

real life controversy

WE WON OUR DIVORCE!

Hayley Wakenshaw, 38, took radical action to end her marriage...

When I met Robert in an internet chatroom I immediately had a good feeling about him. He was the first man who hadn't asked me for my bra size! Instead he seemed sweet and funny and had a genuine interest in me.

He was a 24-year-old IT worker from Amsterdam and I was studying teacher training at Birmingham University.

He came to see me two weeks later and we became a couple.

'It's like you've known each other for years,' friends said.

A year later I moved to Amsterdam to be with him.

We were happy, but I quickly realised things weren't perfect.

Robert liked getting his own way and I hated confrontation so I just went along with him. I had to see friends on my own because he didn't like socialising.

We wore engagement rings but weren't in a rush to get married.

Eight years later we had our son, Matt. Robert loved him dearly but didn't like the disruption a new baby brought.

'Stop him crying,' he demanded.

'I would find it easier if you lent a hand more,' I replied.

'Well, let's split up then,' he said. I knew he didn't really mean it, but it hurt.

As Matt got older, things became easier and Robert and I got married. Our wedding was a small affair with just two friends as witnesses. We didn't even have a wedding photo.

Then when Matt was three he was diagnosed with autism. It

led me to wonder if Robert was autistic too as he could be quite distant emotionally.

'Do you think you should be tested?' I said.

'I probably should, shouldn't I?' he agreed.

After some tests in 2009 he was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and Asperger's syndrome.

It helped explain his difficulties with socialising and lack of empathy when Matt was younger.

But the medication he was

I can't do this any more'

prescribed didn't help. Nor did relationship counselling.

One day in January 2012, after four years of marriage, I'd had enough. 'I can't do this any more,' I told him gently. 'I need to leave.'

'I understand,' he replied, and started to cry.

We saw a solicitor, who did

some preparatory work on our divorce, but were shocked when she sent us her bill – £1500.

'We'll have to save up for our next session,' Robert said.

We agreed that I would take Matt back to the UK.

'We're going to live in England and Daddy is staying here, but you can visit each other,' I said.

I'd hoped to complete the divorce before I left, but it cost too much. We both worked but all my money was going on the move.

I settled in Newcastle and started entering a few online competitions to try to save money.

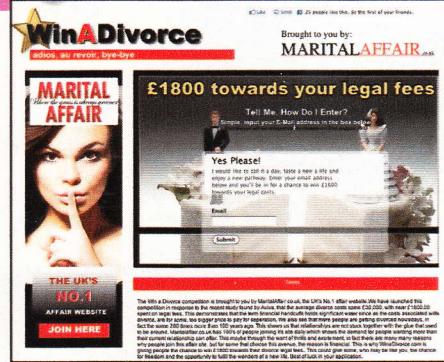
In July, one caught my eye. It read: 'Win a divorce!' It was on the same website as a load of other competitions.

'That would be amazing,' I thought.

It was run by a controversial cheating website, maritalaffair.co.uk. The prize was £1800 towards your divorce fees.

'This shouldn't be allowed,' wrote one person underneath.

'It's going to



encourage divorce,' said another.

But I was in the middle of a divorce anyway so it wasn't encouraging me to break up.

I entered. All I had to do was write a sentence about why I wanted to win. 'Having our fees paid would mean we would have more money for travel so our son could see his dad more who lives in Amsterdam,' I wrote.

Two months later I received an email. 'You've won a divorce!' it said. I laughed out loud.

They said my entry was exactly what they were looking for. I had to agree to do some publicity, but we could use our own solicitor – we just had to send in her invoice.

To complete our divorce would mean we'd have to spend £3000 in total. So we were getting it for less than half price!

I texted Robert excitedly.

'Is there a word in English for "wrang"?' he texted back – that means 'bittersweet' in Dutch.

We're now set to be divorced by Christmas.

Without the competition our divorce would have dragged on and may have threatened our friendship. Now we can both move forward with our lives.

● **Robert, 40, said:** 'I'm pleased with winning the competition. It means I get to use any spare money to see my son, rather than giving it to a solicitor.'

