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Pulse Relax

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Don't feel guilty for ditching deadbeats

Dear Nat: I have a friend who is bad news — he owes me money and used me to get to my other friends. I told him I no longer want to see him, but he keeps trying to be my friend. The problem is, I have known him since kindergarten! How do I break it off while still being polite?

— *Feeling Hopeless*

Dear Hopeless: I'm sorry, but "break it off" and "polite" are two phrases that do not match up! People are always looking for the nicest way to get rid of someone, but the truth is, no one will walk away after being ditched feeling they were treated "politely."

This guy is obviously bringing you down. You've already told him straight out to "get lost," which is all you really can do. Now he's just being a nag. The best way to brush a bug like him off your shoulder is to pretend he's not there, and eventually he'll skitter away. Don't return phone calls or e-mails, and if he catches you on the phone or on the street, explain that "urgent appointment" you're running late for.

And for pete's sake, don't feel guilty because you've known him since kindergarten! Just because you can remember this guy being put down for a nap or eating from his Bugs Bunny lunch box doesn't mean you owe him anything. How you feel about him *now* should determine how you deal with him.

On the other hand, if your "friend" says he wants to start over and vows to treat you better, I think he deserves a second chance. Just keep an eye on him. If he still owes you money after a month, tell him to hit the road. But if all he owes you is crayons he borrowed in kindergarten, I say let him stay around.

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Have yourself a Teshinator Christmas

With three gold albums under his belt, John Tesh hopes his latest creation is 'an album of pure encouragement'

Ryan Bornheimer
Senior Pulse Reporter

Fans of the artist formerly known as co-host of Entertainment Tonight can rest easy. The Teshinator is back. It's been eight long months since his hugely successful album "A Deeper Faith" blasted onto Billboard charts. Now John Tesh has set his sights on the holiday season with the eagerly awaited release of "Christmas Worship." This collection of classic and original tunes is perfect for those long winter nights when you've had 12 glasses of rum-laced eggnog.

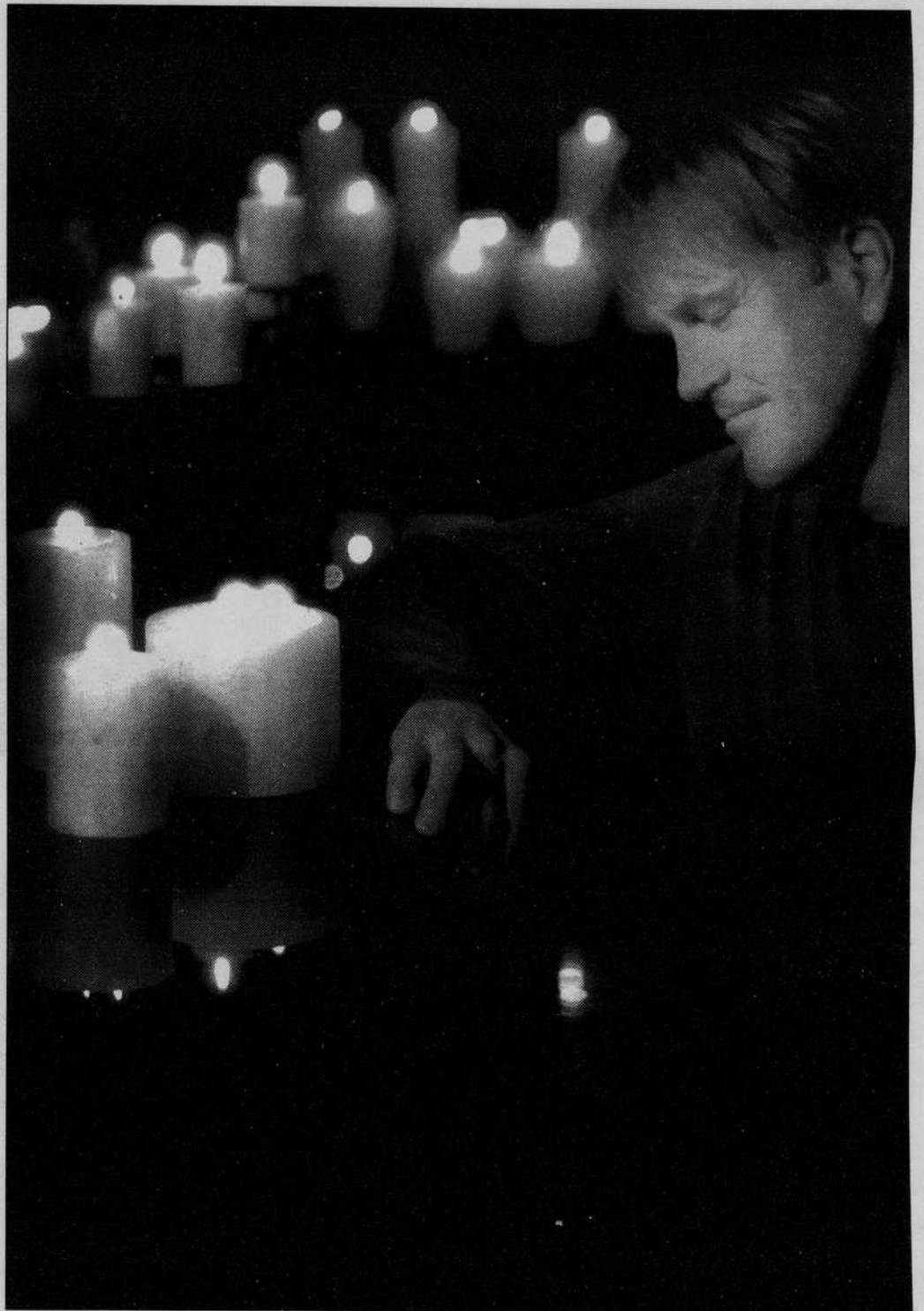
Something has been missing from holiday albums in recent years. Sure there were classics — Destiny's Child gave us "Eight Days of Christmas." Christina Aguilera put the sex back in J.C.'s birthday with "My Kind of Christmas." But only upon listening to the first track off "Christmas Worship" — "This is Your Gift" — does one realize what has been missing — John Tesh.

How many times have you been sitting around the Christmas tree with friends and family when someone said, "You know what this day needs — a spoken-word piece by John Tesh." Well, you've got it, Uncle Seymour, and more.

The combined talent of Yanni and John Tesh have made new-age music more than just a passing fad for teenagers. Having conquered that arena, the composer has since turned his talents to other areas of music. This latest effort is a stew of Tesh's new-age roots and Christian worship music that carries a positive message of togetherness and hope for the holidays. But Tesh himself best describes the release in the album's press material.

"I really want 'Christmas Worship' to be an album of pure encouragement," Tesh said. Perhaps the musician is eager to prevent the increased number of suicides often associated with the

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Courtesy photo

Monty gives clue to Michael; Sarah finds another sign of Kerensa

Chapter 9.

Remembering the fire.

Last week, Michael survived Monty's attack with population statistics, and finally met the woman in green.

The Emerald is printing "And the Dew is Our National Treasure" in serial form, with an installment every Tuesday in the Pulse Relax section. Earlier installments can be found at www.dailymerald.com.

The signs had been consistent: Green put me on the plane and led me to the woman. But what is Fate's message, that Kerensa's a high-priced whore? "No! I'm assigning motives like Sarah! If I'd only stayed in Portland and searched for Kerensa's journal, I'd know her thoughts."

The plane jerks to a stop, and I hold my knotted stomach. I want to curl up, but I stand with the others and shuffle forward. Monty waits at his seat.

Where's Kerensa?

"Remember, 14,713 per square mile." Weird smile, raised eyebrows. I nod and smile back. He stuffs a note in my shirt pocket.

"Thanks." The woman in green is far ahead.

My cab lurches through the crowded streets of Kowloon, where green is ubiquitous, a painful reminder to me of Kerensa. At the hotel, I call Sarah and recreate the sequence that led to the woman in green. "Michael, signs are not colors or things, but people. A 13-hour

flight, and you met no one?"

"Monty..." I begin and remember his note in my pocket. It's scribbled on letterhead from the InTERRim Institute, Portland. "Ffffff...!"

"What, Michael?"

"Monty's note. It's on Kerensa's letterhead!"

After several hours on the phone, I give up trying to find Monty and go for a run. At first, the pedestrians around me have briefcases in their hands, then shopping bags, then wooden cages, then nothing and their empty hands reach toward me. People stare from dark alleys.

Firecrackers explode around the corner; flashes brighten the walls; I go to look. Paper dragons with black legs dance before a bonfire. Sparks fly into the night. A sting of sharp explosions. I see flames through black legs as through balusters. I sink...

"Kerensa?" I scream. I stand in a doorway in white pajamas printed with clowns and drums. A hot glow comes through the balusters. My eyes sting. "Kerensa!" The stairwell before me explodes in flame. I fall. Kerensa's feet beneath the smoke run across the landing. I hear pounding. "Mom! Dad! Mom, wake up. Dad." A lash of flame. I'm on my knees crying. Kerensa takes my hand: "Keep close and you'll be all right." We climb out the window — flames lick over the edge of the roof — and go over the dormer toward the back of the house. Kerensa orders me down the trellis. From the ground, I see her still on the roof moving around to the back. She pounds on a window. "Mom! Dad!" The pane breaks and flames rush through the hole. Kerensa's forced back. She turns and jumps. I'm paralyzed with fear. She gets to her

knees, then to her feet and comes over to me. She holds me tight as the sirens scream.

I hunker against a wall near ashes. Her parents were little more. Afterwards there was confusion and then questions and discussions, and then she was adopted as my sister.

The sky lightens. I stand, find a rickshaw and soon curl up in white, scented sheets.

"Sarah," I say before boarding my return flight. "This has been a disaster."

"The darker the night, the brighter the candle. I found her backpack."

"The one with her journal?"

"Yes." Sarah's cell breaks up and dies.

Peter Wright is a printer living in Portland. He received his bachelor's degrees from UC Berkeley, served in the U.S. Navy, worked as a stock broker and taught at Stanford University.
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