

Dear Uncle Mike,

I'm a happily married woman seriously considering divorce. Two years ago, I married a wonderful man. It was the second marriage for both of us and we went into it with the idea it would be our last. My husband has a daughter from his first marriage. She was sixteen when her father and I got together and she's now twenty-one.

The two of us would probably never be the best of friends, but our relationship was basically a good one. She moved away to go to school just before her father and I got married. The past two years have been everything I'd hoped for. I love my husband very much and we are happier together than I ever imagined I could be with anyone. The problem is his daughter. The relationship she was in fell apart (I can understand why) and she moved back home three months ago "to get back on her feet" and our life has gone to hell.

She has a good job as a waitress in a nice restaurant and makes good money. She has never contributed a penny to the household. Money was never mentioned when she moved in because she was pretty badly shaken up. Although it wasn't what I wanted, I understood she needed some help and I was perfectly willing to give it. I'm not willing to be a sucker and that's what I'm feeling like.

I'm beginning to see a side of my husband I'm not comfortable with at all. He makes excuses for her behavior - she rarely lifts a finger, stays out late and brings dates home to "kick back" in her room. She makes a point of being nice to me but I overheard her telling someone on the phone that "Dad's really cool and his wife is okay but she gets on my nerves." I told my husband about it and he dismissed it as normal behavior between step daughters and step moms. I don't think living under someone's roof and eating their food and cutting them behind their back is normal. I think she's turned into a conniving little manipulator who's got her father wrapped around her finger. She can be very charming.

My husband and I have begun arguing about her and it's beginning to have a negative effect on our relationship. He says she'll move out eventually. I can't see why she would. I would appreciate your thoughts and any suggestions you have for resolving this before I leave her the house and her father.

JoAnne

Dear JoAnne,

The situation you describe is what family counselors call a dog that won't hunt. While it's hard to get a clear take on reality from your perspective alone, I'd say the young woman needs to find her own place; if only to escape very probable violence at your hands. Uncle Mike has been accused in the past of defending the failings of young women more rigorously than he defends the failings of young men. Being a man, Uncle Mike merely finds the ill behavior of young men less interesting and charming. Familiarity can and does breed contempt.

Which brings us back to the young woman squatting unpleasantly in your life. If she is able, as it sounds that she is, to afford even a fourth floor walk-up with a bath down the hall, she needs to pack her stuffed animals and get to stepping. Even among parents and children, there are rules of hospitality. She is, by your description, laughing in the face of them. Since she is behaving, not like family, but like a privileged guest, she needs to be let know her privileges have nearly expired.

You mention no children of your own. Whatever is, is right. While you're having second thoughts about your husband for standing by his daughter in an unsettled time of her life, you might thank whatever powers you believe in for being married to a man who will. There are many character flaws greater than this; lack of patience and compassion being two of them.

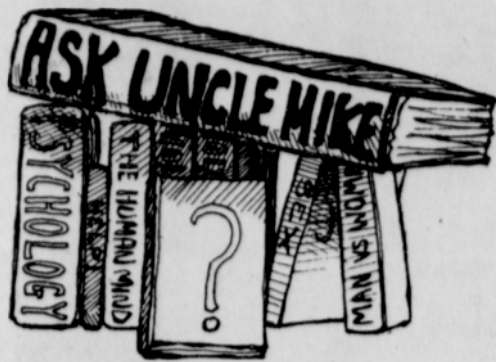
Dear Uncle Mike,

A month ago I met a guy at a dance club and wound up going home with him. It was the first one night stand I've ever done. It seemed okay at the time but he keeps calling me and wanting to hang out. He's nice but I'm not interested and he won't give up. He lives a hundred miles away and last week he drove down and showed up where I work. I feel like I'm being stalked. What do I do? I don't want to be mean but I've tried everything else.

Nicole

Dear Nicole,

Uncle Mike will begin with the assumption the young man is not a sociopath. Surprising you at work does not, by itself, qualify as stalking. It does qualify as unacceptably annoying behavior. Uncle Mike would first recommend not confusing being honest with being mean. If you haven't told the poor mope you're not interested in furthering, or even continuing, the relationship, you really should. Being honest isn't being mean, it's being honest. In any case, when he calls, you must be "just heading out the door." If he shows up, you must "be busy" or "already have a date with a friend." Cooling his ardor isn't being mean; it's being kind. He's obviously deeply smitten with you and the only way he's going to wake from his impossible dream is by being smitten by someone else. Giving him that opportunity is an act of compassion.



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"Back to Black...Drawn to Painting... A Formula on Past and Recent Events" a showing of work by Oregon coast artist Paul Torian

December 8 - January 5
ArtSpace Gallery
in Bay City

Paul Torian has lived in the Nehalem Valley for about 15 years. He lives close to the Acey Line thin and has been up there to observe what's been happening. He's very concerned about forest issues and those issues have been a focus of his art (assemblages, sculpture, paintings and drawings) almost forever. Paul is also a Viet Nam vet who is skeptical about the motives underlying the current conflict...and of course the Gulf War. Torian's work has consistently explored the tension between industrial society and its impact on the natural world. Images combine familiar evocations of nature, especially massive tree trunks, counterpoised with equally familiar images of industry—gears, tools, industrial machinery. Paintings and drawings from the last year have a lighter quality, incorporating translucent color which creates its own tension—an emotional lightness that belies the intensity of the drawn images beneath the paint.

Besides drawings and paintings, this show will present for the first time examples of Torian's "gas pump" series—antique gas pumps burnished, painted and supplemented with images that evoke the connection between oil consumption and current events. Torian has been working on the pump series since 1991 and the Gulf War.

Opening Reception Saturday, Dec. 8, 3 - 6 pm

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Gallery hours are Fridays and Saturdays, 12 to 8 pm, and Sundays 11 to 4 pm. ArtSpace includes not only the gallery, but a café serving great food. Reservations are recommended for dinner and can be made by calling 503/377-2782. Bay City is located five miles north of Tillamook.

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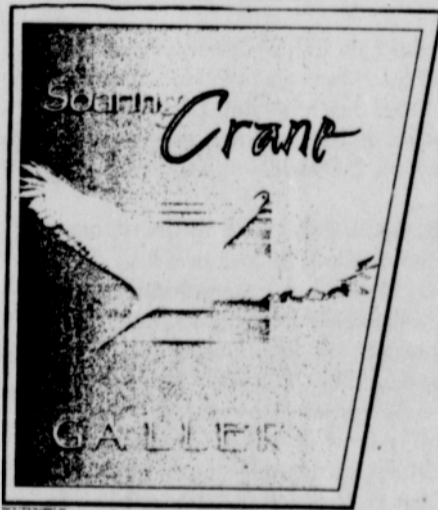
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—Denis Healey



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