

DIVORCE NEVER SLEEPS

SO THE EX just moved to Manhattan's most iconic private housing community. It is a large residential complex of oversized, renovated apartments set in an 80-acre private park. The sprawling collection of red brick buildings abuts the East River and the neighborhoods of Gramercy Park, the East Village, Alphabet City, and Kips Bay. It is a minute's walk from anywhere you'd want to be on New York's East Side. Yet it feels nothing like the grid-bound island of Manhattan. It is more like a dream suburb set in a manicured woodland.

I've been to the development twice since my ex moved there about a week ago. The first time I experienced a mild vertigo as I entered the maze of circling paths and identical red brick apartment towers. It was as if gravity itself could disappear without Manhattan's rigid street grid.

The second visit was tonight. An early, handmade father's day present and a quick goodnight kiss for my daughter before leaving on a business trip tomorrow. Then the girl got on her new bicycle — her first real bike, complete with training wheels — and the three of us began strolling the development's safe, sprawling grounds. I noted fountains, a library, a huge green filled with picnicking families, a play center for young children, a study center for older children, and a basketball court before I stopped ticking off, and feeling slightly overwhelmed by, the development's endless parade of private amenities.

"They're going to put a coffee shop over there," my ex said, pointing beyond a grove of hydrangeas.

Within a few minutes, we had run into one of Ava's favorite school friends and her parents and were strolling with them while the girls biked in tandem, chased fireflies, and played tag with some younger kids. In *my* Manhattan, play dates must be arranged with the skill of a social director and the finesse of an event planner. Fail, and your kid has no one to play with that day. But *this* strange pocket of the city is like a small town: simply by going out the door of their apartment building, kids find each other and play in complete safety. No scheduling necessary. For adults, too, apparently, constant, pleasant social interactions are available simply by walking out your front door. No need for Foursquare, Twitter, or even a phone.

My ex introduced me to my daughter's friend's father. "This is a great place to raise

kids,” he said — not knowing who I was, not realizing I was the father of the kid his kid was playing with, not knowing the lady his wife was talking to used to be my wife.

Divorce keeps breaking your heart.

You think you’re past it. You no longer sit bolt upright at 2:00 AM, asking yourself what you could have done to save the marriage. You no longer worry that your kid will become a junkie because her parents divorced. You no longer imagine the neighbors finding your dead, naked body in a room full of flies, cats, and pizza boxes. You no longer dread your lawyer’s call.

You enjoy your ex as a friend. You and she are equally committed to your child’s well-being, and that is all that matters. You take care of yourself, you’ve learned life lessons, you’re a better dad, a better man, a better worker than you were three years ago. Life is an adventure again.

And then, bang. Your kid is laughing ecstatically in a seemingly utopian environment you did not provide for her and you are not part of. The easy adult social interactions that are unfolding belong to your ex’s new life, not yours. You are watching your family move on without you, you are discovering all over again, as if for the first time, that your family has exploded, your wife does not love you, does not need you, the world goes on without you, this is not my beautiful house, this is not my beautiful wife.

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