[Snap Judgment]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** There are certain things that are never discussed in polite families. Around the dinner table, in the car, in front of the TV. I didn't even have a polite family, and there are things we didn't discuss. Big things, important things, weighty things, thing that matter. Our storyteller today, when he decided to get married, he also decided, "You know what? Screw it." He was going to tackle the elephant in the room head on. He was going to ask every single family member that he had left, he was going to ask them the big question because they all did the ritual. They all said the vows. He wanted to know exactly why each and every one of their own marriages didn't make it. Why have they all ended in divorce? Not only was he going to ask them to open up about their deepest secrets, because Ian Coss is a composer and an audio producer, he was going to stick a microphone in their faces, record everything they said. What you're about to hear right now is the first episode in Ian's five-part series. It's called Forever is a Long Time. It's about marriage and divorce and how they play out across an entire family, his own family. Snap Judgment.

**Ian:** My name is Ian Coss, and what you're listening to is a collection of songs and conversations about every marriage in my family that ended in divorce, which is most of them. Part 1, my parents, Ellen and Tom.

So, in a-- I guess, full disclosure, I'll tell you that-- I already talked to my dad on this subject.

**Ellen:** Yeah.

[phone's ringing]

**Tom:** Hello?

**Ian:** Hey there, it's me.

**Ian**: The reason I tell you that I thought it was funny that, when I broached the topic.

**Tom:** You're sort of dealing something on divorce?

**Ian:** You two had totally opposite reactions.

**Ellen:** Oh, I'm sure. [Ian chuckles]

**Tom:** This is really an awkward topic for me, Ian. [chuckles]

**Ellen:** I'm sure. That doesn't surprise me.

**Ian:** Maybe this is not surprising to you, but-- [crosstalk]

**Tom:** quite honestly.

**Ian:** You know, his response was--

**Tom:** You know it's like, I'm 60 years old and I really haven't figured this stuff out.

**Ian:** Really? You want to talk about what? [chuckles]

**Ellen:** Yeah.

**Ian:** Your response was, "All right. Name the place and time."

**Ellen:** Yeah. Also, I think that don't forget he went through a divorce with a kid.

**Ian:** Yeah.

**Ellen:** And I mean the ugliest of ugly. And I didn't.

**Tom:** I don't know.

**Ian:** Well, can I ask some questions and you can just let me know?

**Ellen:** I think that he and I both have really different points of view on the whole mess, if you will.

**Ellen:** If he will.

**Tom:** I should say before we start that I like to be candid in my answers and I don't know if I can really do that, which is-- I don't know how useful that is.

[acoustic guitar music]

**Ian:** My parents divorced when I was eight years old. I was young enough that I don't have a lot of clear memories of what happened but old enough that I was definitely watching and listening and learning from what was happening. I think that's why I pushed to have this conversation even when I knew that parts of it would be ugly and even when my dad made it pretty clear he did not want to talk about it. I felt like I had a right to know, to know consciously at least, the lessons and examples that I had almost certainly internalized as a little kid.

Let me tell you about my parents. Stuff that you won't pick up just by hearing their voices. Today, they live about 10 miles away from each other in two small towns of Western Massachusetts. My father, Tom is a farrier, which is the person who puts shoes on horses. He drives a truck with a forge in the back that's hot enough to melt solid iron. My mother, Ellen, used to work as a paramedic in town. Then, she taught 8th grade science. To this day, I will meet former students of hers who tell me that she is the best teacher they've ever had.

I take these things for granted. Like I think most children take their parents' lives for granted. It's easy to forget that in all likelihood, none of these things would be true if my parents had never met and had two children, my brother and I.

In a lot of families, "How did your parents meet?", is a familiar topic of conversation. Something that's part of the family lore, but it was never part of our family lore. I don't even think I know how you guys met.

**Tom:** Well.

**Ellen:** Tom had been working in Hinsdale, New Hampshire.

**Tom:** And then, I rode my bicycle down from there.

**Ellen:** And he was out of a job.

**Tom:** I would say that I was at loose ends at that point in my life.

**Ellen:** And actually, I knew Eric.

**Tom:** My brother had gotten a job at Friends World College in Huntington, Long Island.

**Ellen:** The creepy dorms were up top and those were the ones that have been put there back during the Cold War.

**Tom:** I think I might have gotten some kind of job to do, some maintenance work on the building.

**Ellen:** What it boils down to is that there were these wacky army barracks that looked like they'd been put up in about ten minutes.

**Tom:** At that time, your mother returned from Kenya.

**Ellen:** And all of extra crazy, because I'd really gone-- I mean, I'd been gone for two years.

**Tom:** And she had gotten a very bad strain of malaria.

**Ellen:** Oh, you know, high fever, vomiting.

**Tom:** I think she was a little delirious in some [chuckles] ways.

**Ellen:** I still had it.

**Tom:** It's episodic, and it comes and goes.

**Ellen:** And it isn't pretty.

**Tom:** She came back, and she stayed in that house where I was staying.

**Ellen:** And the first day I met him, he had turned up in my kitchen is the way I looked at it [chuckles]

[acoustic guitar music]

**Tom:** And she kind of made the first move, as I recall.

**Ellen:** And he was eating this just an absolutely magnificent sandwich. And he held up half of the sandwich and said, "Are you hungry? Would you like some?"

**Tom:** That's how we met.

[acoustic guitar music]

**Ian:** You don't have to go into the carnal details here.

**Tom:** Okay. Well, it was kind of romantic. They had a fireplace there in the room, and it's kind of a nice place.

**Ellen:** The thing about Tom and me is that we actually have a ton of stuff in common despite being so different.

**Tom:** We hung out, we got to know each other, and then--

**Ellen:** There was this one fateful night. The rest is history.

**Tom:** She announced to me that she was pregnant.

**Ian:** Up to this point, my parents' narrative of events and their feelings about those events mostly agree. They met, they hung out, and without meaning to, they conceived a child, my older brother, Sebastian. Eventually, of course, their stories do begin to diverge. But it's not just a matter of two people telling stories to make themselves look good. It's two people who long before they got divorced and long before they got married, were already seeing their relationship through the lens of very different past experiences, the experiences that they had grown up with.

I'm curious at that time in your life, I guess, what was the model in your mind of how marriage was supposed to work? As an institution, did it feel valuable or meaningful to you?

**Ellen:** Well, with me, yes. But it was also something that had been used as a weapon.

**Tom:** My parents are like a textbook of what divorced parents should not do, which is to basically make war on your ex and put salt in the soil the way the Romans did in Carthage. It was just a never-ending, nonstop war. I think that's a lot of what drew your mother and me together also is that we both had really troubled relationships with our fathers. Your mother was just furious at her father for being a drunk and for just pissing away his talents the way that he did. It just really infuriated her.

**Ellen:** My dad was on a really bad downward spiral from the time I was born, say, maybe when I was 14 or 15. So, my mom, anytime she was stressed, my mom would take me out in the car and drive around and explain to me how I was a mistake and she hadn't planned to have me and that she had been planning to leave my father, and she would laugh, "Riley, one of these days, you're going to come home and I'm not going to be here. It's going to be just you and your dad."

**Ian:** So, you think if you hadn't been born, your mother would have divorced your father?

**Ellen:** Oh, yeah. She had kind of put things in motion, and then wham, she got pregnant.

**Ian:** Because at that point, your siblings were practically out of the house. They were like well into high school.

**Ellen:** Paul was 15, going on 16. Yeah.

**Ian:** And then, you came along?

**Ellen:** Yeah. She really felt like that was the time. I guess for me, I was the generation where every single one of my friends, their parents got divorced before we were out of high school. And that was new. That was super new. That was the first wave. I remember being partially proud that my family had managed to stay together and partially horrified because they did such a bad job being parents. [laughs]

**Tom:** Yeah. I think were both wounded in some ways.

**Ian:** I'm curious how that conversation went when she told you she was pregnant with my brother

**Tom:** Uh, I don't have a really great memory.

**Ellen:** His immediate response was that I should get an abortion.

**Tom:** My father had found out about it, and his immediate response was to get rid of it because he was convinced that your mother was trying to take advantage of me somehow or something.

**Ellen:** So, that was sort of the first chink.

**Tom:** Your mother decided she was going to keep the pregnancy, and she told me, "You can either come with me or not. But either way, I'm going to keep this baby."

**Ellen:** My thought was, "Well, that's fine. If you don't want to do this, I'll go my way and you can go your way." For whatever reason, that wasn't okay with him.

**Tom:** I don't have any recollection of having the instinct of bolting.

**Ellen:** And I kept expecting him to leave.

**Tom:** And she made it very clear to me that there wouldn't be any consequences for me if I did.

**Ellen:** I knew it was going to end badly.

**Tom:** And I decided to come with her and to stick around.

[music]

**Ian:** So, keep going with the story then. You go to Tennessee, Sebastian is born. You wind up back in Massachusetts, I'm born. At what point did--

**Tom:** And you were also unplanned. [chuckles]

**Ian:** Right.

**Tom:** I don't know if your mother ever told you that or not. 0 for 2.

**Ian:** I guess maybe the next thing I'm curious about is when did the idea of getting married enter the conversation? Because I was at your wedding. I mean, I was already born. I was a couple of years old. When did the conversation start, "Oh, I guess we should get married"?

**Tom:** You should probably ask your mother that question. [chuckles]

**Ian:** So, it was her idea?

**Tom:** Totally her idea.

**Ellen:** We talked about it and decided that for tax purposes, it would be more sensible if he got married.

**Tom:** I was perfectly content to live in sin, but your mother really wanted us to be married.

**Ellen:** There was no proposal. There was no "I love you" and none of that stuff. I bought my own ring. Yeah, that's how that happened.

**Tom:** We did that and then, I don't know, maybe three, four years or even less after that-

**Ellen:** I mean, we barely were married for two years. It was like 18 months.

**Tom:** -she asked for a divorce.

**Ellen:** I never understood why Tom stayed with me. I really didn't. I mean, it was always a mystery to me, because I don't think he ever loved me. He never said so.

**Tom:** I think that she would tell you that I didn't love her and that I was just sticking around to be with you guys. And there's probably some truth to that.

**Ellen:** There were times I wondered like late at night whether he was coming home. I'm sure that there were times when he was thinking to himself, "Should I just keep driving?" [chuckles] It would be easier that way, you know?

**Tom:** But I never would have ended it because I didn't want to put you and Sebastian through what I went through, even if the marriage was not ideal.

**Ellen:** But I just knew that I was hurting him and he was hurting me, and that despite the fact that we had two beautiful children together, we would be better apart.

**Ian:** Yeah.

**Ellen:** And I was really sure of it.

[acoustic guitar music]

**Tom:** When your mother told me she wanted to end the marriage, I was not expecting that.

**Ellen:** He went completely bonkers.

**Tom:** Now, we're getting into stuff that's a little uncomfortable.

**Ellen:** We agreed that we would not get lawyers.

**Tom:** You know, it's like he said, she said and--

**Ellen:** You know he wanted a lot of stuff.

**Tom:** I mean, divorce is never a pretty thing.

**Ellen:** Like, this is a little weird.

**Tom:** We had that bump in the road when she took out a restraining order.

**Ellen:** We got into a pretty serious physical altercation.

**Tom:** Your mom and I had a fight about something.

**Ellen:** And I called the police.

**Tom:** And I in the heat of the moment and not being very smart, I put my finger on the button and said, "No, don't call the cops."

**Ellen:** And that was bad.

**Tom:** I got in my truck, and I remember stopping. There was a pay phone and calling her and saying, "I hope everything's cool." But apparently, the cops showed up.

**Ellen:** And that's how we ended up with the restraining order.

**Tom:** A restraining order against me.

**Ellen:** Which, of course, didn't make me any friends.

**Tom:** That was probably the low point in the whole thing.

**Ian:** I didn't know any of this stuff before about the police coming, the restraining order, and really, it just keeps going.

**Ellen:** He gave me a scare.

**Ian:** There's the story of the actual divorce proceedings.

**Tom:** I think it took close to a year.

**Ellen:** He called me and said, "Just so you know, I'm not going to sign it."

**Ian:** The day when my mom apparently called all the local paramedics on duty to show up in the courtroom.

**Tom:** She was working this crazy job on the ambulance.

**Ellen:** He had his five bearded, crazy people, and I had probably 15 uniformed men.

**Ian:** There was the question of whether my parents might move away from each other.

**Tom:** For a little while, she was making noises about leaving the area.

**Ian:** Or whether they could date other people.

**Ellen:** He said, "I want to have some say in who is living with my children."

**Ian:** It's pretty rare that their stories directly contradict, but they don't really match either. They focus on different moments or different details. Details that align with the way they see the world.

**Ellen:** Oh, it's so weird, Ian.

**Tom:** I'm not going to psychoanalyze your mom. [chuckles]

**Glynn:** When we return, we hear more from Ian and his parents. Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

Welcome back to Snap Judgment, The Forever is a Long Time episode. When last we left, Ian Coss was diving into the details of divorce with his mother and father. Their divorce. Up to this point, his parent's narrative of events and their feelings, they mostly agree, but eventually, they don't. Snap Judgment.

**Ian:** All of us have ways that we deal with uncomfortable truths. For my dad, I think that means downplaying, understating, or simply forgetting the parts that don't sit right or that he doesn't want to say out loud. For my mom, I think it's more about dramatizing and embellishing, making the whole thing into such a great story that you can almost forget what it even means. I know these behaviors well because I do them too. They're things I learned from my parents that they probably learned from their parents.

**Tom:** In retrospect, I respect your mother for ending the marriage when she did because it wasn't easy for anybody involved, but she felt like this is what she had to do to make it right. But at the time, I was pretty devastated. I think part of it had to do with the fact that you and Sebastian were just about the same ages as Eric and I were when our parents divorced.

**Ellen:** But that was his experience because he went through multiple stepmothers and there were no hints of a family unit.

**Tom:** Both of us tried our best to not repeat the mistakes that my parents made, and again, that's a very low bar.

**Ian:** In hindsight, I'm really grateful that you guys split up when you did and went on to choose your own lives and your own homes and your own partners again. I guess when I look at the children of other marriages that held on bitterly that did stay together for the kids, the end result doesn't actually look better to me. It often looks worse.

**Ellen:** Oh, yeah, no because you spent all that time growing up having just terrible behavior models for you. Like, I lived that with my parents.

**Ian:** But what it makes me think is you had sort of opposite but mirrored traumas.

**Ellen:** Yeah.

**Ian:** And so, it's like when it came to that moment of do we stick this out or do we call it quits, it seems in a way you were both trying to avoid what your own parents had done.

**Ellen:** Yeah, exactly. No, I think that's very accurate. But because they were opposite, there was no happy medium and I just had to hope I was right.

**Ian:** Do you remember how Sebastian and I responded to you guys getting divorced? Because I have no memory of this.

**Tom:** Well, it's interesting you should mention that because that's one of the few scenes that I really can picture. There was a therapist there at the Worthington Health Center. Can you picture that?

**Ian:** Yeah.

**Tom:** Up on the hill in Worthington?

**Ian:** Yeah.

**Tom:** We brought you guys there to tell you that we're getting divorced. I remember these tears just sort of spontaneously popped out of your eyes and you're just like-- I don't know. It was unlike you because you're quite stoic in a lot of ways, but you just cried instantly, and I can still see that now.

**Ellen:** My fear is always, what awful things are you carting around from both of us that are negative behaviors that you don't even know about? Or maybe you do, but you don't realize that they're there and when you act out on them will cause harm to your relationship.

**Ian:** Yeah, I think about that too sometimes.

**Ellen:** Because it's hard not to become your parents.

**Ian:** Yeah.

**Ellen:** Yeah.

**Ian:** Six years ago, I got married. My parents were there, and they both spoke. My dad reading from prepared notes on a yellow legal pad.

**Tom:** [Reading at Ian's wedding] Two atoms moved to share their electrons on equal terms.

[laughter]

**Ian:** And my mom riffing her away through anecdotes with totally over-the-top gestures.

**Ellen:** Huge doe eyes, and blink, blink and--

[laughter]

**Ellen:** -like everyone's playing with the puppies and she's-- [crosstalk]

**Ian:** As always, they're very different selves.

[laughter]

**Ellen:** But it was completely oblivious. And when we got into the car-- [crosstalk]

**Ian:** It's hard to view your parent's relationship as a mistake when it's the only reason you could possibly exist. But I think I've always known that my parents made mistakes and that given the chance, I would act differently, maybe find a way to express myself more fully or make decisions with more care and compassion. What I really didn't know until now is that they were trying to do the same thing, to avoid the mistakes of their parents, to take the models they'd grown up with and the examples they'd internalized and do better.

[singing at the wedding]

**Ian:** At the time I'd decided to get married, every living relative who had ever been married had also been divorced. My parents, of course, all my aunts and uncles on both sides, my only living great uncle, my only living grandparent, all had been married and all had been divorced, some twice. To this day, I don't know what made me think I could do better or even if I knew what better looked like. Is it just ignorance or overconfidence that made me think I could hold this commitment that none of them had? Or is it possible that we can learn from our elders and take a different path?

[soothing music]

**Ian:** I can't know that yet. I've been talking--

**Speaker:** Hello.

**Speaker:** Hi, Ian.

**Ian:** --to every one of those relatives who was there that day.

**Speaker:** How are you?

**Speaker:** Oh, hi, Ian.

**Speaker:** Hi, how are you?

**Ian:** About their marriages.

**Speaker:** At that moment, all my friends were getting married.

**Speaker:** I really thought I would be with him for the rest of my life.

**Ian:** And their divorces.

**Speaker:** [unintelligible 00:28:37].

**Speaker:** I think it takes a lot of courage to change the direction of your life.

**Speaker:** I was expecting it to be more fulfilling.

**Ian:** Just like with my parents, there are pieces of these stories I knew already.

**Speaker:** There was so much compensating really on both sides for the other person not being the person that you really wanted them to be.

**Ian:** But many pieces that I didn't.

**Speaker:** I get very cold, I withdraw.

**Ian:** And there are other pieces, pieces that I've been carrying around with me this whole time, even if I didn't know it.

**Speaker:** Oh, God. Marriage really doesn't mean a thing to me.

**Speaker:** I didn't want to pass that legacy on to my kids.

**Speaker:** They did a lot of stuff to fuck you up, but you also get gifts.

**Speaker:** You start to feel like you're good and sufficient reasons. Maybe they really weren't so good and sufficient for who you actually become.

[*Come Back Later* by Ian Coss plays]

**Glynn:** That was the first episode in a five-part podcast with producer, Ian Coss. He interviews every member of his family about their experience of marriage and divorce. You can listen to the whole thing right now. Just look up "Forever is a Long Time" wherever you get your podcasts. The show also includes a series of original songs paired with each conversation. So, it's really part podcast, part album. If you're wondering what Ian's own life partner thinks of all these stories, you're going to get that in episode 2. Again, just search "Forever is a Long Time". Keep listening.

The show is edited by Lacy Roberts. The music is coproduced by Alex Chakour and mastered by Nick Zampiello at New Alliance East. The artwork is by Kelsey Tyssowski. Forever is a Long Time is created by Ian Coss.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** It's tough, right? Everyone wants to know, what is the secret to everlasting bliss? The secret is that everyone thinks they're an expert. We sent producer, Christopher Beal, out to the bay to talk to some people who may or may not be experts. Snap judgment.

**Josh:** My name is Josh Taylor. I am divorced and single.

**Heather:** My name is Heather and my last name is Lee. I am in a relationship.

**Angel:** My name is Angel DeLeone.

**Raymond:** Raymond DeLeone.

**Adam:** Adam Green. G-R-E-E-N, like the color.

**Raymond:** I'm within shrinking distance, so I am certainly in a relationship, married.

[laughter]

**Angel:** Better say that.

[upbeat music]

**Josh:** The best relationship advice I've ever received is that two individuals, even though they come together as a couple, are still individuals, and both need to bring the same amount of energy to the team. One carrying the other for so long will ultimately fail you.

**Heather:** Communicate.

**Raymond:** Always communicate.

**Adam:** Be communicative and like transparent that what my needs are.

**Heather:** It's simple, but so many people don't do it. [chuckles]

**Josh:** The part of communicating that people kind of mess up is that you have to listen as much as you speak.

**Angel:** Growing up, I did not know what a healthy relationship looked like. Everybody in my family is divorced, is on their second marriage. I didn't have anybody to look up to. My dad, even when he met Ray, was just like, "Run." [laughs] Relationships are not healthy in my family. They're in a relationship, but I can't say that they're all in a happy relationship. But I'm in a happy relationship.

[upbeat music]

**Heather:** The worst relationship advice I've ever received is that no matter what, you can always fix everything.

**Angel:** It's cheaper to keep her.

**Heather:** Which, as we all know, is not true.

**Raymond:** Probably something to do with crystals or moons rising. Astrology is a racket.

**Adam:** Not saying what you're feeling, what I mean like? That would have to be the worst advice. When I was younger, that was always-- a man's supposed to be a man.

**Josh:** The worst advice overall has been my sister. She's also very single. The advice was that I shouldn't have to communicate certain things and should just expect that my partner knows them.

**Heather:** Sometimes, relationships just don't work and that's okay.

**Josh:** It doesn't work well at all. [chuckles]

**Heather:** Always talk to your partner, communicate. It's super important. It can be really fun. That's the best, most important thing that I can think a relationship needs. It's communication.

**Angel:** Don't get fat, he'll lose interest. [laughs] And most of these are from my dad. Usually bad relationship advice.

**Glynn:** Thank you very much to our panel for your expert insight. That piece was produced by Christopher Beal with music by Bo Walsh.

When we return, what happens when you shrink your wife, literally? Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** You're listening to Snap Judgment, the Forever is a Long Time episode. My name is Glynn Washington and longtime listeners of the show, they know that sometimes we tell stories that are not true. But not because they never happen, it's because they haven't happened yet. This next piece comes to us from the overactive brain of writer, Manuel Gonzales.

**Wife (voiced by Eliza):** What are you--? What are you doing? Stop.

**Thao:** He shrunk his wife. It was a mistake. One moment she was her normal size, laughing at his pink tie, telling him to switch it out for the green when she got him last Christmas. Then, the next, she was the size of a mouse, kicking and biting at his shoe. He picked her up and put her in his pocket. She tried to sink her tiny nails into his shirt to tear at the cotton. But she was too small. She had no power.

**Wife:** Can't you unshrink me?

**Husband (voiced by Sam):** Don't worry. I'll take care of you now and protect you.

**Wife:** What are you talking about? You shrunk me. Unshrink me.

**Husband:** We-- don't know how to do that yet.

**Wife:** What about that expantiator thing you said you got the money for that expanding thing at work?

**Husband:** That's development. That's years off. Anyway, don't you think you could like it this way?

**Wife:** Of course not. I want to go outside and see my friends.

**Husband:** Okay. I just need some time. Just for now, let's try and make things better. I'll make this right.

**Thao:** He didn't make it right. He did have a multitude of enlarging tools back of the miniaturizing department. But instead, he built her a tiny house. He relished the smell of sawdust and wood glue, the metallic smell that lingered on the tips of his fingers after handling so many small nails. He ordered one of his employees in the miniaturizing department to shrink down a dining room set, a nice bed, and a few sets of sheets. He had some fun shrinking the refrigerator and a whole shopping trip's worth of groceries.

After he'd put all final touches on the house, he put it on his bedside table. And the next morning he looked through the little windows at the unmade bed, the tiny lamp growing in the living room.

She was frying up some thin strips of bacon in the kitchen, muttering angrily to herself and avoiding his gaze and his cheerful, "Good morning." He wondered, was it possible that they could be happy there together?

He wondered if this mistake could be the solution to all their marital woes. She'd always made fun of his clothes, of his jaw, the way he allowed his mother to boss him around. Now, he could continue to work. He would shrink pearl necklaces and other little trinkets for her in his lab. He'd tell friends she was on vacation, that she was taking night classes. He would sleep beside her in the little house every night.

But the next evening when he came home from work, he couldn't find her. He opened up the dollhouse, lifted up the bed, opened the dresser. She was gone. He thought maybe she just needed some time. So, he wrote her a note on a post-it. He couldn't change her back, but she would see, life would be simpler this way. They would be happier. But his note went unanswered, untouched on the kitchen counter. He didn't see her for days on end. He started in his way to miss her.

And so, he miniaturized her cell phone. He put it on the dining room table in the little house where his wife could easily find it. He called the phone four or five times a day, but after a few days, she still hadn't returned any of his calls. Maybe the phone didn't work, he thought, or she had left, or maybe she was dead. But on the fourth day, he came back to his desk from a meeting and found a message on his office phone.

**Wife:** Hey, it's me. I got your calls. I'm back in this stupid, tiny house. Let's talk this out.

**Thao:** He missed her deeply then. The way she used to sling her arm over his side as they slept. The way she used to tap her feet to an unheard tune as she cooked dinner. He grabbed his jacket and left his office, sped home, his heart in his throat. He parked the car on the lawn, burst through the door, and took the stairs three, four at a time. He threw the dollhouse open. There she was, in the little bedroom on the bed, her hair tussled, the sleeve of her nightgown falling from her narrow shoulder.

**Wife:** Well, hello to you too.

**Husband:** What's going on here?

**Wife:** What are you talking about?

**Husband:** It's 1 in the afternoon. Why are you in bed? And why are you wearing that nightgown?

**Wife:** What do you mean? What about it?

**Husband:** That pink nightgown, the one I like so much.

**Wife:** I was taking a nap.

**Husband:** There's someone in here, isn't there?

**Wife:** What?

**Husband:** I bet you called Richard.

**Wife:** Richard who?

**Husband:** Don't play dumb like that. Richard, Richard Weir from my department. You couldn't stop laughing at his stupid golf jokes the last company picnic. I bet you called him up, told him to shrink himself, and come right over, didn't you?

**Wife:** Are you kidding me?

**Husband:** Richard, come out. I know you're in there.

**Wife:** Don't embarrass yourself. Come on. [chuckles]

**Husband:** Is he in the closet? Get out of the bed. I bet he's hiding under there.

**Wife:** He isn't here.

**Husband:** Oh, no? We'll see if that's true.

**Wife:** What do you mean?

**Husband:** Let's just see how you and Richard fare without sunlight or food or water. You'll need me then.

**Wife:** I told you, he's not here. You can't trap me in here forever.

**Husband:** Oh, no? Watch me.

**Thao:** He locked his wife inside the dollhouse. He nailed the house shut, covered the windows with squares of cardboard, glued and then duct taped from the outside. He threw a drop cloth over the little prison and weighted it down with bricks from the garage.

**Husband:** Just wait. You'll be calling for me before it. You'll see.

**Thao:** He came home the next night to find the dollhouse burned to the ground. He searched the charred embers and ashes for a sign of her, but he couldn't find one. He didn't know how she'd managed to free herself. And then, it struck him. If she could escape and then destroy the dollhouse, what else was she capable of?

That night, he wore earmuffs and swimming goggles to bed. He tied down the sheets, layered the bed, three and four blankets thick. In the wee hours, the sickening smell of burnt flesh jarred him from sleep. He found a burned cockroach on the nightstand, speared through its abdomen by a tiny metal skewer. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her small figure jump from the nightstand and scurry beneath the bedroom door. The next day, he starved the cat, and just before bed, he let it loose in the house. He woke to find it dead on the pillow opposite him, covered as though it was taking a nap.

How had she killed it? How had she moved it and settled it onto his pillow? The cat was well over five times her size. She had loved that cat. He didn't want to take any more chances, so he drew a bath, let it overflow, and flooded his bedroom. The water was 2 feet deep. He perched the bed atop brick stilts. He slept without earmuffs or headphones. He fell asleep and dreamed she was drowning in his moat. But she didn't drown. Instead, she climbed atop his pillow.

**Husband:** Oh, God, my eye. [Wife laughs] Come back.

**Thao:** But she was gone. He waded around his bed and found her boat, an old sardine can still slick with salt oil, and smashed it again and again until his hand was cut and bruised. He opened the bedroom door and the water spilled into the hall.

**Husband:** Can you see the white flag? Am I waving it high enough for you?

**Thao:** He walked to the stairs where he slipped on the hardwood, tumbling down the 13 steps into the kitchen and then from the bottom of the stairwell, he spied her camp, a small hut made of a coffee tin and a couple of overturned Tupperware containers. Tiny spears lined the entrance, each bearing the head of a spider, a cockroach, a fly. There she sat, warming her hands at the fire, humming to herself. She was wearing scraps of grubby kitchen towels, crudely sewn together, crawling towards her. He pleaded.

**Husband:** Please. Please let's solve this now. I'll do anything. I'll take you back to the lab. I'll set you right.

**Thao:** She turned then. Her eyes were red, her smile crooked and wide. [evil laugh] He escaped from the backdoor. He stumbled through the overgrown leaves and brambles, the sad remnants of his wife's old vegetable gardens. He pushed his way into the shed and he clung to himself, shaking. He was safe, at least until she found him. She would find him and destroy him, tiny though she was.

**Glynn:** That's what you get, Snappers, that's what you get. This story comes to us from writer, Manuel Gonzales. You can find out more about Manuel on our website, *snapjudgment.org*. Special thanks to the narrator, Miss Thao Nguyen, San Francisco's own rock and roll superstar. Our husband and wife are played by Sam Fischmann and Eliza Smith. The story was produced by Eliza Smith. The sound design and wholly original score was by Pat Mesiti-Miller.

[upbeat music]

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If you don't know, it is happening. Storytelling crafted in the dark of night, get ready for Spooked season 6. Coming soon.

Snap is brought to you by the team that constantly has people running off the street asking for their hands in marriage. Except, of course, for Mr. Mark Ristich. Don't worry, he'll never be alone with the cable television sports package that we got to distract him. Anna Sussman, Renzo Gorrio, Nancy López, Pat Mesiti-Miller, Shaina Shealy, Teo Ducot, Flo Wiley, John Fecile, Marisa Dodge, Regina Bediako, Davey Kim, Bo Walsh, and David Exumé.

Now, this is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, after years of therapy and introspective work and forgiveness extended both to yourself and your former spouse, you could finally and at long last, start moving on from your painful breakup. Going to then have your ungrateful son start sticking a microphone in your face, asking all kinds of personal questions that are none of his business. And you would still, still not be as far away from the news as this is. But this is PRX.

*[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]*