



CAROLYN HAX

Secret boyfriend

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

Dear Carolyn:
So I've been dating a girl for more than a year. She keeps her family and friends completely separate from our relationship. She recently met my folks, but not only have I not met hers, she also hasn't even TOLD her family she's seeing someone. When her parents come over, I'm supposed to make myself scarce. When she goes out with her friends, it's quite obvious she's going alone. She insists she loves me, and she says she's "independent." But I can't help but wonder if she's also keeping secrets from me, just like I'm a secret to her family and friends. It sure would be easy considering how much of her life I'm not privy to. Help?!

Baltimore

Your pride just asked my permission to bang its forehead on my keyboard. If she's "independent," then she'll be able to stand on her own if, say, you don't like her friends, or her parents don't like you. Likewise, if her feelings for you wane, then she'll be strong enough to break up with you despite your popularity among her friends and family. An independent person will be able to separate her own opinions of you from others', so she won't have to worry about peer pressure to get married or parental pressure to break up or whatever pressure to whatever. An independent person will be shaped and informed by past experience but not emotionally crippled by it, and so even a bad breakup with someone who insinuated himself into every part of her life wouldn't justify her shutting you out. And even if you disagree with my take on independence, nothing I listed is too scandalous to put into words by Month 2. "I had a messy breakup with a guy my family and friends all loved, and I don't want to relive that." Or, "The minute I mention a boyfriend, my family and friends start badgering me relentlessly." Really, is that so hard to spit out?

Now, if she has some other explanation for treating you like an unsightly rash, even one that's tough to admit, then you're still entitled to hear it and make your own judgments (something independent people can handle). You've stuck by her for more than a year, after all; you're not some fling. But if "independence" is really all she's got to justify her secrecy, it seems like a howler to me. What matters, of course, is how it sounds to you. Whenever you're not sure whether to endure, protest or flee someone's behavior, just ask yourself whether you understand and respect the reasoning behind it. That's roughly the line between acceptable and unacceptable treatment.

If you don't buy your girlfriend's reasoning, then say so. Ask for a more thorough (or just less ridiculous) explanation. And if she doesn't improve on her first explanation, then tell her that's not good enough, and spell out the way you expect to be treated. Not like you're an unsightly rash, for example. And if she doesn't start including you or offer a valid reason not to, then ask yourself why you're still there, and why you've stuck around so long.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on www.washingtonpost.com/discussions.

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or tellme@washpost.com.

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THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 836

in which we offered a list of institutions and asked you to describe what would happen if any of them ran, or were run by, another institution — including any of the others on the list. A number of Losers noted that if Microsoft took over a sperm bank, it had better come up with another name. And that if McDonald's ran a college English department, it would have a ready supply of labor after graduation.



If a sperm bank ran a hospital, nobody would care how old the waiting room magazines were. (Bruce Alter, Fairfax Station)

BAD COMPANY: HONORABLE MENTIONS

If the Kohler bathroom fixture company ran the Redskins, the season would be down a much nicer toilet. (Craig Dykstra, Centerville; Larry Yungk, Arlington; Erik Wennstrom, Bloomington, Ind.)

If Microsoft ran the U.S. Army, boot camp would have to be followed by reboot camp. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

If Congress ran an elementary school, half the curriculum would be recess. (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn; Kevin Dopart)

If Warren Buffett ran Congress, then it would cost at least 10 times as much to buy it. (Ed Gordon, Georgetown, Tex.)

If a hospital ran a funeral home, staffers would still come around at 6 a.m. to take everyone's temperature. (Roger Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.)

If a hospital were run by Ryanair, the IV drips would be replaced by saline vending machines. (Samuel Aaron, Wellesley, Mass., a First Offender)

If Facebook ran a hospital, the staff would know something about you. (Judy Blanchard, Novi, Mich.)

If a hospital ran a stationery store, paper would be known as a Graphite- and/or Ink-Receiving Device and cost \$3,900 a sheet. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

If Tiffany's ran a hospital,

2 the winner of the 1994 paper doll book "Bill & Al's Excellent Adventure":

If Match.com ran the Redskins, Jason Campbell might actually connect with somebody now and then. (Christopher Lamora, Arlington)

3 If a hospital ran Guantanamo, those prisoners would be out of there in three days. (Mel Loftus, Holmen, Wis.)

4 If a Wall Street investment house ran your dry cleaner, you wouldn't have to remember to empty your pockets. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

babies would actually be born with silver spoons in their mouths. (Pat Kanz, Ocean Pines, Md.)

If McDonald's ran a sperm bank, it could use the same current slogans: "Created Just for You," "I'm Lovin' It" and "Open Extra Wide." (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

If the Washington Nationals ran Match.com, at least you'd know at the start of your date that you're unlikely to make it to second base. (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

If an investment house took over Kohler, it would change its name to Bare Sterns. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

If the Redskins ran a sperm bank, Dan Snyder would charge a fee for naming rights. (Chuck Smith)

If a sperm bank ran Microsoft, the Xbox would be more popular than the Xbox. (Judy Blanchard)

If a college English department ran the Redskins, the games would still be pass-fail. (Dean Alterman, Portland, Ore.)

If Microsoft ran the Redskins, their end zone would be labeled "404." (Sue Lin Chong, Baltimore)

If the Redskins ran a sperm bank, the product would always fall in the red zone. (Tom Witte,

Montgomery Village)

If the Redskins were run by the Cherokee Nation, they'd be renamed the Washington Lying White Bastards. (Cy Gardner, Arlington)

If the Kansas City Chiefs owned the Washington Redskins, then MAYBE that would explain what happened Sunday. (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

If the Redskins ran the Marine Corps, they wouldn't have beaten the spread on the invasion of Grenada. (Howard Walderman, Columbia)

If the Redskins ran TD Ameritrade, it would just be Ameritrade. (Kevin Dopart)

If the Redskins ran McDonald's, you could order the four-piece nuggets off the \$20 value menu. (Jeff Contompasis)

If the Masons secretly ran this contest, they wouldn't print any entries poking fun at them. Unless, what if they wanted to make it look like they didn't run it? In that case they'd print such an entry. And to really throw people off, it would be one that wasn't funny and didn't even fit the rules. (Russell Beland)

And Last: If Kohler ran The Post, The Style Invitational would be on Page 1A. (Ward Kay, Vienna)

Next week: Strip Search, or Panel Surfing

Online discussion Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational at washingtonpost.com/styleconversational.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 840: Frittering away the neurons

Hiring a Russian: Looking to someone else to immediately and mysteriously solve a problem.

Gnawing the wing: To enthusiastically engage in a mundane activity to a point just beyond normal involvement.

Joining the Vikings: Making one last push in your career. One. Last. Push.

Not-a-Loser-just-a-reader Jeff Hamilton brought our attention to the current issue of Esquire, which, along with "Kate Beckinsale Is the Sexiest Woman Alive" and "Blake Lively Cooks in Five-Inch Heels," features a nifty list of imaginative phrases to describe various situations, many of them in the X'ing-the-Y form, such as the examples above. This week: Give us some more colorfully useful phrases; they don't have to be in the X'ing-the-Y form.



Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a giant flamingo-shaped pen whose top is a huge pink plume and whose base is a big pink foot. You won't absently walk off with it, we guarantee. Donated by Cheryl Davis. Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Nov. 2. Put "Week 840" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Nov. 21. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's results is by Pete Morelewicz; this week's honorable-mentions name is by Roy Ashley.

INK FLAMINGO: This week's foot-tall second-place prize pen.

iPhone finger painting isn't child's play

BRUSHES FROM IC

More than 100,000 people have downloaded the application. "It has a low barrier to entry," says the app's soft-spoken, 33-year-old software designer Steve Sprang, who lives in Mountain View, Calif., and gets 70 percent of each \$4.99 download fee. "There's no mess and it's always with you."

To exhibit a medium that has evolved from technological curiosity to celebrated creative con-

"It has a low barrier to entry. There's no mess and it's always with you."

— Brushes designer Steve Sprang

duit, we asked four Washington artists to compose pieces for us using Brushes. And we want to see your work, too. Watch a video of the creation of a Brushes piece and submit your own Brushes artwork at washingtonpost.com/style.

Patterson Clark, 54, is an artist for The Washington Post.

"It's a supremely mobile way to paint, allowing one to work quickly in cramped, dark spaces. I'm intrigued by the idea of using iPhone paintings as a way to take readers to places where photography is inappropriate or forbidden. Unfortunately, iPhones are taboo at the Supreme Court, so I chose Bar Pilar on 14th Street Northwest instead."

James Huckenpahler, 40, is an artist, instructor of new media at George Washington University and a member of Dorkbot D.C., a coalition of artists and engineers who are interested in the intersection of electronic art and physical computing.

"It's nice to be forced out of my comfort zone. Using Brushes for the first time was a lot like drawing with an Etch-a-Sketch for the first time: You've got to completely recalibrate the eye-hand coordination, learn where the sweet spots are in the technique and generally figure out how to make something new and beautiful



CASSANDRA KOPECKY

PLUG-IN: Cassandra Kopecky, 17, is an art student at the Duke Ellington School. "As a young artist, I do think that this technology is very cool... but it did drain the battery of my iPod," she says.

that doesn't rely on old, sleepy habits."

Cassandra Kopecky, 17, studies visual arts at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

"As a young artist, I do think that this technology is very cool and convenient, but it did drain the battery of my iPod. I think that, in the future, I would work with it as long as I had a wall charger. I do see this as being a different medium for artists to work in, but I see it as a medium that will not replace traditional methods, but work alongside or independently from them."

Kyle Spence, 20, is a fourth-year architecture student at Howard University.



JAMES HUCKENPAHLER

SHAKE IT UP: James Huckenpahler, 40, is a member of an art and technology coalition. "Using Brushes for the first time was a lot like drawing with an Etch-a-Sketch for the first time," he says.

when you don't have a pen and paper and you want something you can e-mail to yourself, you have a digital copy of it. And the

cool thing is you can take a photo with the iPhone and then paint or sketch on top of it."

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DOONESBURY

By GARRY TRUDEAU

