

Prologue: The First Friday in May

“I just need two more signatures...”

Terri Kaplan, Leslie Meyer’s attorney, delicately placed her right index finger first on one of the blank lines at the bottom of the divorce decree, and then quickly shifted it to a second one slightly below the first.

Leslie hesitated, caught her breath, and then finally scribbled her name on each of the two lines. Signing her name was a mechanical act, a task that of course she had effortlessly completed thousands of times before. This time, though, the weight of this simple deed was crushing, even though this very moment was several years in the making. The gold-trimmed black Cross pen weighed a hundred pounds, and Leslie had to force her hand to begin the capital “L” and then proceed with her full signature.

She finally completed the painful chore, looked up at her attorney, and asked, “Any others to sign?”

The attorney offered a tight half-smile as she shook her head.

“That’s all. I’ll FedEx these over to Greg’s lawyer in L.A. for him to sign. He should have them on Monday so Greg can go in there and sign them sometime early next week. When they send the signed originals back to us, I’ll go ahead and file all of the paperwork with the Pima County Superior Court.”

The attorney shuffled the papers and then asked Leslie, “Do you want me to notify his lawyer to give Greg a heads-up that they’re on their way?”

“I’ll just text Greg myself,” Leslie quickly replied as she rose from her seat. She had been the one to catalyze this final scene of her marriage, so she would own the responsibility to bring her very-soon-to-be-former husband onto the stage.

Another tight smile was offered by the attorney, but this one was tinged in sadness.

“It’ll take about two weeks from that point and then I’ll let you know when everything is finalized.”

Leslie released a lengthy, pained sigh.

“I know,” Terri Kaplan continued sympathetically. How many times over the past decade since she began practicing divorce law had this scene played out in her office? Too many times had Terri wished that she had chosen some other aspect of the law in which to specialize. Being a firsthand witness to the imminent death of so many marriages had come to be every bit as difficult as a doctor helplessly watching patients slip away on a regular basis. Even more: personally facilitating the legalities of marital demise, no matter how inevitable that conclusion might be by the time she became involved, felt to Terri as if she were a veterinarian called upon to mercifully speed some poor animal’s passing. Too often, what she did for a living was heart-wrenching.

“At least you have your trip coming up,” Leslie’s attorney added, “so maybe that will take your mind off of all of this...at least a little bit.”

“Maybe,” Leslie answered unconvincingly.

“How’s Alexis doing with...” – Terri’s voice hesitated just a touch before uttering the D word – “...the divorce?”

Leslie sighed.

“She’s mostly focused on graduating from high school in a couple of weeks and then starting college this fall. I think for her, the thing that affected her the most was when I filed. It’s been a year now, so she’s pretty much adjusted.”

A thought poked at Leslie.

“I just realized that for her graduation, the divorce will have just been finalized. That’s going to feel strange, with Greg there at the ceremony, and then afterwards at a restaurant or wherever we all go.”

“Are you still getting along okay?” the attorney asked warily. “You and Greg?”

“Sure, I guess,” was Leslie’s non-committal response. “We just live our separate lives like we’ve been doing, so there’s nothing really to fight about.”

Leslie nodded to the half-signed divorce papers.

“I guess this all went smoothly enough,” she added, referring to the entire past year since she had filed for divorce. “No real battles over the house or money or anything.”

Terri offered a brief, sympathetic hug – a female divorce lawyer’s prerogative with her clients, she often told herself – and then accompanied Leslie out of the conference room into the narrow hallway. Terri Kaplan’s law office in midtown Tucson, Arizona was comfortable enough, but bore no resemblance whatsoever to that of some upper tier law practice’s facilities. She turned in the direction of her own smallish office as Leslie Meyer headed through the front door out into the multi-tenant office building’s main lobby.

Before heading outside into the late April mid-afternoon and the unseasonably warm temperatures that were already topping ninety degrees, Leslie reached for her phone to text Greg.

Divorce papers signed and being sent FedEx to your lawyer, he will have them Monday. Plz sign Monday or Tuesday and send them back so they can get filed

Leslie hesitated for what felt like an eternity before finally sending the message. She stared at the phone for close to fifteen seconds, wondering if Greg would reply immediately. Finally telling herself that it didn't make any difference whether he did or not, she dropped her phone into her purse just as she heard the double-ding indicating an incoming text. Irritated that she hadn't waited just a second or two longer, Leslie fished in her Coach bag for the phone which, as usual, had somehow instantaneously burrowed its way underneath her wallet, her makeup bag, a jumble of store receipts, and whatever else happened to be in her purse on any given day.

As expected, the incoming text contained Greg's reply. What wasn't expected, though, was what Leslie read.

Can't do on Monday sorry – am leaving tonight will be out of the country all next week. Will sign them the following Monday as soon as I get back to LA sorry

Leslie couldn't help herself.

Where r u going?

She fully expected Greg to either not answer her, or respond with an overly general answer: something along the lines of “to Europe” since he had already confessed that he would be somewhere out of the country. She could almost feel Greg’s hesitation ooze from his phone, over the cellular connection, and then through her own. She *knew* that for some reason, he was reluctant to share his destination to Leslie.

Finally, the return text appeared, and Leslie felt herself gasp as she absorbed the words.

Venice - Marghera actually, on the mainland

A few seconds later, a follow-up text appeared on Leslie’s phone:

Submitting a proposal for a big shipping port management contract, have final presentation Tuesday

Leslie began typing her reply but her fingers fumbled so many typos into the brief message that even her smartphone's auto-correct couldn't decipher what she really meant to type. Finally, she was able to get the words correct. She stared at her phone for a good ten seconds before finally pressing the up-arrow to send the message.

**I'm going to be in Venice also, on the island – leaving
Saturday**

Leslie wanted to follow up her abrupt reply with something like “what a coincidence!” or “that is REALLY ironic!” or even a simple “Wow!” She couldn't bring herself to type anything further, though. Instead, she stood in the office building lobby, her mind involuntarily traversing both space and time.

About fifteen seconds later a final text from Greg dinged in reply to hers. Even before reading his words Leslie was absolutely certain that he shared her own feelings about this unnerving coincidence.

**Well that's the ultimate irony that our marriage began in
Venice and is ending while we're both back there. I'll sign the
papers as soon as I get back I promise**

