



Dear Uncle Mike,  
What do you think about a husband who reads his wife's personal e-mail and then gets jealous over what he's read?

Heidi in San Francisco

Dear Heidi,

Much the same as he feels about being asked questions that lack the parameters necessary for an intelligent response. For the sake of polite discourse, Uncle Mike will assume the offending message made no mention of a recent episode of wild abandon, or confirm plans for a future excursion into the dark heart of infidelity, or otherwise contain passages purple enough for a jury of adults to see as grounds for a male hissy fit. Given these conditions, your husband's wounded ego hasn't a leg to jump up and down on. You may remind him for Uncle Mike that, in the days when messages from a distance came in envelopes, he would be guilty of both mail tampering and violating the privacy of a human who, in the best of all possible worlds, would be his most trusted and respected friend. If, as Uncle Mike assumes, the message was addressed to you alone, his decision to read it was a serious violation of social contract. A person puts up with this sort of behavior only at great risk to the long term quality of their life. Uncle Mike has a shameless love for simple truths. Conflict begins when we mistake someone else's affairs for our own. Wars begin when someone takes something that isn't theirs. Assure your husband such behavior is beneath him and that much depends on his ability to resist it.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Well, I hope you like giving advice on the sinister topic of love. I am currently living with my fiancée (I guess you could call him that; I have yet to see a ring). I am 21 and he is 12 years older than I, divorced with two kids. We have been together a year now. In the beginning of our relationship, he was always expressing his feelings to me. I remember feeling like he was almost "too" much, he ALWAYS wanted to be near me. About six months ago, I really fell in love with him. And now, the tables have turned. He has come from a terrible divorce and I have come from several bad relationships myself. We have a terrible communication problem. Last night he walked away from a conversation in which we were both frustrated. Which left me to spend a night alone for the first time in a long time. He gets very defensive when I tell him that something he did hurts me. How do I talk to him in a way that he will listen? How do I react to this?

Heartbroken and Questioning, Portland, Oregon

Dear Heartbroken Questioner,

Fortunately for all concerned, Uncle Mike enjoys giving counsel on all matters not pertaining to which fork to use. You ask about love. Unless there are some strengths and delights to your relationship that you failed to mention, it sounds like half of your engagement is disengaging. The dance you describe is called approach/avoidance, much like the tango only more ancient. Regardless how egalitarian a pair bond turns out to be, it begins with a pursuit: a constellation of primal, often brutal behaviors which, performed artfully, constitutes courtship. During the six months before you fell in love, your suitor was, in Shakespearean terms, wooing you. Putting its best paw forward as it were. Your avoidance invoked his approach. At the moment you opened yourself, flower like, to his professed devotion, the dynamics of your little tango changed. Once a person gets past the hysterical weeping, one of the funniest things about love is that the person who cares the least has the most power. You have become, in business terms, a done deal. Uncle Mike isn't suggesting for a minute that this is the best you can, and jolly well should, expect in the way of male behavior. If, for instance, what your fiancée was really interested in was sharing a life with you, your acceptance of his suit would exalt his soul, precipitate a you've-made-me-the-happiest-man-in-the-world experience, and make him vow to live up to the honor you've paid him. Such a person would pour more energy into the system, not less. Giving the swine the benefit of the doubt, this may be a reflex that will pass in time. Real relationships with women tend to terrify men, who, living as they do in an entirely different biochemical universe, have a need for emotional aloofness wise women eventually cease trying to understand. Although gender distinct behaviors are, for the most part, myth, male humans resist being absorbed with a strength only matched by the female humans who, with the purest and best of intentions and no small amount of patience, devote their lives to absorbing them. On a good day, it's all quite amusing. Given time, your male may learn to face his phobias like a man and recognize you as a fairy sent by his karma to remind him of a purpose higher than himself. From what you say, Uncle Mike wouldn't bet on it.

In dealing with his fellow humans, Uncle Mike finds what works the best is to see things as they are. This person's behavior is hurting you. The distance between you is increasing rather than decreasing. It's becoming more, not less, difficult to communicate. You seem to express yourself well, which leads Uncle Mike to suspect the reason your fiancée is neither listening nor hearing is that he doesn't find what you're talking about all that interesting. What one does now is draw a line in the sand. Calmly and compassionately tell him that the person he's become isn't someone you'd consider spending the rest of your life with. Tell him that, your love for him aside, he has a decision to make and that, if he'd like, you'll be glad to give him a day or two to make it. As some philosopher must have said: life is short, a bum marriage is long.

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