



Dear Uncle Mike,

I am an unmarried male, twenty-seven years old, with a noncritical crisis: what's up with women who resent being treated like ladies? I'm not an out of touch dweeb who lives in a romantic daydream but I do open doors for women, light their cigarettes and treat them differently from men. I was raised to be a gentleman and refuse to change. I take a lot of crap because of it. I can't understand how or why a woman would put up with being treated like a fishing buddy. I've had women say they didn't want to see me because I'm sexist and treat them like they're weak and need help and protection. It's not true. I treat them the way my parents taught me to treat women. Do you hear from other guys about this?

Aaron, Bellingham, Washington

Dear Aaron,

Not nearly enough. Uncle Mike takes his hat off to you (a gesture of respect predating the era of the baseball cap). Like all belief systems, being a gentleman is divided into two parts: theory and practice. In theory, there's nothing wrong with paying gender specific respect. It's just out of fashion; sort of the turtle neck sweater of social behavior. Like all belief systems, its success is measured by the practice; which is to say, attitude and appropriate application. If your gentlemanly behavior isn't a scam, if your heart is good, there are women who will respond favorably to it. There are women who will spit on you because their belief system is anchored to the notion that men are basically slime bags who use manners to get over on them. In all fairness, it's men who have taught them this. As for application, fit your performance to the audience. A gentleman isn't pushy about being a deferential human being. If the pleasure of another is truly your first concern, it's their pleasure you should be concerned with, not your own. Be patient and stick to your principles and get your licks in when you can. As a fellow gentleman, Uncle Mike thanks you for your help in creating a world in which men and women feel personally fulfilled enough to be nice to each other. During your long, lonely nights watching reruns of ER, try to look on the bright side. Women who cannot accept kindness and respect are seldom actively involved in giving it. The wisest thing a gentleman can do in such situations is to close the door, not open it.

Dear Uncle Mike,

What do you think about a 45 year old woman who's seeing a 24 year old man?

Geoff, Portland, Oregon

Dear Geoff,

That the two of them have something to learn and that, if no one interrupts them, it shouldn't take long.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I have a woman friend I've known for several years. We've been close since we met but lately we're getting closer. We're both in our midforties, I'm single, her marriage is sucking big time. Over the years, we've talked about other people crossing the line and how our friendship meant so much to us because we didn't. Now it looks like it might, or at least could. I've always thought her husband was a jerk, so there's no loyalty issue there. She just needs someone and I care about her, maybe more than I realized, or in a deeper way. I don't expect you to solve my dilemma but I would be interested in your thoughts.

Leaning, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Dear Tilted,

Uncle Mike has just one: the woman is married. That her marriage is troubled and her husband is a jerk are details, not extenuating circumstances. It also doesn't matter that, given your feelings for each, you'd be making love instead of rooting around like a pair of weasels in rut. It doesn't even matter that the comfort and compassion you could give might deepen both your friendship and her marriage, although this plot development is more common in cheap novels than in real life. All that matters is that this woman made a vow and your only option as a friend is to do everything in your power to help her keep it. If her marriage is over, she needs to get out of it. If it's not, she needs to get on with it. What the two of you need to do is to reaffirm your vows of personal integrity. In the meantime, light a candle. Everytime you have lascivious thoughts about your friend, hold you hand over the flame until you can't stand it. The pain is nothing compared to what it could be.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My aunt and uncle, whom I hardly know, are celebrating their 50th anniversary next month. They live an hour's drive away and our relationship is hardly a close one, just Christmas and birthday cards. The few times I've seen them as an adult, they've been aloof to both me and my husband. Are we obliged to go? Do we have to take a gift? My husband says yes but I say why be phony? What do you think?

Mary, Beaverton, Oregon

Dear Mary,

The first thing you need to do is to stop confusing Uncle Mike with Ann Landers. At the risk of startling you, dear, there are people out there with real problems, or at least interesting ones. To say yours falls short of the mark is to hilariously understate the case. Should you honor your blood relatives on the occasion of their golden wedding anniversary? To answer, Uncle Mike must first ask if you were raised by weasels. If not, your dilemma disappears. Uncle Mike refuses even to discuss the question of gifts. Which is to say, there is no question.

Dear Uncle Mike,

What's the stupidest thing you've ever done?

K.L., Phoenix, Arizona

Dear K.,

It's hard to tell yet, the competition is fierce and is still going on. So far, it's been imagining his wants are his needs and defining himself according to them. Next to this, the shattering episode with the Flamenco dancer was nothing; or nearly nothing.

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