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Marriage and divorce have been in the news recently. The American public is united in its belief that the only way to curb divorce is to make marriage laws more stringent. All the meanwhile, many of those same Americans believe the only way divorced Catholics can come back to the church is through the annulment process. Only in the United States would people believe something so diametrically opposed. Let's explore these two options, deciding for ourselves whether or not they are valid.

In Louisiana, there's a new option: contract marriage. Basically, the Louisiana Legislature believes the solution to high divorce rates is making divorces harder to obtain. Their reasoning is that there should be two kinds of marriages; one for the so-called "easy" no-fault divorces and one that makes it difficult for a couple to divorce. This second kind of marriage is a "contract marriage," and it really would make it difficult for people to divorce in

From this day forward

Some marriages won't work

Louisiana. The only valid reasons to divorce with a contract marriage are spousal abuse, adultery, abandonment (after one year), and a few other egregious offenses. Even then, under most circumstances, one would have to have been separated from a spouse for over 1½ years, and undergo mandatory counseling in order for the divorce to proceed. Proponents of contract marriage say it will curb the divorce rate, as well as provide a "cooling off" period for couples who need it.

This is a naïve view. No one gets married in order to divorce. Numerous studies have shown that 100% of the couples polled on their wedding day in various states believe that they will never divorce. Newly married couples are embarking on a new life together, and are understandably optimistic. They can't conceive that someday it could be possible that they may need to separate or divorce.

"But," you're saying, "there still are some outs for these people. Why are you being so hard on them in Louisiana for having the guts to try something new? Isn't having a lower

divorce rate worth it?" Well, yes, a lower divorce rate would be worth it, if it's more than a cosmetic change brought about by the mandatory 1½- to two-year wait for a divorce. Also, what about the fact that abuse or adultery must be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt? There will be large increases in retainers paid to private detectives as cuckolded wives and husbands try to obtain incontrovertible proof of adultery as required under state law. (Hint: if you need a good job, be a private detective in Louisiana.)

In many cases, abuse is not easily proven. Many times, an abused wife refuses to leave her husband, out of a mistaken belief of love, his ability to change and a too-strong commitment to her marriage vows (rather than a commitment to her personal safety). Contract marriage could end up being a license for continued abuse by making it much harder for these women to leave their abusive husbands. It may also endanger their safety. It has been shown that death at the hand of an abuser is most likely when the victim tries to leave.

On the other hand, the Catholic

Church has made annulments easy to obtain. Some people, like Mrs. Joseph P. Kennedy (No. 1), believe that they are too easily obtained. Annulment was originally meant to be a way for divorced Catholics to regain the sacraments of the church. The Catholic Church has set up guidelines, which say that under some circumstances, there could not be an attempt at a real, valid marriage. For example, if you were a young man who was hounded into marriage with a shotgun after getting your girlfriend pregnant, no valid marriage vows could be given. So, under those circumstances, you would be granted an annulment.

However, there are other categories that you can fall into and still get an annulment. If your spouse has been treated for depression, has sexual problems, or was "mentally incapable of making a logical decision," you may still get an annulment, regardless of how long the marriage lasted or whether children were born. For example, Joseph P. Kennedy recently had his first marriage annulled, despite the fact that he had three children with wife No.

1, and that the marriage had lasted for more than 14 years! Whatever happened to "for better or for worse?" And are his children now considered bastards? Talk about hypocrisy.

I have some experience with this issue. My ex-husband, despite the fact that we were married in a civil ceremony, asked for an annulment of our 8-year marriage in 1996, although we were legally divorced in March of 1995.

This annulment process seems silly to me, and combined with contract marriages it shows the unique dichotomy of our American existence. Why can't we agree that some marriages just don't work? With contract marriages and annulments, the pain is revisited, over and over again. The reality is that people change. In a free society, we cannot dictate that people will stay together forever. So, unfortunately, some marriages will fail and some hearts will be broken. Obviously, an attempt must be made to keep people from divorcing over frivolous reasons, such as "I like my coffee black, but she always offered me cream and sugar." But on the other hand, we cannot be allowed to let Big-Brother government step in and force people to stay together when they are miserable. We should stop punishing people when their marriages don't work, and instead commend them for the courage to "make the best of a bad bargain," and move on. Anything less would be uncivilized.



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It was a dark and partly cloudy night. The phone rang sharply next to my head, awaking me with a fright. The ensuing conversation led to six hours of sheer torture.

My mother was coming to town to take her "Toddy" back-to-school shopping.

Because of her visit, I was forced to wake up at 7 a.m. on Labor Day to finish preparing for her 10 a.m. arrival. Actually, the preparations began the night before when I kindly asked my downstairs neighbor to keep the death metal and the mysterious herbal odors to a minimum while Mother was visiting. With that taken care of, it was time to finish prepping my apartment. Even though I've paid the rent every month for two years, my mom still feels the urge to snoop about as though it were her place. That means I have to hide anything - and everything - that could raise an eyebrow: unknown credit card bills in the attic, tequila in the toilet and all the beer to my roommate's side of the fridge. Poor Aaron, I'll sure feel sorry for him when my mom actually checks him into rehab.

With this finished, the final step was bathing. After spending more time in the shower than I did the entire summer, I slipped into clothes that made me feel quite Republican. Now, I was ready for her and, for some strange reason, I felt like drop-kicking a homeless person.

At promptly 9:45, I greeted her at the front door with my patented "Five Dollar Smile" only to trigger her patented "Nag-o-Matic" voice. "Oh, Toddy, I can't believe I spent all that money fixing your teeth for you to not to wear your retainer. What a waste."

Note: Before I go on, I must tell you that the following names have been changed to protect the guilty.

But if you use your imagination, I think you can figure them out.

After a guilt-laden trip up O Street, we arrived at that quintessential monument to consumerism, the Gateway to Hell Shopping Center. After finding a parking spot in Waverly, we began the hike back to town.

As our eyes adjusted to the blinding light of 75 stores crammed under one roof, we went to Eddie Bowser to try to find some jeans to fit my butt. Trying on pair after pair, I was too afraid to walk out to the sales floor to hear Mom's opinion. It kind of gets old after age 20 to hear your mother say to the sales clerk, "Maybe we should have him put a pair of socks in the crotch so it looks like he has something there." Luckily, the third pair was a charm, and we escaped before my urge to join 90210's Steve Sander's KEG house and purchase a sport-utility vehicle took over.

Sadly, the next stop left me curiously waiting outside Vicky's Secret as Mom ventured in for some shopping of her own. After exchanging looks with the dozen other guys waiting outside, I began to ponder a deep issue: Would Vicky's Secret hire a guy like me?

Then I saw it. A store that stuck out like a turd in a punchbowl. It's called Hot Myopics, which is a punk-rock store right smack dab in the middle of a mall in Lincoln. What has this world come to? I ventured in, trying not to laugh at all the angst-filled teenagers convincing their moms that the Marilyn Manson look is right for them. Before I could really look around, a clerk with enough body piercings to set off a metal detector chased me out yelling, "Die Republican scum."

By now it was lunch time. Nothing fuels a shopper's stomach like the plentiful bounty only a food court can offer. Mmm ... corn dog nuggets, monster cookies, and an Isee to top it all off. Keeping the

Nag-o-Matic running, Ma reminded me that my little brother made something like \$10,000 working this summer in the cornfields, with which he bought his school clothes for the fifth-straight year.

With the grub consumption out of the way, it was off to finish the shopping day. At the Chuckle, the sales folk covered us like E. coli on a Hudson hamburger. Once I found a pair of shorts, the Spice Girl helping me offered a plethora of accessories. Luckily I grossed her out by saying, "Look, I'll be honest with you, I'll be lucky if I even wear underwear with these shorts, let alone a belt." Quick tip: If you're a smart ass, salespeople will run away - far away.

The last stop was Gadfools, where the saleslady kept calling me "bro." When I made the score of a lifetime by finding Hawaiian shirts on the closeout rack for \$9.99, I was saddened by mainstream America's lack of style. My sadness turned to laughter when my 46-year-old mother said, "Toddles, over here they have a nice assortment of Pimp Gear.

Wouldn't you like to dress like a pimp

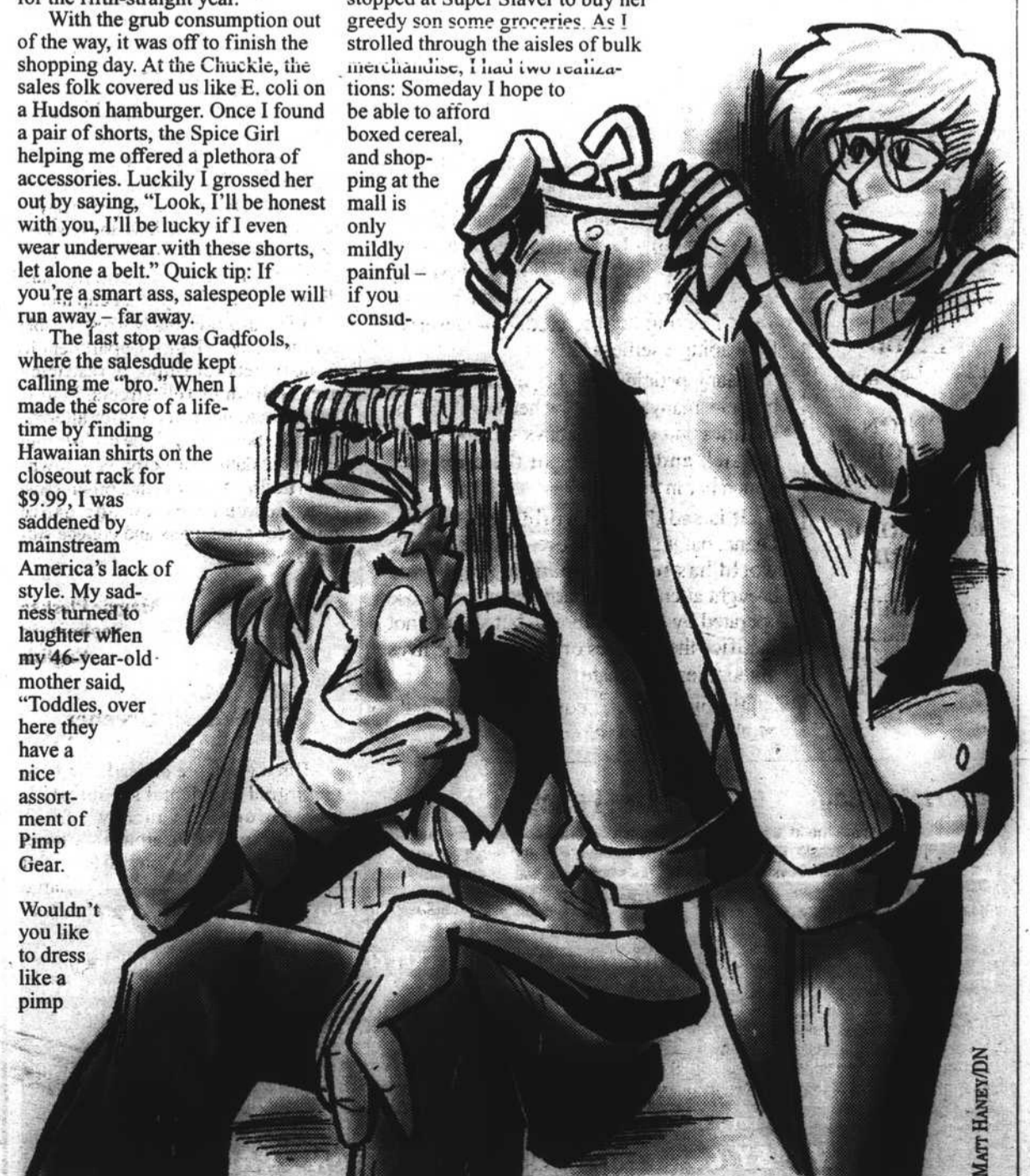
when you go back to class?" Thankfully, after I convinced the saleslady that we were of no relation, the mall was closing.

Before going home, Mom stopped at Super Slaver to buy her greedy son some groceries. As I strolled through the aisles of bulk merchandise, I had two realizations: Someday I hope to be able to afford boxed cereal, and shopping at the mall is only mildly painful - if you consid-

er slamming your testicles in a drawer to be mild.

Mall rats

Guilt, Spice Girl sales clerks offer insights



MATT HANEY/DN