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voice

Equality

When Gay Marriage Ends

BY JESSE GREEN

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NTIL RECENTLY, Kevin Muir and Sam Ritchie could have been poster boys for marriage equality: a gay couple so solid and beamish it would seem just plain ornery to keep them from the altar. Their entire lives together had been pointing toward legal union, in exactly the kinds of ways most people would find normal and completely unthreatening. They'd met in 1997, when Kevin, then 26, and Sam, then 20, both worked for a company that produced the Boston-

to-New York AIDS bike ride. An office flirtation quickly turned to love, former boyfriends on each side were ditched, and within three months, "as New York real estate forces you to do," Sam recalls, "we had to move out of our old apartments and move in together, and that was it."

Over the next seven years, their lives merged in all the usual ways: credit cards, work relocations, shared real estate, shared Facebook friends. At each moment it became possible to reflect their entwined reality in public terms, they leaped at the opportunity, starting with a big blowout commitment ceremony in Los Angeles in 2000, with moms making speeches. In 2003, having moved to Tucson, where Sam was appointed to the "Gay and Lesbian Commission on Blah Blah Blah," as he puts it, they became domestic partners on the day the ordinance permitting it passed. "Basically," Sam says, "every time we could get a piece of paper, we did." That quest culminated on May 28, 2004, eleven days after Massachusetts became the first state to open civil marriage to same-sex couples, when Kevin and Sam stood before a justice of the peace in a restaurant across the street from Newton City Hall and solemnly uttered an updated version (*through prosperity or adversity, on this day, and for the rest of your lives*) of the traditional vows.

For a while, they were proud to be known, especially among their straight friends, as gay-marriage pioneers. Sam enjoyed writing feisty footnotes on his tax returns saying "I'm checking 'single' because you don't recognize my marriage." But they were different from many in that first matrimonial wave. They were still quite young (Sam 27, Kevin 33) and unencumbered. Most of those marrying had been together longer and had a more settled existence. Julie and Hillary Goodridge, the lead plaintiffs in the case that paved the way for marriage equality in Massachusetts, were in their late forties, for instance; among the hundreds of couples to wed in those first days, they were not so unusual in having an 8-year-old daughter to serve as their flower girl.

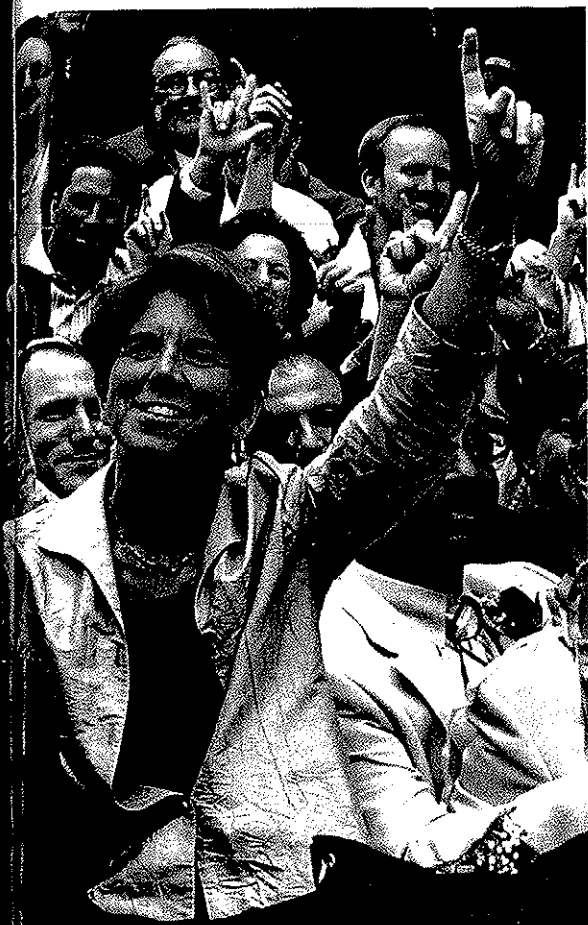
Sam and Kevin had always assumed they'd have kids; at 12, Kevin even made a tape offering advice to some future version of himself about how to be a better father. (His parents divorced

Same-sex couples are operating in a divorce environment similar to the one that existed for heterosexual couples a hundred years ago.



when he was 9.) A few years after Sam and Kevin married, they began to explore the possibility more seriously. They agreed that adoption would be the right path for them, but the long process took them in unexpectedly divergent directions. On the one hand, they had to sell themselves as paragons of marital steadiness. The fourteen-page promotional book they put together for birth parents is beautifully calibrated to impress without overwhelming, featuring anodyne self-testimonials ("The thing that's kept our relationship strong is that we are best friends") as well as festive pictures of holiday get-togethers, family travel, and more-or-less local amenities. A section called "Kevin & Sam At-a-Glance" includes clip art referencing the ACLU and Crunch fitness; "Stuff We Like" aims both high and low with *Desperate Housewives*, sushi, a gay rainbow, and *Never Let Me Go*.

But in couples therapy, which they also started as part of their adoption process, they were discovering that the pictures they had of their potential child's future didn't really align. "Kevin's picture was very much like the white picket fence and the house on Long Island," Sam says. "And I was very much going to have the urban kid." This difference echoed contrasting lifestyle preferences—



Julie and Hillary Goodridge celebrating their first wedding anniversary in 2005. They divorced four years later.

Sam wanting to go out on weekends, Kevin wanting to stay home—that they had previously finessed. But after years of compromising, they found themselves no longer as flexible with each other, and those preferences kept turning into arguments.

By the time they were approved to adopt in the summer of 2011, shortly after their seventh anniversary, Sam realized, “Wow, we’re not so ready.” A few months later, Kevin said to Sam, “Okay, I’m done.” The adoption book would remain nothing more than a collection of files in their computers, never to be printed and bound.

FROM “I DO” TO “I’M DONE” is a well-traveled road—for straight couples. When their legal marriages are over, they pretty much know they will need a legal divorce. But for gay couples, the promise of marriage is still so new and incomplete that the idea of matrimonial courts, equitable settlements, and all the rest barely registers. How do you process the undoing of a bond that until a moment ago in history you were not allowed to form?

It’s not a subject that marriage-equality groups tend to trumpet on their websites, but gay couples are at the start of a divorce

boom. One reason is obvious: More couples are eligible. According to a report by UCLA’s Williams Institute, nearly 50,000 of the approximately 640,000 gay couples in the U.S. in 2011 were married. (Another 100,000 were in other kinds of legal relationships, such as domestic partnerships.) The marriage rate, in states that allowed it, was quickly rising toward that of heterosexual couples: In Massachusetts as of that year, 68 percent of gay couples were married, compared with 91 percent of heterosexual couples. Another reason for the coming boom is that while first-wave gay marriages have proved more durable than straight ones (according to the Williams Institute, about one percent of gay marriages were dissolving each year, compared with 2 percent for different-sex couples), that’s not expected to last. Most lawyers I spoke to assume that the gap will soon vanish, once the backlog of long-term and presumably more stable gay couples have married, leaving the field to the young and impulsive.

Already, the data suggest that there are hundreds of gay divorces each year. Some are vividly acrimonious; some, like Kevin and Sam’s, just sad and confusing. Kevin doesn’t even accept Sam’s version of the events that led to their breakup. For him, it had little to do with the adoption. He says that as far back as 2008, when he “became a recovering alcoholic and started to work toward sobriety,” the marriage “probably would have, or should have,” ended. His need to avoid temptation may explain the preference for staying home, but it also opened up its own kind of rift between them. “My not drinking, and my not wanting to be exposed to the things surrounding drinking, is what ultimately caused me to say, ‘I need you to leave this house,’” Kevin explains. “Sam is a beautiful, loving, generous, amazing guy. If I had continued to drink, we would still be together.”

In a separate conversation, because they no longer talk—a situation they both describe as bizarre and painful after fifteen years together—Sam responds that he thought they’d agreed not to go into “such personal territory” publicly. “I don’t think the picture he’s painted is complete, accurate, or fair.”

Toggleing from one to the other, I get the feeling they lived in different marriages. Even the details of its ending, mundane though they be, are a matter of interpretation. When Kevin’s fifteen-year-old dog, which had lived with the couple from the beginning of their relationship, died in December 2010, they disagreed about getting a new one. Sam thought that having a little more space in the apartment, and a breather from always needing to come home to take care of a pet, would be good for the relationship. But for Kevin, the relationship was already over; by the following winter, he had joined OkCupid and was “moving on.” At Heavenly Angels Animal Rescue in Queens, he selected two Chihuahuas and told Sam, “These are *my* dogs, not *ours*.”

And so the Chihuahuas slept in the bedroom with Kevin while Sam slept in the living room. Sam at first protested a little: “You know, we should think about this,” he said. Then came “Okay, if you’re done, then I’m not going to stop you.” Another day or two later, he realized it was “the right decision.” But they were both somewhat dazed. “And then we moved into the ‘Now what do we do?’ phase,” says Sam. It was clear he would move out of their Prospect Heights condo; it had been bought mostly with an inheritance from Kevin’s mother. “And we quickly decided Kevin would buy me out. But at that point I hadn’t lived on my own in, well, ever, so I had to look for an apartment and get the money together for that. There was a lot to handle.”

Still, they moved fast. Within a few weeks, they found a lawyer, Carol Buell, who takes on divorce cases only when the parties agree to alternative dispute models such as mediation or collaborative law. Kevin and Sam planned to “stay friends and in contact,” and at first that seemed possible. When Sam moved to a small apartment in Prospect-Lefferts Gardens last March,

Kevin rented the U-Haul and helped him lug his belongings. That night, after a nap, he went on a date planned long before; it was a coincidence, but also a conclusion.

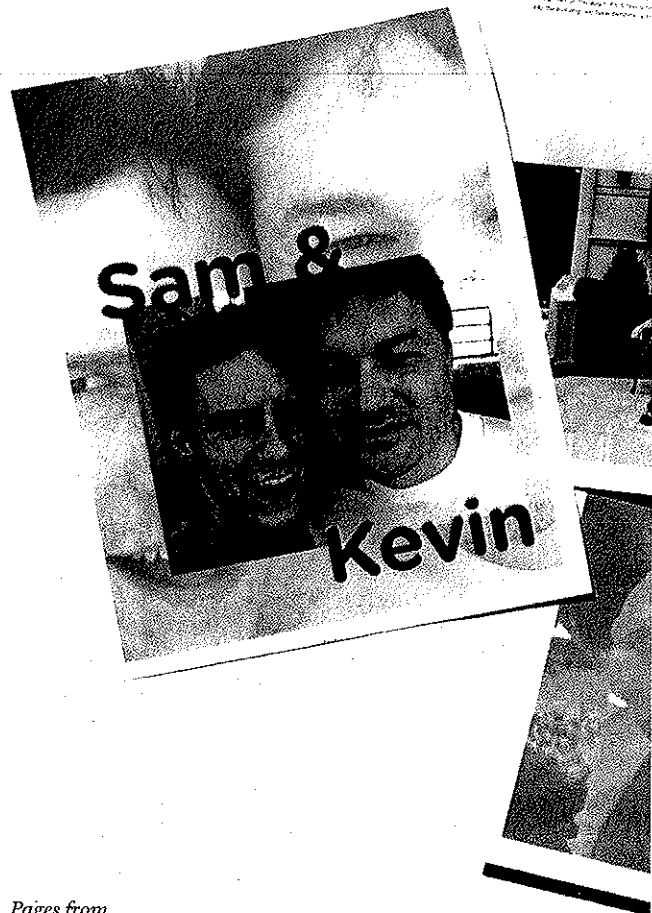
DIVORCE, ONE LAWYER tells me, “provides a forum with rules and guidelines to keep people from giving in to their very worst impulses.” For gay couples, though, the Byzantine chaos of current law can yield grotesque results. The problems arise from two main sources: differences among the states in their laws concerning gay relationships, and differences between the states and the federal government, thanks to the Defense of Marriage Act, in their treatment of taxes, pensions, inheritance, and other transfers that may figure in settlements. You needn’t be a “marriage tourist”—one of the many couples who trekked from jurisdiction to jurisdiction to wed repeatedly as marriage became legal in each—to get caught in the flypaper.

“Imagine you’re a same-sex couple married in Washington, D.C., and taking the Amtrak from there to Boston,” says Susan Sommer, director of constitutional litigation for Lambda Legal. “You’re married in D.C.; everything’s fine. Next stop Maryland, which until 2010 wouldn’t treat you as married but now would. You get to Delaware, which has a civil-union law, so it treats you not as married but as a civil-union couple. Then you get to Pennsylvania, which has not been recognizing these out-of-state marriages as anything at all, and not allowing divorces, so while there you are potentially a legal stranger to your spouse. That’s not a good part of your trip. New Jersey recognizes your marriage only as a civil union. Then, phew, you’re in New York and you’re married again; same in Connecticut. Then you get to Rhode Island: a civil-union state where the attorney general has said you are married and the government is treating you as married, but the courts have said we won’t divorce you. Finally, you reach Massachusetts, and you can breathe a sigh of relief: You’re married. And you can divorce. But it’s a very complicated legal ride.”

Sommer has been working for marriage equality for years, but a surprising part of her work has been getting married couples their divorces. In the process she has come to see divorce as an “incredibly important spearhead” or “wedge” to force the door open for marriage. Cases she argued in New York in 2008 and in Maryland in 2012 established the right of couples legally married elsewhere to divorce in those states—even before they allowed gay marriage themselves.

But a side effect of that piecemeal progress has been the complicated legal ride Sommer describes. And it’s not an abstraction. “Here’s a typical case that has come up in Texas, Wyoming, everywhere,” she says. “A couple that in happy times together, in the blush of love and the excitement of the availability of marriage in some jurisdictions that have no residency requirements, get married, may even throw some big party with family and friends, then return to lead their boring lives as married couples. And then, no different from what happens in heterosexual marriages”—

“This all would have been much simpler for me 30 years ago, when I could have given him \$50,000 and just said, ‘Good luck, good-bye.’”



Pages from
Sam and Kevin's
adoption book.

Sommer herself is married to a man—“a certain percentage may split apart. But, by and large, even if states have no residency requirement to marry, they do have a residency requirement to divorce”—meaning that if you live in Georgia but married in California during its twenty-week “marriage window” in 2008, you can’t get divorced in Georgia, which does not recognize your marriage anyway, and you probably can’t get divorced in California either, unless you take up residency there, perhaps for as long as a year. The vast majority of couples can’t afford or even arrange that, especially if they’re feuding.

“It gives wedlock a whole new meaning,” says Sommer. “They’re trapped.”

If this sounds familiar, that’s because the situation resembles what many straight couples faced in trying to end their marriages before the wave of recent reforms that standardized no-fault divorce throughout the country. Same-sex couples, Sommer estimates, are operating in a divorce environment similar to the one that existed for heterosexual couples a hundred years ago.

“And it has terrible and profound consequences for them,” she continues. “First of all, you can’t enter into a new marriage, or for



that matter a new civil union or domestic partnership. So you can commit bigamy and might be subject to criminal prosecution." Such "walking bigamists," accustomed to the more casual ending of past gay relationships, may not even realize they need a divorce. "Or let's say you and your spouse live in Virginia but got married in New York. You split up but don't get divorced, because you can't. One of you steps foot in D.C. because you commute there for work. While you're in D.C. you are married to that other person even if you haven't spoken in years. And let's say you're in an accident that doesn't allow you to make end-of-life decisions; that spouse is likely the one who has the right to make decisions for you.

"Or say you never bothered to make wills, and you die. It is that spouse who inherits your property. And if you *have* made a will, giving your estate to your new partner, the old one is probably entitled to the spousal election, a percentage of the estate that has to go to the spouse regardless, because the law in general says you can't entirely disinherit your spouse.

"And here's another: There's something called the marital presumption. So if you are married to your same-sex spouse but have moved on without getting a divorce, and have a child using

an anonymous donor with your new partner, it's your old spouse who is the presumptive parent of that child. It's a *mess!*"

If the Supreme Court strikes down DOMA's "one man, one woman" definition of marriage this year, some of the biggest complications for divorcing gay couples in some states will vanish. It will no longer be necessary, for instance, for lawyers to develop expensive workarounds that provide for equitable distribution of federal benefits like pensions and Social Security, which are taxed in gay divorces but not in straight ones. Simple changes in state laws will sooner or later allow gay couples to divorce wherever they please, without incurring the cost of establishing residency elsewhere or of fighting to apply "long arm" jurisdiction to a spouse back home who refuses to cooperate. And divorce plaintiffs from nonrecognition states will no longer have to reframe their marriages as business partnerships or joint ventures in order to divide marital property or force its sale.

For Kevin and Sam, there were few such complications. They had no children, no need of support, and because both men work for nonprofits, little in the way of tangible wealth to divide. That didn't stop them from arguing. At first, their negotiations over their only large joint asset—the condo—got tangled in squabbles over who supported whom when, and how much. But Buell urged them to stop trying to persuade each other of the meaning behind their assets and just come up with a price. At that point they quickly agreed on what Kevin should pay to buy Sam out. They also agreed to split the legal fees of about \$5,000.

Their relatively inexpensive settlement does not mean that the underlying emotional issues were resolved; divorce nullifies a contract but not a relationship. In fact, their relationship deteriorated even as they reached legal accord. Amicability in the lawyer's office—while having screaming fights outside it and proxy wars on Facebook—is hard work. "You still have to be in a room being civil with someone who maybe you don't want to be civil with," says Sam. "And processing why this person who wanted to be with you forever apparently no longer does."

RABBI MARGARET MOERS WENIG had no clue that she was a lesbian until almost a decade into her first marriage, which was to a man. "The real turning point was seeing *Desert Hearts* on the big screen," she says. She left the theater sobbing. Even as she paid a pastoral visit to a patient at Memorial Sloan-Kettering—Wenig served for many years as rabbi at Beth Am, the People's Temple, in Washington Heights—she could hardly stop crying. "I came home that night and said to my husband: 'I'm quite certain that I'm a lesbian, and I'm afraid our marriage will not be lifelong.'"

Their divorce was amicable. The couple wrote their own separation agreement, and ate lunches together during the process of having it turned into legal language by a mediator. They shared custody of their two young daughters 50-50. More than that, they remained extended family to each other, even as Wenig met and fell in love with Sharon Kleinbaum, another rabbi, whom she wed years later, during the California window in 2008. The five of them—Wenig, her ex-husband, their two children, and Kleinbaum—often went to shul together and sat in the same pew.

Having officiated at gay weddings as early as 1991, and having preached about gay rights for many years before they directly affected her, Wenig, now 56, was embraced by her synagogue through all her life changes. More than embraced, really. For a progressive religious community, having a nontraditional rabbi, and especially one who is married, is a kind of gold star. Wenig and Kleinbaum—who leads Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, considered the largest LGBT congregation in the world—began to seem like lesbian-rabbi royalty. They had done everything just right.

And then, after almost twenty years, (Continued on page 73)

they fell apart. Their divorce, which is uncontested but not yet final, has been, like many more ordinary divorces, wrenching and costly. Wenig's own legal expenses so wildly exceeded her savings that she was forced to liquidate a substantial chunk of her retirement funds. She declines to talk further about the circumstances of the split or the divorce itself except to say, "I am heartbroken that this marriage ended."

But she freely admits that at several points in the process she felt enormous despair, and once "took measures to end my life." In response to confessing that "violation of Jewish values," she was "appropriately benched" from the pulpit for a period of time. "A divorce may adversely affect not only one's family and friends," she explains, "but members of the wider community as well." With some studies suggesting that suicidal thinking is more prevalent among gay and lesbian adults (not just youth) than it is in the general population, and others suggesting that divorce itself increases suicidality, it may be that gay divorce amounts to a double whammy, bringing with it an extra emotional risk.

It certainly brings with it an extra moral risk, Wenig believes. In a commentary called "Marriage Equality But Not Divorce Equality," she points out that many states, including New York, will not count toward the definition of marital property those assets acquired during the years a gay couple were partnered but not legally wed. (She and Kleinbaum were a couple for seventeen years before they could legally marry.) While urging a change in the law to correct this unfairness—"a change that may mean the difference between poverty and survival"—she also argues that it is "good and right" for a divorcing same-sex couple to voluntarily structure the terms of their separation agreement so that it acknowledges the full length of their partnership. "To fail to do so is to dishonor the claims that same-sex couples have been making for decades about our marital-like relationships." Wenig encapsulates those claims in the story of a Lutheran lesbian couple whose wedding she attended. The minister, she recalls, asked the women to pledge that their marriage would be "publicly accountable"—a striking phrase in a private rite. When further asked "Do you, X, take Y as your beloved partner?" each replied not "I do" but rather "I did, I do, and I will."

Perhaps it is a sign of increasing equality that gay people are not only breaking such vows but also, like straight people, exploiting every loophole of the legal system to fashion a noose or pillory for their exes. Wenig's lawyer, Allen Drexel, says that "ho-

mophobic anti-marriage-recognition laws" create perverse incentives that almost beg litigants, or their lawyers, "to coerce concessions relating to everything from finances to parenting arrangements." The most famous example involves two women, Donna M. and Beth R., who lived in New York, together raising two children born to Donna by alternative insemination. Donna and Beth got married in Toronto in 2004 but split up three years later; when Beth then filed for divorce, Donna sought to have the action dismissed on the grounds that they could not be considered legally married in a state that did not allow it. Had the court agreed with this hypocritical argument, which seemed to mock the fact of their Canadian marriage, Beth would have been prevented from seeking joint custody of the children, whom she had never legally adopted. But in a landmark decision in 2008, Donna's motion was denied, and the divorce, including joint custody, was granted in 2009.

Custody was not a legal issue for Wenig; her daughters, raised with Kleinbaum from early childhood, are no longer minors. But she says the girls are nevertheless "caught in a painful unofficial custody battle" that makes her worry about the effect of gay divorce on family and the larger community. Her parents, who had initially offered only antipathy and resistance to her declaration that she was a lesbian—"This will hasten my death," her mother said—eventually came around. "The joy we exuded as a couple gave them a positive picture of a same-sex partnership," Wenig says. "The dissolution of this partnership, particularly the ways in which it ended, has left my side of the family, which frowns on divorce, much more skeptical of the 'good' of same-sex relationships. I'm only glad my parents did not live to witness it."

ONE OF THE THINGS—besides the law—that may make divorce especially difficult for gay people is the way it seems to prove, despite the statistics, old slurs about their relative inability to maintain stable bonds. On a larger scale, gay divorce may be used to undermine arguments for gay marriage in the first place. But Evan Wolfson, the founder and president of Freedom to Marry, says the opposite is true. Access to divorce, he often tells straight audiences, is a key justification for legalizing gay marriage. "They have to think," he says, "but when they do, they get it."

What they get is that people need safe ways to exit relationships, and not just because there's been an affair or one spouse cannot stand a single day more of the other's socks on the floor. Sometimes, gay or straight, you find yourself trapped with someone different from the person you

married, and the situation is more than depressing: It's dangerous.

That was the case for a man in his sixties I'll call Geoffrey. As his need for a pseudonym suggests, his divorce is still being litigated, and he fears inflaming his ex, a man I'll call Carl. Partnered for more than fifteen years, Geoffrey and Carl got married during the California window, largely because Carl suffered from a "major but treatable illness."

"I thought our marrying would be good for two things," says Geoffrey. "One, it would help him feel more secure that I wouldn't abandon him because of his illness. And two, I would be able to get him on my insurance at work. Which was a good thing." Before the marriage, Carl had suffered two major flare-ups of his illness, which cost Geoffrey "a fortune." But a third, after they married, was completely covered.

In marrying Carl, Geoffrey was trying to do the right thing: take care of a person he loved even after the passion had seeped out of the relationship. But the relationship eventually deteriorated even further. There were "angry outbursts," Geoffrey says, calls to the police, outrageous threats. Finally, unable to live that way anymore, Geoffrey put his dog in its case one night and walked out the door of their New York apartment, heading to La Guardia for a trip to Florida. Even though it was too late to get a flight, he preferred to sit in the airport all night than to return to Carl at home.

He knew he had to end the relationship, but because of the odd nature of the California window, he wasn't sure what kind of legal process he needed. In Florida, where he figured he would at least change his will, he consulted a "respected lawyer in the gay community," who turned out to be clueless about New York matrimonial law. "He told me: 'Why not just throw him out? Stop giving him any money, and stop enabling him.'" But prying a legal spouse from your apartment isn't as easy as, say, changing the locks. Because they were married, Geoffrey had to get an order of protection, and even then the police at first refused to carry it out. They said Geoffrey's problem was merely a roommate matter, and referred him to landlord-tenant court.

That mistake was quickly corrected, but the divorce has dragged on. The case involves four actions, now consolidated, including harassment and criminal-mischief aspects that his lawyer, Allen Drexel—who also represents Rabbi Wenig—will not characterize further. At this point, Geoffrey is willing to make almost any monetary settlement to get out of the marriage, even though Carl "didn't work except for maybe two months in the whole time we were together." The legal fees alone—both

his and Carl's, which Geoffrey, as the higher earner, has paid—have already cost him more than \$60,000.

"Gay folks are not prepared to deal with what comes with marriage," he says. "Not a clue what they're getting into. When I tell people I'm getting divorced, most say, 'I had no idea you even had to do that! Oh my God!'"

That's why Drexel, who is "gay, not married, with a couple of cats," says that in "conversations with my hypothetical beloved"—and with clients—he very strongly urges "the signing of an agreement that, entirely apart from the financial issues, provides a clear, rational, predictable path through the dissolution process in the un hoped-for event that the relationship should fail. That's not a zero-sum discussion. That benefits everyone."

While most matrimonial lawyers would agree that gay couples who marry should have a prenup settling such knotty questions as jurisdiction and custody, gay divorcés tend to be more ambivalent, focused as they are on the question of whether it was worth getting married in the first place. It's a "be careful what you wish for" conundrum, and something of a philosophical litmus test as well. After all, the marriage-equality bandwagon has achieved its nearly unqualified success in part by papering over with white crêpe bunting the questions that have animated and bedeviled gay activism since the movement began: Are gay people really just like straight people? Should they want the same things? The younger divorcés I spoke to tend to think so: Kevin Muir sees his divorce as a continuation of his participation in the marriage movement, "just from the other side now." Sam Ritchie says he would marry again, and without a prenup—though only *once* more.

But for some older gay men and lesbians, the shocking pain of divorce has reminded them that the sublegality of gay relationships in the pre-marriage years was not just a turn-on but in some ways a privilege and a point of pride. "This all would have been much simpler for me 30 years ago when I was a young man," says Geoffrey. "I could have given him \$50,000 or \$100,000 and just said, 'Good luck, good-bye.' Or often enough just parted without any settlement at all, and moved on. I remember when the biggest problem used to be who gets the recipes, who gets the CDs, who gets the dog." He pauses a moment. "I still love the *idea* of marriage," he concludes, "but sometimes I wish it hadn't been possible."

And while Wenig argues feelingly that gay and lesbian couples, like all couples, "should consider ourselves to be 'publicly accountable' for our behavior throughout

our relationships, including when we divorce," she knows that a consciousness forged in an earlier era of secrecy and even shame is not so easily discarded. Certainly the mores of that time—and the protective habit of not criticizing other people's sexual and romantic choices, no matter how outré or destructive—made leaving a partner easier, as she relates in the parable of the lesbian who told her a few years ago: "I miss the old days, when we were in the closet and no one knew what we did."

KEVIN AND SAM, THOUGH, are glad they were able to get a real, publicly accountable divorce. (It was granted on January 16—but because they forgot to undo their domestic partnership in Tucson, they may still be legally connected there.) "Divorce gave us a clearer path than we'd have had otherwise," says Kevin. Even so, Sam doesn't want to leave the impression that it was, in the end, "all rainbows and unicorns." "It made the legal part easier," he says. "The breakup part was just as bad as breakups always are."

Worse, in a way: Kevin says he hung on to the marriage those last few years—despite urgings from members of a therapy group he attended—in part because of "having worked so hard to get marriage in the first place." Sam, too, was troubled by the signal it might send for gay spouses to divorce, and as such was deeply relieved to learn that they would not be among the first. Even the Goodridges, having separated two years after their marriage and gotten their decree in 2009, beat them to it.

Still, their divorce felt a bit shameful to them and was disappointing or confusing to others. Sam's mother, whom he was too embarrassed to tell, was hurt to find out about it on Facebook. And when he was ready to move on, Sam was surprised to find no support groups or clubs for gay divorcés, as there are for straight ones. "It's really just: *Start dating again*," he says. Even then, if he mentioned over dinner that he was getting divorced, his date's response would often be an incredulous "From a *woman*?"

Though each man now has a new steady boyfriend, the conflict and sense of loss survive in odd ways. Kevin ended up de-friending 150 people on his Facebook account, feeling they were more Sam's property than his. When he moved, Sam found among his belongings the tape of Kevin at age 12 speaking to himself in the future; he has not returned it. And when Kevin recently saw Sam out of the corner of his eye in a busy corridor between subways at Atlantic Avenue station, he made no effort to communicate. "He was going one way," Kevin says, tearing up, "and I was going another." ■

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