

Never Again

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woman next door, who referred to me as Amy's husband. When Amy replied that in fact we weren't married, our neighbor—usually a good-natured sort—took a stand: "Now that's *wrong*, to live together when you're not married." Amy disagreed, I trust. For this was seven months after she had coolly declined my official, ring-bearing marriage proposal, and two months before she made a sudden trip to the post office for a handful of change-of-address cards for herself only.

Maybe it would have been different if we had exchanged vows: "I, David, take you, Amy, to be my live-in girlfriend. This shared utilities bill I with thee pay, from this day forth, till one of us just doesn't feel like it anymore." Instead, we dated for four months, made casual plans to marry, and Amy moved in. And while I did tell her, "Don't move in unless it's to last," only now does the phrase "to last" sound eerily ambiguous.

I thought our relationship went smoothly, until eventually I saw unhappiness in Amy's eyes. When I'd ask her what was wrong, she'd say that her job was troubling her. Then one evening I said, "You're acting so cold tonight." And she replied, "I've decided to move out."

Now it's all very clear: Amy—six years younger, once married, career-shifting—was still shopping. I'm convinced that if marriage had been a stricter prerequisite, she never would have crossed the threshold with her clothes, books, records, and self in the first place. But because she *did* cross that threshold, and then reversed direction a year later, I've vowed never again to live with a woman to whom I'm not married.

I've made the wrong move—the halfhearted one—twice. The first time, four years before Amy, was for the sake of convenience: We'd been taking turns staying at each other's place for the weekend, so didn't it make sense to combine places for all seven days? This, of course, has all the rational foresight of drinking seven martinis because two feel real good. It was a naive, careless move, and I was much wiser when, a

year later, we both realized we didn't belong together and said good-bye. The second time, I swore, would be different: It was to be a marriage prelude that would swell into Wagner and Mendelssohn—instead, it faded into solo blues.

Admittedly, my stance comes from the perspective of the humbled and the never married. Indeed, living together has gained a certain legitimacy in the last decade or two, so that fewer eyebrows are raised at the news, and those raised don't go up as high. Possibly, it seems more romantic to believe in the bond of the heart, not the law, that a marriageless cohabitation suggests.

But to me, the most romantic act of all is to know the perils of marriage—and then to get

married in spite of that. Who can't be carried along by the tides of infatuation? The true test comes when the undertow hits and then threatens to pull you out into the cold waters where most relationships drown—or at least flail.

Yet why eliminate the possibility of finding the right woman to just live with, perhaps to determine if you *can* live in permanent harmony? In fact, I've been seeing such a woman for more than a year now. We've talked marriage, but when she brought up living together, I said I

wouldn't do it. I've decided that dating works just fine as a test drive for marriage—it usually reveals the most obvious flaws, though subtler ones take time to emerge—and at least it doesn't pretend to be otherwise.

Marriage, though no guarantee of permanence—never mind happiness—does at least suggest that you both really mean it, and so could continue to mean it. But when you merely live together, you've got one foot out the door, and that foot is often pointed in the direction of not the chapel but the post office. For living together's undeniable foundation is conditional love, and conditional love is *not* love—it's as oxymoronic as "temporary permanence." Living together is just a modern, self-indulgent nonresolution to an eternal challenge. It promises nothing—and it delivers. □

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Why I'll Never "Move In" Again

by David Maloof

A few months after Amy and I moved in together, we had dinner at the home of friends who had lived together for several years. There we were, two cohabiting couples, sneaking up with our forks on miniature, trussed-up Rock nish game hens. Our hostess, who had chosen the little birds, also had a rather trussed-up manner, which stood out all the more because her significant other was so down-to-earth that his comments caused more than a few dinner-table cringes. Never mind the old "opposites attract" truism: Between them there was no heat, only space.

Maybe it was this couple's seeming mismatch that brought out my disdain. Maybe it was the humiliation of struggling with that lilliputian fowl. In any case, when Amy and I were driving home that evening I said, "I wouldn't want to be like them, just living together for so long. I think that's cowardly. Pathetic, even." Her answer was, appropriately, noncommittal.

Less than a year later, Amy was talking to the (continued on page 109)

**More than half
of all couples
in the United States
live together
before marriage.**

**Married couples who
live together first are
50% more likely to
divorce within a
decade than those
who don't.**

**More than 60%
of divorced people
will live with
someone before
marrying a
second time.**