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SAVAGE LOVE

MOTHER LOVE

BY DAN SAVAGE

My father left my mother abruptly when I was 14 years old, and he hasn't contacted either of us since. It was a crushing blow for her, and she retreated from the world. She was never bitter about it, but it was devastating. She lost the love of her life for no apparent reason and was left completely alone, except for me. We have both done our best to forget about him. We were extremely close for the next four years and actually slept in the same bed every night. Eventually, we began doing something that most people would consider evil but neither of us has ever regretted. It was just something that happened. And it wasn't something that just happened once — it went on for two years and ended only when I left to go to university. I haven't thought about this for years, and it is something my mother and I have never discussed. She has since remarried and seems perfectly fine. But even today, we sometimes send each other friendly messages that are vaguely suggestive. The problem is I mentioned it to my wife recently and she went ballistic. She called me and my mother sick and moved into another bedroom and refuses to have sex with me. I wish I had never mentioned it, but it was part of a truth-or-dare session we were having. This has been the situation for the last three months. I have finally lost my patience and I am thinking of leaving. I have never cheated on my wife or hurt her, either physically or emotionally, and I have supported her financially while she studies at university. I have mentioned going to a counselor, but she refuses and claims that she is married to a monster and that no woman would want me. We don't have any children — so if I were to leave, I wouldn't be disrupting an innocent's life. Do you have any advice?

Truthful Revelation Unmakes Two Happy Spouses

I'm not a professional counselor, TRUTHS, but I'm gonna climb out on a limb and say that a game of truth or dare isn't the right time to reveal an incestuous sexual relationship with a parent. Dr. Hani Miletski and Dr. Joe Kort, on the other hand, are professionals: Dr. Miletski is a psychotherapist and a sex therapist, and Dr. Kort is a sex and relationship therapist. Both are certified by the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, and both are authors — Dr. Miletski literally wrote the book on the subject of mother-son incest: *Mother-Son Incest: The Unthinkable Broken Taboo Persists*.

"There's no wonder his wife is so upset," said Dr. Miletski. "Sexual relations between mother and son are considered the most taboo form of incest."

Dr. Miletski told me it isn't uncommon for a woman who has been abandoned by her husband to turn to an adolescent son for emotional comfort.

"These women are often very insecure and needy," said Dr. Miletski. "Unbeknownst to the son — and sometimes to the mother — the son begins to feel responsible for his mother's well-being and emotional support. The son becomes 'parentified' and is treated by his mother as a substitute husband. Occasionally, this close relationship between a mother and her son evolves into a sexual relationship, and the substitute husband becomes her lover as well. The situation described in this letter sounds exactly like that. And while I'm glad this man believes he has not been affected by this boundary violation, [the fact that he and his mother are] sending suggestive messages to each other may suggest otherwise."

Dr. Miletski prefers not to use terms like "abuse" or "trauma" unless the person involved uses those terms themselves — which you didn't, TRUTHS, but I'm going to go ahead and use them. Here goes: You say you have no regrets, and you don't mention feeling traumatized by the experience, but the absence of trauma doesn't confer some sort of retroactive, after-the-fact immunity on your mother. She is responsible for her actions — actions that were abusive and highly likely to leave you traumatized.

"In the mental-health field, we have a growing body of work showing that not everyone who is abused is necessarily traumatized," said Dr. Kort. "I have seen countless men who have been sexually abused by their mothers who do not label it as abuse because they were not traumatized. But his mother seduced him, dismissing the sexual and emotional needs of a teenage boy. There is no other way to describe this other than abuse, however consensual he may have perceived it to be at the time."

But that was then, TRUTHS. What do you do about your situation now?

"Unfortunately, I don't think his wife will ever be able to put this revelation behind her," said Dr. Miletski. "I think his best bet is to leave her, move on, and seek therapy. A therapist will help him deal with the emotional upset of the breakup with his wife, as well as process what happened with his mother."

Dr. Kort sees some hope — albeit slim — for your marriage.

"To gain empathy and compassion from his wife, TRUTHS should be willing to listen to her concerns, fear, and anger," said Dr. Kort. "He also needs to invite her to have compassion and empathy for the vulnerable position he was in — but he cannot do that until he has some compassion for himself. Untreated, the abuse he suffered from his mother, as well as the loss and grief over his father, could be troubling to his wife and their relationship. Perhaps if he ever has children, the reality of the abuse will hit him. Parents don't have children to turn them into lovers."

And, once again, people probably shouldn't reveal incestuous relationships to their current partner during a game of truth or dare.

You can find Dr. Miletski's books and learn more about her work at DrMiletski.com. You can find Dr. Kort's books and learn more about his work at JoeKort.com and on Twitter @drjoekort.

I'm writing you to ask about a friend of mine. He's a gifted artist who hasn't truly dedicated himself to his art. It's as if he's afraid of success. He's also a so-called "womanizer," and every time he meets an interesting woman who's into him, he inevitably fucks it up. For this reason and some others (that I won't mention), I believe he's a repressed homosexual. Let's just assume that he is. Every time we talk, maybe once or twice a year, he recounts his latest fuckups with women (and everything else). During the last call, I was very close to asking him if he was sure about his sexual orientation. I believe that what makes him unable to face this aspect of his life is interfering with everything else, too. I would like to be able to talk openly about it with him without hurting him. Do you have any tips?

Artist Failing At Relationships

Sometimes a cigar isn't just a cigar — but an unsuccessful heterosexual is almost always just that. Unless the details you didn't share include, say, a massive collection of gay porn or messy closet-case classics like drunken lunges at male friends or running for Congress on a "family values" platform, your friend will have to remain in the hetero column for now. That said, if you believe a solid gay ass pounding would jar loose the professional and romantic success that has thus far eluded your friend, go ahead and ask him if he's a "repressed homosexual." It might cost you his friendship, AFAR, but someone who calls only once or twice a year to recount his romantic fuckups doesn't sound like much of a friend anyway.

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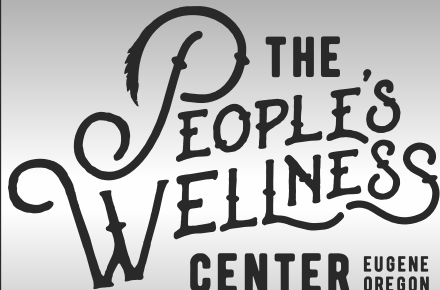


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