

“I’m so pissed at you!” he screamed. “You used me to get me to buy you things.”

He said nothing as tears trickled down his face. A few agonizing minutes passed before he whispered, “I always thought we’d wind up together, but I just want you to be happy.”

I was absolutely amazed at how calm he was being. But his altruistic attitude didn’t last very long.

Power Play

For the next few weeks, Brett sent me e-mails, occasionally mentioning things he’d bought for me, along with little favors he’d done, like picking up my vitamins from the health-food store and my dry cleaning. In between breezy passages about his job and his family, he’d slip in a sentence about how I really should pay him back.

I shouldn’t have replied, but I thought that if I agreed with him, he’d go away feeling vindicated. So I sent him a half-hearted e-mail that said “Sure, sure, of course I’ll pay you back.”

Weeks passed, and things with New Guy intensified. I talked to Brett less and less. Until one Sunday afternoon when I was home vegging out and the phone rang. It was Brett.

“I’m so pissed at you!” he screamed. “I can’t believe you’d throw away our entire history because you met some guy. You totally used me. I know that you just played on my emotions to get me to buy you things.”

What was he talking about? He’d offered; I’d accepted. I’d never *asked* for anything. There were never any promises or commitments between us. I tried to reply, but he abruptly cut me off. “If you don’t pay me back all that money I laid out for you while we were together, I’m going to take legal action,” he said.

Legal action? My heart was pounding. Could he actually sue? They were gifts! And I’d paid for stuff for him too, like facials and a pair of Prada shoes. The call ended with both of us angry.

Two weeks later, he mailed an itemized list. It included the designer dress, air fare for a vacation to Colorado (but I’d paid for all the ski-lift tickets!), a dozen \$30 dinners...even gas he’d put in my car. All told, he wanted to be reimbursed \$10,000. Two weeks later, he phoned me to say that he’d call off his lawsuit if I broke up with my boyfriend. I hung up on him.

A week later, I was doing errands when a guy in a navy suit approached me on the sidewalk and asked if I was Jill. I nodded. He thrust papers into my hand. “You’ve been served,” he said.

I sat down on a park bench, trembling. I couldn’t believe it. He’d gone through with it. My ex was suing me for breaking up with him.

Judgment Day

Since I’d been served, I couldn’t even call Brett to try to work it out. So I was forced to hire a \$500-an-hour divorce attorney who assured me that “any judge with half a brain” would throw out Brett’s claim.

The way cases like this work, each party gets to tell his or her side to a judge, who then takes anywhere up to 90 days to issue a verdict. And that’s what happened. I was sitting in the shoe department of Neiman Marcus, trying to shop away the stress, the lawsuit, and everything else he had caused when my lawyer called to tell me that Brett had won. The judge ruled that my e-mail—telling Brett I’d pay him back—was binding.