

## Real Estate and Relationships

Elizabeth Boskey

In most places, people keep their failing relationships together 'for the kids.' In New York City, however, people stay together for the apartment. It wouldn't be surprising if, per capita, we had the highest percentage of individuals still living with their ex... sometimes still sharing a room.

In New York, it's hard to find a place to live, even under the best of circumstances. Expensive in both time, and money, finding an affordable apartment in a reasonable neighborhood is difficult even when you have a few months warning, and can be next to impossible when you want to get out of a bad situation in a week or even a night. In most cities, a girl can crash on her friend's couch when she's broken up with her boyfriend, but New York is a place where 300 square foot studio apartments are considered spacious and your friends are sleeping on their own couches because they don't have room for a bed. Most people can't afford to live alone, and sometimes staying with the devil you know is better than jumping ship to live with the strangers you don't.

Alyssa is a nice young woman who recently graduated from college. Her story is pretty typical. She and her boyfriend had been sharing a beautiful one-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn for almost a year when they realized that their relationship wasn't working out. They both loved the apartment, with its dishwasher and enormous volume of closet space, but neither one of them could afford it on their own. In the three months that it took for them to find their own places, they still had to share a room and a bed, and all the little tiny irritations that they had dealt with as a couple turned into constant fodder for arguments and anger. Not only was the living situation uncomfortable, but their apartment search also put them at odds. They fought over the apartments they saw listed online, and hid the newspaper from each other until they realized that in their next apartment they were looking for completely different things. He was looking for a cool place in a cool neighborhood, and she was looking for a place where she'd never have to pick up after anyone else again. In the end, he moved into a doorman building with 6 roommates, and she ended up in a tiny garden apartment in Astoria. Both of them speak longingly of their shared home, and miserably of the three months they spent in it trying to stay out of each other's hair. Neither of them is planning on moving in with a lover again for a very long time.

Sadly in the twenty first century, there is no Emily Post to spell out the rules of etiquette for Manhattan real estate. If only apartments were as easy to dispose of as engagement rings, the decision would be clear, but, just like with a marriage, men and women get different things from their apartments and have different reasons they want to go or stay. For most men leaving a place is an inconvenience, whereas for women losing a home is a heartache and a personal loss. Who should get the apartment? It feels instinctive that the one who breaks the heart should also break the lease, but it's rarely that simple. Which person lived their first? Who has more personal and fiscal flexibility? Even who is easier to get along with can play a role in the final decision of who gets to stay, and who has to go.

In many relationships, it's the woman who puts the most effort into the apartment. She cleans, she decorates, and frequently she's the one who has to leave when the relationship falls apart. She is, in most couples, the one with the lower income, and is therefore less likely to be able to afford the rent on her own. It can be particularly painful to see an apartment you've cherished and improved go to a person you can no longer stand. To quote one woman, who was so mad at her boyfriend when they broke up that she packed her belongings and moved to the other coast, "I was really pissed that I put SO much work into the apartment - the decorating, the repairs, pretty much everything, and HE got to reap the benefits. Didn't seem fair. However, after much deliberation, I decided not to torch the place before leaving town. Wouldn't be fair to the neighbors."

How, then, can the horror of losing your home along with your honey be avoided? Everyone says the same thing: if you can afford it, make sure that you, and your partner, each have your own rooms. Private space will not only help keep the relationship together, but if it falls apart you'll have someplace to retreat. Don't think about the extra space as a place for when the relationship ends, but as an office, or studio, to work in while it thrives. And if things do end, well... if you really loved someone, you should set them free. If they really loved you, they'll give you the key.

--The End--

Note: Published as "Humble Abode" in New York Moves – I just don't have a scan of the piece.