



I Signed a Prenup

We were about to get married. So why did I feel as if I were mapping out our divorce?

BY CHRISTINE MORRISON

I'd always expected that the biggest challenge I would face before walking down the aisle would be finding the perfect dress. I was wrong. I learned it is the prenuptial agreement.

Until recently, I thought prenups were reserved for Hollywood stars and *Gossip Girl*-style dramas. It wasn't until I had to sign one that I learned how commonplace these agreements are among people I know: colleagues I work beside, friends I had no idea had *that* much money.

But having a hefty bank account is not necessarily the reason people opt for a prenup. These agreements are not about how much you have, but about wanting to keep what you've got — what you earned, what you inherited.

I learned about my boyfriend's prenuptial requirement long before his proposal. I had plenty of time to walk away, but didn't. James is my best friend, and I feel a once-in-a-lifetime love. Instead, I argued that it was hurtful that he thought he needed it; he argued that it was not a reflection of what he thought of me. Me, who still lived paycheck to paycheck. How could it not be a reflection of me?

It took months to get comfortable with the idea. His proposal was delayed, I think, accordingly. We spent those months joking that there should be "weight clauses" and "making the bed"

contingencies. Anything to alleviate the tension. Finally, I confided in a colleague.

"This is as much for your protection as his," she assured me. "You won't get half of everything he had before knowing you, and you won't be left with nothing."

I had never thought of it in that way. With one statement, she made me not a victim but an advocate for myself. So I envisioned I would find a smart attorney and simply show up to sign. That is, until I lost my financial independence. I had not been prepared for the vulnerability of leaving my successful career as I followed my beau to Boston for his, but it became clear the prenup would now need to address my lost wages in addition to his previous assets.

Nonetheless, I found it impossible to approach these negotiations like a business transaction. This was about love — and loss.

"It doesn't mean we are not building a future together, sharing everything," James said lovingly.

I tried to be consoled by this. Yet it just felt cruel that we hadn't even begun the marriage, and we were already mapping out our divorce.

Our conversations took on a new vernacular. I spoke of "terms," he of "threshold for payment." We talked about percentages, as if our love were capable of being measured. We reviewed provisions, again and again. I knew them better than the honeymoon itinerary.

With every revision, we grew more angry and weary. Following what I hoped to be my final attorney meeting, James and I convened on neutral ground, at the train station near his office. The grease from the food court was as thick as the tension. All I could think was, "Who eats chicken fried rice on a train?" Instead, I challenged our reasons for being together.

He looked at me with the smile that had won me over years ago. "We are in this 50/50. I am just protecting my previous assets." He had said this from the start, but as I had just gotten an earful from my attorney about what I was giving up, I felt angry.

"How can you expect me to sacrifice my career for so little?" I said. Louder than I had hoped.

After a pause, he asked what I just knew was coming: "Would you love me if I had nothing?"

With that, I packed up and headed for the train. I realized I was not cut out for the aggressive stance I had attempted. Fleeing was the only thing I could do. He ran after me, apologetic. He was at his wit's end, he exclaimed, and knew I loved him for him. It is not romantic to make up in front of an Au Bon Pain, but we did.

Ten days before the wedding, there was still no contract. The lawyers were having screaming matches and hanging up on each other, yet James and I remained loving. We were stronger having gone through this exercise. We now knew how to communicate and listen more than ever, with greater intensity and empathy. Signing five days before the wedding was easy. Marriage will test us; we had just passed our first exam.

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