



Not too long ago, my best friend moved in with her boyfriend.

It's a big deal: this is her third long-term, serious relationship, but the first one she felt confident enough in to say, "Hey, I like you so much, I'm going to live with you."

I have very mixed feelings about this whole thing.

First of all, I am Catholic. I am on fire for God and the Church and the idea of living with some man before marriage gives me the heebie-jeebies. (My best friend, by the way, is not Catholic—she's not even Christian—she vacillates between agnosticism and atheism but, I am convinced, contains a healthy dose of pagan virtue.)

On the other hand, I am delighted that she cares this much about a guy—a few years ago the idea of marriage disgusted her, now she's well-versed in diamond rings and carats and clarity and likes to drop hints about her preferences to the Boyfriend.

About a week after the big move I met up with my best friend and asked her cautiously about sharing her space so intimately with another human being for the first time. She reported a nearly seamless move: she loved getting to spend more time with Boyfriend and sharing their commute to work. She loved getting to play with his dog.

I asked her: did you get to do any redecorating? She said they bought a couch together.

A couch.

A couch is a major purchase.

Couches are expensive. Big. Room-ambiance-changing. If a relationship goes south, you cannot set the couch between both parties and whistle and call until it comes galumphing over to its favorite owner. If a relationship goes south, it really matters who gets to keep the couch (where memories have been made but—almost more importantly!—where you can continue to sit/sleep as a single person in a single's apartment, enjoying your major financial investment in furniture).

My best friend considers the couch a promise.

A couch is not a promise.

The problem with moving in with a man before you marry him is that you have to think about things like, "is it worthwhile investing in a couch?" My husband and I just bought a couch. We had to juggle some finances to do it, but it will be in our home until it grows old and dies from our kids and pets and friends abusing it. What will happen to my best friend's and Boyfriend's couch? Will it live to a ripe old

age? No one knows.

Couches are furniture, not promises. When I think about my relationship with my husband five, ten years from now, I do not rely on something as flimsy as a couch to tell me he will still be by my side. I have the Sacrament of Marriage to bolster me up; that's a promise so strong that I actually cannot picture life five, ten years from now without him.

To everyone out there wondering where your current romance will take you in the future: furniture purchases are about as accurate as tea leaves. A promise to stand by one another, in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, requires stronger binding than stylish upholstery.