

Happily Ever After: The Marriage Club

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ON THE WAY DOWN THE AISLE, I felt a wave of relief and a great weight lifted from my shoulders. I was leaving behind the frenzy and frustration of single womanhood and walking toward a life of love, monogamy, and consistency. It wasn't that I had grown tired of the party scene, the endless dates with the brainless brutes. Heck, some of these adventures had made good little tales to tell all my friends. The truth was, I had fallen for it. I had finally handed in my singles card to the eagerly awaiting hands of all my married girlfriends. Walking that infamous walk in my beautiful white gown with my best friend nodding her approval and my mother wiping tears of joy, I was sure I had made the right decision. I was standing beside my Prince Charming reciting the words that would bind us forever. I had made the smartest move of my life. Then I woke up.

It was the worst case of peer pressure I had ever experienced. I remember huddling as an anxious woman in my early twenties to listen to girlfriends with fancy and colorful fantasies talk about the day they had accidentally on purpose bumped into Prince Charming, married him, and gave him lots of babies, all named in some way, after him. I listened in awe. They were smiling; they flashed beautiful diamonds on their manicured hands. They were members of important organizations like The Women's Auxiliary and the PTA. I had to join this club.

I concocted the perfect plan modeled after their seemingly fairy tale lives. I would be married by the age of twenty-four, pregnant by twenty-five. I would leave my full time job and devote my days to raising the baby, keeping our home immaculate and having dinner ready by six, when my loving husband would glide through the door and cover me with kisses. But, at the age of twenty-four and having not even been one year into my marriage, even the thought of doing what it took to make a baby exhausted me. I wondered how my girlfriends had done this more than once, and I wanted to know just what made them think I was capable of doing it as well.

My married girlfriends told me that getting married was the best decision I would ever make. They had somehow convinced me that a husband was exactly what was missing in my life. I could not possibly find fulfillment in living the life of a single woman. What they failed to mention at the first meeting, however, was the pre-ceremonial vomiting, the post honeymoon awkwardness and the spilled coffee that provoked the first argument and the first tear of many in a marriage that I foolishly thought would bring me joy every single day of my life. They did not tell me that Prince Charming had this habit of leaving his discarded clothes in a pile on the floor by the bed until he tripped over them one morning while stumbling out of bed. They did not give warning that he would then have the nerve to ask why I hadn't picked them up.

Prince Charming was supposed to sweep me off my feet, not keep me on my knees scrubbing scuff marks off the kitchen floor. I was supposed to have gifts showered upon me and walk upon rose pedals, not find new and creative ways to mention that he had missed one of our special anniversaries—again. I soon began to wonder if, by getting married, I had let myself off the hook, or if I had subconsciously hanged myself.

I immediately wanted to hunt down those married girlfriends of mine who had led me to believe that marriage was the new in-crowd. They had made me feel guilty about being single and having a date every Friday night. They had made me feel like it was unsafe to live alone. They had made me feel that if I did not get married and start a family right away, I would shrivel and die before anyone would have a second look at me. I had fallen for it and I was confused as to how the women who claimed to be my friends could do this to me? How could they lead me to believe that matrimony was the key to the kingdom of

happily ever after? Then I realized what they were up to: they were jealous of my single womanhood. Generations of married friends before them had duped them, and now that they were stuck in their unhappily ever after, they wanted me to join them. I finally got it—misery loves company.

Shortly after my wedding day, I began to see the faces of my married girlfriends who were not flashing smiles and giggling about the cute things their husbands or their children had done. They finally revealed the real tales of married life in hushed conversations over the phone with our respective husbands in the next room watching football. They cried across the table from me over coffee on Saturday mornings and wondered aloud what they had gotten themselves into. They told me horror stories of finding month old socks under the bed, the bad snoring habits. Our conversations had taken totally different turns. I reminded them that not only had they gotten themselves into it, they had dragged me unknowingly into it as well.

I am a member of the club I had been dying to get into all of my life, and while there are times when I feel misled, there are times when I feel I am the luckiest woman on earth. Those are the times when Prince Charming smiles as I walk into a room. Those are the occasions when he holds the door for me. I can think of more than one time when we actually did something fun together. Is the Marriage Club all that I thought it would be? Not really. Would I ever consider turning in my membership? Not even for a second.