



Dear Uncle Mike,

I'm a 28 year old waitress. Over the years, you've been very supportive of service people (tips, showing appreciation, not being a jerk) and so I thought I'd write to see if you could let men in on what seems to be a secret -- just because a waitress smiles at you doesn't mean she wants to (colloquial term for loveless sex) you. I'm no naive kid and I know enough

about men to know they think with their (colloquial term for male sexual apparatus) most of the time, but it's August and I work in a tourist town and I've lost whatever patience I had in June. I'm a professional and believe in treating my customers as welcome guests. This includes warm smiles and the sort of friendly banter that I hope makes their meal a pleasant experience. A certain (high) percentage of men think this means I'm coming on to them. Don't they understand I'm working and when I'm slammed the last thing on my mind is arranging after-work liaisons? Maybe I am naive. Or in the wrong business. I'm sure you don't do this but if you did, what could the waitress do to slap some sense into you without being rude? Thanks, Uncle Mike. I really enjoy your column. You seem like an interesting person. What are you doing after work?

Shelli, Portland, Oregon

Dear Shelli,

Since Uncle Mike doesn't have what anyone in their right mind would call a job, the term "after work" has no meaningful referent. This alone would make a rendezvous tricky. It would also make his iguana jealous and Uncle Mike has no intention of going through that again. Sad, but there it is. Even sadder is that there is no real answer to your problem. When it comes to women, a certain (high) percentage of men have what can most charitably be called a rich fantasy life. Even the clearest of realities often confuse them. But then, you know this. You do know this, right? A certain (not quite so high but high enough) percentage of men are the sort of shameless hounds for whom the rolled up newspaper was invented. In between are the average mopes who are either without mates or mated to someone who no longer finds them amusing. Waitresses perform a crucial social service by providing men with a faint hope that they've still got what it takes. This is often part of their rich fantasy life. The only positive thing to be said of the problem is that, given patience, even Labrador retrievers can learn the command: "Cut it out." You might also try: "Gee golly, thanks, but you're just too much man for me," or "I'd love to but my psychiatrist says I could still kill again", or one of Uncle Mike's personal favorites: "You're mistaking me for something on the menu you could handle or afford."

Dear Uncle Mike,

I read Vanity Fair and they always have a piece about what books really interesting people are currently reading. What's on your bedside table these nights?

Mary, Seattle, Washington

Dear Mary,

Before Uncle Mike answers, let him ask you something: did it ever occur to you that those interesting people might be lying through their teeth? If Vanity Fair called you and you were reading Victorian erotica, wouldn't you answer War and Peace or James Joyce? As for Uncle Mike, he usually reads nothing but the Oxford English Dictionary, Greek tragedy, and anything he can find in Sanskrit. Okay, okay. He just finished a piece of trashy true crime (with pictures) and just started Club Dumas, a novel by Arturo Perez-Reverte, a Venezuelan writer whose previous work, The Fencing Master, rolled Uncle Mike's socks down. He also tries to keep something by James Thurber within arm's reach. Regardless how bad life gets, an hour with Thurber's Dogs will make it better. Especially the essay entitled The Dog Who Bit People.

THE RARY PAGE

Dear Uncle Mike,

I've become involved with two men at the same time. They both know about each other. One of them is an old and dear friend of mine. We've known each other forever. He's one of the best men and people I've ever known. I love him dearly and I know he loves me. The other man I met a year ago. He also says he loves me and has ardently pursued me. We have this "attraction", for lack of a better word, that I've never felt before. Yet, he is very quiet. It's hard for him to express his feelings. We do not share the deep level of communication my old friend and I do. They have both proposed to me this past month within a day of each other. I can't go on being with both of them, trying to make up my mind. It's driving me crazy. Does one marry the one who loves them best or the one they love best?

Stuck in Stayton, Ohio

Dear Stuck,

Uncle Mike would suggest examining the nature of your "attraction" in light of the very real difference between excitement and pleasure. If you need to know more about your more recent lover in order to make an intelligent decision, by all means go and find out. Your old friend sounds like a person who'll return your calls no matter what. Being a hopeless romantic, Uncle Mike would always choose the person who plays his heart and hormones like a wind chime. But then, Uncle Mike has made some spectacular mistakes in such matters. He would still caution you against marrying anyone simply because you love and understand each other. It probably wouldn't be enough for him, married to a woman with a low threshold for boredom and a difficulty deciding what she wants. Besides, one doesn't decide about love; any love worthy of the name decides about you.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My mother is celebrating her 75th birthday next month. My father died last fall and this is her first birthday in 52 years without him. I asked her how she wanted to celebrate and she replied "Very quietly". Because she is afraid she will break down in front of others, she wants only immediate family and a quiet dinner. The problem is my older sister. She is convinced that Mom needs cheering up and wants to surprise her with a house full of old friends and neighbors. I have talked to her until I'm blue in the face and cannot convince her that Mom is serious and really would not like to be the center of so much attention. I don't know what to do. My sister is ready to do invitations on her computer.

Sis in Seattle

Dear Sis,

Uncle Mike assumes (at some peril, given your sister's behavior) that your mother has expressed her wishes directly to her. If so, your sister is crying out to be stopped. The time for subtlety has passed. The three of you should get together for lunch, or perhaps several gin fizzes, and lay all the cards on the table. Being a hopeless optimist, Uncle Mike can see no way your sister would carry on against a clear statement of your mother's wishes. It is, after all, her birthday. One proviso: be sure your sister isn't right in her hunch that your mother would really delight in and benefit from a gathering of her extended family. Not being able to look the woman in the eye, Uncle Mike can offer no assistance in the judgment call. He can however, and does, wish her a happy birthday.



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The state calls its own violence law, but that of the individual crime. Max Stirner

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