the scarlet letter – that screamed failure and shame.

The big truth? I was terrified. Terrified to fail. Terrified of what friends and family would think and say about me. Terrified that I would be judged. But even more so than that, it wrecked my heart knowing I would hurt so many people that I genuinely loved, in the wake of what seemed so selfish at the time. So, I suffered in silence...all the while scared to move. Paralyzed by the fear of so many unknowns.

My idea of a picture-perfect life was crumbling from the inside out and one can only take so much.

I was silent until I wasn't anymore. And on that significant day, like a gigantic chaotic exhale, it all came out.

Divorce is like a bomb. No one even knows it's there until it goes off. And the next thing you know, it's all over the news and everyone knows about it. That's how it felt anyway. I didn't want some big dramatic ending with lawyers and mediators. I just wanted to be free. So I drew a line in the sands of my life and quietly stepped to the other side.

I'm not here to re-hash and re-live the details and trauma of my marriage. This story doesn't have a villain or a victor. This story has two very unhappy people – who were no longer choosing one another.

So I'm here to speak about my decision – one that felt big and scary, but one that was my courageous act of self-love – a step inside of my own empowerment. It was in this moment, for the first time maybe ever, I chose myself.

If only I could go back and tell that version of me how brave she was – or even tell her that, in all the loss, and all the people soon to make their exit, she would gain so much.

It's been a violent shed. Violent and lonely. Friends who I thought would always be in my life, aren't anymore. Under pressure, you find out who's who and no one really prepares you for the big waves of change that come flooding in, after a life-altering decision.

In all honesty, I didn't have the emotional capacity to try and convince people they belonged in my life, nor did I think I should have to. So I didn't and they left. As difficult as it was to learn hard lessons of letting go and the sadness that comes with losing people you care for, I watched my old life play out without me in it and I knew I didn't fit there anymore.

When I say I chose me, I don't just mean I chose me over my marriage – I chose me over everything. I chose me over their opinions of me and the fact that I would be the topic of dinner table gossip. I chose me, despite what my parents would say. I chose me despite the fear that rose in my belly to try and stop me from choosing me. And for that, I will never apologize for.

But it wasn't easy choosing me. It wasn't easy at all. It broke my heart. I had always chosen others, put their needs before mine, and this wasn't the scenario in which I wanted to learn this massive lesson.

I stood in the midst of a mess I created and wanted to clean it up, neatly, without any casualties...and that just wasn't possible. I had to make peace with being the "bad guy" in hopes that someday, I would be seen in a different light.

And somewhere along the way, my resentment has been replaced with forgiveness. And where hardness once was, I am now soft.

So, what comes after?

It's hard to know what will come after amidst a path that is clouded and uncertain, but that is life and when your heart speaks, you listen.

There was a whole new life waiting for me, on the other side of my fear. One that brought me the greatest love I've ever known.

One that has given me my very own journey full of self-exploration and curiosity. This space feels expansive and I can breathe deeply now.

I have a hunger for life and love and a newfound respect for human connection. Less has become more and I've learned the importance of grace and trust and what it means to be human. And sometimes it's messy – it just is.

I see the sunlight pour into the corners of my life that have awakened my senses to the beauty of new beginnings and change...and I have a deep appreciation for the lessons I came here to learn. I found my worthiness through these depths, and I'll always be grateful for that.

It was in these moments that I was a student of life...and I can, with kinder eyes, look back on what this was here to teach me, and at the same time, look around at what it has given me. Without that chapter, there would not be this one.

And so, I look at the girl in the mirror and see strength. A reflection that doesn't speak of shame or guilt or fear – and

who, despite all odds, fearlessly followed her heart.

I am on a path of healing, in a new place – one that is spacious, with a heart that is open and spine that is strong.

Photo by [Frank McKenna](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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Following Our Own Paths***

***Divorce Is Not A Dishonourable Discharge Or A
Demotion***

***To My Husband, At The End Of Our 25-Year
Marriage***

I wanted movement and not
a calm course of existence.
I wanted excitement and
danger and the chance to
sacrifice myself for my love.

Leo Tolstoy

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