

## Prelude

# It Has Come to This

“Look—I’ve done a lot of these things,” said Reverend Dave, his face fixed in a grin. “If you’re having any doubts, it’s best to tell me now.”

Jason laughed. I took a sip of water and fake laughed.

This was our wedding day, typically a day of celebration and joy. But I felt like a student who, about to take the most important exam of her life, had not only failed to study but had also forgotten a number 2 pencil. And a blue exam book. And pants.

The three of us were sitting on a patio in Palm Springs, the sky above as hard as turquoise. It was May 21, 2011, the date that Christian radio personality Harold Camping had pasted all over national billboards as Judgment Day. But so far, the sea had not turned to blood, the stars had not fallen from the sky. If I found myself in an apocalypse, it was not a biblical one. And I would know—I knew the Bible like, really well.

Hummingbirds and sparrows busied themselves around desert plants. Trees with bright yellow flowers bobbed in the breeze. Yes. I was having major doubts, but how to frame them in words?

I raised my hand.

"Yes?"

"Well, I was married before."

"Sure, you've shared that," said Rev. Dave. "And are you nervous that this new marriage might, uh, not work out?"

"Well..." I stammered.

I momentarily distracted myself by thinking about The Moods of an Irish Setter, a favorite Far Side cartoon in which the repeated, identical picture of a dog's ecstatic face is

labeled with various emotions: happy, depressed, excited, suicidal. Reverend Dave, former child star, reminded me of that dog. He was unthinkably chipper no matter what—for instance the time he slowed his Subaru in the Hollywood Hills to greet me and Jason and we warned him of a grisly motorcycle fatality just below on Highland Boulevard.

“Yikers!” he’d said.

Would I get another *Yikers!* now, if I told him I was about to get in my Prius and drive away?

A motorcyclist slathered across Highland like jam. Yikers. A jilted groom whom I loved, crying in a tuxedo. Yikers.

The sun had begun to beat down on Rev. Dave's short-sleeved shirt and white priestly collar, and we watched as he scooted his plastic lawn chair, and himself, back into the shade.

“I guess you could say I’m having some doubts,” I continued.

Rev. Dave's Irish-Setter face looked as upbeat as ever. "All right, some doubts. Let's talk about this."

I glanced at Jason and wanted to wince, but I didn't. He was sitting with his muscular legs outspread—an alpha move, taking up space like that—wearing a pink t-shirt that said, “Lay it Down Gently on the Bentley,” sipping a glass of water.

"Let the healing begin!" Jason said.

His response surprised me because sure, he was typically nonplussed, but on the other hand, 158 of our closest friends and family had travelled to Palm Springs to watch us wed in just under four hours. Some were probably ironing their suit shirts or getting their hair curled at this precise moment. Caterers were sautéing onions; florists were wrapping boutonnières. I had always been a procrastinator, putting the finishing touches on school papers under the sick light of dawn, but for fuck's sake, this was ridiculous.

And where should I even start? Should I admit that despite my jokes, I still believed in demonic possession and had firsthand experienced, on several occasions, what most would term an exorcism? How about that only a decade before, my parents had invited a group of prophets to live in our tract home in Orange County, one who successfully prayed for healing of my life-threatening blood disease, another who led me into an experience called “travailing” during which I groaned and wailed for several hours while lying on the industrial carpet of our church? There was more—my Harvard-educated father singing in the spirit, my violinist mother’s visions of playing the Mendelssohn concerto at the throne of God. Like everyone else, I made fun of Harold Camping for believing that today was Earth’s Judgment Day. But on the other hand, I believed that there *would* be a judgment day, some day. And yes, I still capitalized “God” and thought of Him as a He.

How could I hide from Jason all the things I missed so deeply about my old church that I sometimes felt that my heart would calve in two—praying in tongues, loving Jesus, feeling God wash over me like a warm ocean wave? Why hadn’t I tried harder to mention all of this until now? We had certainly talked about God and the Bible plenty; my resistance to premarital sex vs. Jason’s desire to bone ASAP meant the conversation was unavoidable. But the underpinnings of my obvious religious devotion, the reasons I couldn’t shake my belief—that we had not touched. And the whole of it ached in the shape of a girl hovering somewhere in the silence.

I was not afraid that this marriage would fail. I was afraid that it would succeed.

I looked Jason in the face and continued, “I’m feeling like maybe there are a few things I haven’t shared.”

“A few things you haven’t shared,” repeated Dave. “Do you feel like any of this is blocking you from getting married today?”

Jason was now sitting upright in his chair, listening to me with his entire body. I looked into his eyes, the color of rich soil, and cleared my throat.