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Dear Uncle Mike,

I'm sure you've heard this one before. My husband and I have been married for 16 years. There's not much love left. He goes to work, he comes home, I feed him, he sits on the couch, watches tv, ignores me and our two children (ten and fourteen) and goes to bed. We have no sex life. I'm staying with him mostly for the kids and because my job skills are limited. Do you think I'm an idiot?



Marooned in Kennewick

Dear Marooned,

In a word, yes. On my block, we call a marriage like yours a dead horse. The smart cowgirl gets a new horse and rides away. No, Uncle Mike is not ignoring the difficulties involved. Sixteen years of inertia is a tough act to follow but staying together for the kids is not always the act of a rational adult. One parent at peace is worth two parents at war. As for security (i.e. money), the benefits of economic comfort in a pressure cooker are as nothing compared to clipping coupons in an apartment free of emotional wreckage. If you choose to stick it out until the kids are gone, Uncle Mike suggests two things. First, make one last effort to resuscitate your dead horse. Remember, if you can, what you ever loved about this man. Encourage him to do the same about you. Buy him silk boxer shorts. Second, prepare your escape route by upgrading your job skills and smiling (in a ladylike manner) at attentive men.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I think my girlfriend's cheating on me. How can you tell if a woman's having an affair?

Dennis M, Portland

Dear dense,

Not knowing how naive and clueless you are, Uncle Mike is uncertain where to begin. One surefire way to find out is by asking her. Should she a) shift her eyes, b) giggle nervously, or c) tell you you're out of your mind, you've got big trouble. Here's Uncle Mike's checklist on infidelity: Does she have a friend you've never heard of who's recently been taken ill? Has she enrolled in a night class? Has she begun to hum for no reason? Has she taken to staring at you, shaking her head, and sighing? Does she wonder what you'd look like in a mustache? Has she become morbidly concerned with your happiness and personal growth? Has the phrase, 'follow your bliss' snuck into her conversation? At crucial moments, does she cry out someone else's name?

Dear Uncle Mike,

So, since you've got a half-baked opinion on everything, what are your thoughts on O. J. Simpson?

Michelle S, Seattle

Dear Snotty,

Having watched none of the televised proceedings or suffered through their feverish analysis in the much too popular press, Uncle Mike has reached a fully baked conclusion. It's none of Uncle Mike's business. Uncle Mike doesn't know these people, was not there, and saw nothing.

The tendencies of democracies are, in all things, to mediocrity, since the tastes, knowledge and principles of the majority form the tribunal of appeal.
James Fenimore Cooper




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When strength takes leave
and all that's left
is a turbulent belly, a handful
of addictions and a mind
struggling to focus
from one line to the next—

When strength takes leave
and all that's left
is a trembling finger
and one dull eye revolving
in a tired skull, flickering
from petal to leaf—

When strength takes leave
and the teeth crack
and the body sags
like a bag a fat
fit only for rendering—


This is when the fight begins in earnest.

—Bill Clunie

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