



Explaining Zellweger's "Fraud" Claim

by Joal Ryan

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When Renee Zellweger called Kenny Chesney a "fraud," she meant it only in the best way.

The Oscar-winning actress attempted to clarify Friday why her four-month marriage to the country singer all but ended this week when she filed for an annulment, citing "fraud."

In a statement, the *Cold Mountain* star called the term "simply legal language and not a reflection of Kenny's character."

"Oh, I beg to differ," Glen L. Rabenn, a family law attorney based in Seal Beach, California, said with a laugh when read Zellweger's words. "What is it then? She's saying the guy is a fraud. Doesn't that go to character?"

Family law attorney **John Mayoue** called the "fraud" declaration "very unusual for a high-profile case."

"Most celebrities who have a public name to protect would not make this kind of public allegation," said Mayoue, an Atlanta-based litigator who has represented the likes of Jane Fonda. "When famous people call us, we try to find a way under the radar, so to speak."

In California, where Zellweger filed, the FL-100 form, covering divorce, legal separation and annulment, doesn't give the annulment seeker much room for a graceful exit. While the divorce seeker can ask to end the marriage because of nebulous "irreconcilable differences," the annulment seeker must declare one of the following: That he or she was under age; that one of the parties was already married; that someone was of "unsound mind"; that the marriage was entered into by "force"; that one of the parties suffered "physical incapacity"; or, that "fraud" had been perpetuated.

"Fraud is a very high standard," Mayoue said. "For a court to accept this for fraud, it's going to have to be a very egregious situation."

Under California law, a fraudulent marriage means, in part, "the consent of either party was obtained by fraud."

Zellweger, 36, and Chesney, 37, wed May 9 in the Virgin Islands. While their courtship proceeded at light speed, they'd met just five months prior, the ceremony was not exactly impromptu. Family

and friends were present; an official wedding photo released.

Whispers of their demise were heard as early as the summer. The bad buzz got louder last week when Zellweger walked the red carpet at the London premiere of *Cinderella Man* without Chesney, who'd finally wrapped the tour that had kept him on the road for much of their marriage.

"I would personally be very grateful for your support in refraining from drawing derogatory, hurtful, sensationalized or untrue conclusions," Zellweger said Friday. "We hope to experience this transition as privately as possible."