

## REAL-LIFE READS

The day I drove to the bank to get the certified check was bittersweet: Brett had already cost me a year of agony, and I was angry with myself for not just paying him off in the beginning. But at least now I could get rid of him for good. I brought the check to my lawyer, along with his \$6,000 fee. Sixteen thousand dollars, gone just like that. So much for the down payment on a condo.

In the end, I learned never to put anything in writing, especially if you're dealing with a lawyer whose heart you've just broken. My dismissive "Yeah, I'll pay you back" replies are why I lost. The truth was that Brett had expected a return on his investment in the form of a commitment. When he didn't get it, he settled for the next-best thing: revenge.

So I've learned a lesson: The next time I get a pricey designer dress for a fabulous event, the name on the credit-card slip is going to be mine. ■

## Words as Weapons

Be careful what you say. Some things uttered can be held against you.

**YOU SAY:** "I don't care about that damn dog!" referring to the pooch you bought together.

**THE LAW SAYS:** If you don't have a prior agreement as to who will get the dog if you split, your ex can use your words as evidence to prove that he should.

**YOU SAY:** "My deepest, darkest secret? At 17, I was arrested for stealing."

**THE LAW SAYS:** If your ex is missing \$500 and pins it on you, he's out of luck. Someone's past does not create the grounds for a lawsuit.

**YOU SAY:** "Honey, here's my ATM card and PIN. Use it to pay for our trip."

**THE LAW SAYS:** If your ex uses the info to buy anything other than the vacation, you can have him charged with a criminal offense.

**YOU SAY (to 10 of your closest friends):** "Matt has the smallest penis I've ever seen."

**THE LAW SAYS:** If he finds out that you've been making fun of his manhood—and can prove that you've exposed him to ridicule with your remarks—your ex can sue you for slander.

**YOU SAY:** "Don't worry, I'll help pay your bills until you find a better job."

**THE LAW SAYS:** A financial promise like this is not binding in court unless he makes a promise in return, but watch what you agree to.