



GRAMERCY TAVERN, MANHATTAN

According to Tom Kretchmar, a Manhattan divorce lawyer with Chemtob, Moss, Forman & Beyda, most people enter marriages fully aware of certain nagging problems — like, say, a bad temper — but choose to overlook them. “They think, how bad is it really to get yelled at because you didn’t put the toothbrush back where it belongs?” he said. “But then over five, 10, 20 years or even just six months, it’s like, ‘How much more of this can I take?’ Forget cheating or the business failing. Often, it’s just like, ‘You’re not a very good person.’”

Kretchmar had spent the morning in his Midtown office, surrounded by art that referenced his profession. Near his desk there was a framed cover of “Brides in Love,” a 1963 comic book, the issue titled “Day of Divorce.” On the windowsill there was an ashtray with a William Steig cartoon of a wife telling her husband: “You know something, George? You’re not happy.” Near a Joey Ramone figurine (the Ramones are his “favorite band of all time”) was a gold-plated hand grenade — because, Kretchmar told me, “a divorce lawyer should be aggressive without being ugly or coarse.”

Kretchmar, 40, wore jeans, a gingham shirt and a fleece vest. His wavy hair was slicked back, his mood cheerful. The movie version of him would be played by Jonah Hill. Kretchmar likened his job to that of an oncologist. “Nobody loves oncologists,” he said. “Even if they got through the cancer, all they hear when they hear ‘oncologist’ is this traumatic phase of their life. People say, ‘How can someone surrounded by this great sadness and trauma love what they do?’ But I do. I love it. And I’m sure there are oncologists who love what they do.”

That morning, Kretchmar woke up to a 3 a.m. email from a client about a spouse’s violating a custody agreement. “There’s not much I can do other than ask the lawyer on the other side to tell their client not to do that,” he said, sounding like a parent who must phone another kid’s parent. Next he arranged for the spouse of another client to be served with divorce papers.

Like medicine, divorce law is full of euphemisms for unpleasantries. Kretchmar is a “matrimonial practitioner.” Alimony is “spousal maintenance.” Before New York State allowed no-fault divorce, divorce on the grounds that one spouse refused the other sex was “constructive abandonment.” A “four-way” is a meeting of the divorcing spouses and their lawyers.

Nancy Chemtob and Susan Moss, the female partners of the firm, popped by. Moss had been watching the royal wedding on the TV in her office. “As divorce attorneys, it’s life-affirming to watch weddings,” Moss said. “Because, you know ... it never lasts.”

“Thanks,” said Chemtob, who is getting married for the second time this summer. (Moss is handling her prenup.)

Kretchmar left the office and headed south to the Ronin Gallery, where a show of prints by Hiroshige, the Japanese woodblock-print artist, had just gone up. In his free time, he likes to drop by galleries so that he is better versed in his clients’ assets, which can range from children’s doodles to million-dollar artworks. “You’re kind of useless if your client says I have a collection of 20th-century decorative art and you don’t know what that is,” he said.

The gallery’s director, Tomomi Seki, introduced herself. “Do you have any of Hiroshige’s fish?” Kretchmar asked.

Seki disappeared into a back office and returned with several prints of fish. “Beautiful,” Kretchmar said, identifying the fish as sayori and amadai. His other hobby is “Japanese culinary arts,” both cooking and consuming, and he takes pride in being able to identify breeds of fish. The prints were priced at \$4,200 each. Kretchmar snapped a few photos. “No impulse buys today, but I’m glad to see what you’ve got,” he said.

Kretchmar took a cab uptown. At Gagosian, he browsed an Ed Ruscha catalog that included a print that read, “I Can’t Not.” He threw his head back and laughed heartily. This is something his clients say, he said, especially when asked not to text or email their exes during divorce proceedings. “I don’t look at everything as a piece of client-management art, but part of my job is corralling clients,” he said, purchasing the Ruscha catalog. “Even if I can’t hang it, I can point to it.”

After gallery hopping, Kretchmar headed to Gramercy Tavern, where he’s a regular. At the bar, he sometimes finds himself chatting with the other diners. Some ask for his business card. Others ask about high-profile marriages, like how President Donald Trump has kept Melania from divorcing him. Kretchmar speculates the cleanest way would have been with a postnuptial agreement promising a monetary incentive after four or eight more years of marriage. “You can’t keep her from divorcing you,” he said, “but you can pay her more to stick around.”

Kretchmar ran into a law-school classmate from Emory, who told him that she was pregnant. “Mazel tov!” he said.

Kretchmar isn’t married. Despite spending his days dissolving marriages, he still believes in love. He hopes that by 45 he’ll be married with children. “But I can’t tell you if it hasn’t happened by then, if all of a sudden I’ll be like, ‘Something has gone wrong here.’” For now Kretchmar lives alone in a Manhattan high-rise. He asked that, out of respect for his privacy, the apartment not be described further. “You can say I’m risk-averse,” he said. “I know divorce attorneys who get death threats.”

In the evening, he headed off to a birthday party of a financial consultant in the East Village. A whole roasted pig was served. Kretchmar chatted with a friend who told him about superbiking, genre of motorcycle racing. “And how are you?” asked the superbiker. “Seems like you’ve been busy?”

“Yeah, man,” Kretchmar said. “People keep getting divorced!” — Text by Irina Aleksander.