

Terrence Howard Forced to Pay \$50K in Ugly Divorce Battle

Kim Basinger and Alec Baldwin. Mel Gibson and Oksana Grigorieva. Denise Richards and Charlie Sheen. Liza Minnelli and David Gest. When Hollywood couples break up, the result is often a made-for-the-tabloids legal fight.

Now another couple is in the running for the title of Nastiest Hollywood Divorce: Actor Terrence Howard and his wife Michelle Ghent Howard. The couple quietly married in January 2010 and Ghent Howard filed for divorce a year later. Although the divorce petition cites irreconcilable differences as their reason for splitting up, it's quickly turning into a case of he-said, she-said.

Accusations Are Flying

In December, Ghent Howard got a restraining order against her estranged husband because of alleged abuse during their marriage as well as verbal threats. (Howard reportedly sought his own restraining order against her, but it appears as if that request wasn't granted.)

Other allegations that Ghent Howard has made against her soon-to-be ex, according to The Daily Beast, include:

That she's needed medical treatment for physical injuries he caused

That he's stalked her

That he broke her computer

Howard has his own set of complaints. He accuses Ghent Howard of:

Using racial slurs to describe him

Being jealous of female fans and hitting him in public

Secretly recording him and using the recordings in an effort to extort money from him

Temporary Assistance Granted

The pair was back in court last week to deal with Ghent Howard's request for temporary financial support to tide her over until a divorce settlement can be finalized. The judge ordered Howard to give his soon-to-be-ex more than \$50,000 within 30 days. According to TMZ, Ghent Howard is receiving:

\$10,000 in temporary support, intended to pay for day-to-day expenses such as food and rent

\$20,000 for legal fees

\$20,000 for accounting fees

\$1,800 a month for her car payments

Howard's lawyer argued that his client didn't have that much money to spare, says E! Online. The site reports:

According to Ghent's attorney, Karen Donahoe, Howard has two houses and an apartment and is maintaining a \$76,000-per-month lifestyle after making \$2.6 million as an actor.

But Howard's attorney, Christian Markey, countered in court that Ghent has more money than her husband at this point.

"He hasn't had a paycheck, and no job offers," Markey said. "And he only has \$20,000 in cash. She's got more money and he's got less money."

Understanding Alimony

Alimony, also known as spousal support, is a payment made from one spouse to the other as part of the divorce settlement.

Attitudes toward alimony have changed over the years. Decades ago, men typically paid alimony to their ex-wives until the women remarried or died.

Today, alimony is more often viewed as a temporary form of assistance. It's usually paid to the spouse with less earning power—regardless of sex. It's intended to help that person get back on their feet while finding a job or furthering their education. Sometimes alimony payments are made on a monthly basis, or there may be a lump-sum settlement at the time of the divorce.

Factors that affect alimony awards include:

The standard of living during the marriage

Each spouse's income and financial condition at the time of divorce

The age and health of each person

One spouse's need for financial support and the other spouse's ability to pay alimony

When a divorce drags on—as is the case in the Howard-Ghent Howard divorce—then the court may award some form of temporary support.

"Any client going through a divorce should consider making a request for temporary support and fees in cases where they have a significantly lower income; limited access to financial resources and/or the other spouse refuses to voluntarily contribute to the family's regular living expenses," says Barbara J. King, a partner with Tully Rinckey PLLC in Albany, N.Y.

"The legal system is not intended to cause a war of attrition where the higher income spouse can outlitigate their partner and force them into financial submission. Leveling the playing field so each side can have adequate representation and the financial wherewithal to sustain themselves through the litigation, is the focus of most divorce courts these days."

Community Property & California

Although Howard and Ghent Howard's marriage only lasted a year, the couple have filed for divorce in California, because that's where they reside. California is one of a handful of states known as a community property state. This means that any money or assets one spouse earned during the marriage must be divided equally when the couple divorces.

According to IMDB, Howard appeared in several episodes of Law & Order: Los Angeles while the couple was married. He also filmed the movie Winnie

while they were married, and probably received income from earlier work that was rebroadcast while the couple were married. All of that income would probably be considered community property in the eyes of the divorce court.

The couple is due back in court in mid-April.