

CAROLYN HAX

Into's & outs

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

Dear Carolyn:

"He's just not that into you": Do you feel that this phrase is overused? Do you think it has just been thrown out there to simplify relationships? I recently told someone, "You're just not that into me," because I felt it was true based on his actions/inactions. He didn't take it very well. I'm confused. If he really liked me, shouldn't he have tried harder?

HJNTTY

If it's a phrase, then it's overused. I can say that much with confidence. And I think this one is thrown out there to simplify breakups, not relationships.

Even when people can be summed up perfectly by the phrase du jour — they rarely can — they resent the hell out of being reduced to a cliché. It's better to stick to specifics: "When you [in/actions here], I feel [sad/angry/hurt/whatever]."

That's the answer to the phrasing question. As for the shouldn't-he-have-tried-harder question, that depends on who he is and how he shows affection. What you perceive as neglect could be the best effort of someone who is happy to be with you; some people are just less demonstrative. Since we can never be sure-sure what someone thinks or feels about us, your job isn't to pry the truth out of him. Instead, it's to figure out what you get from this relationship, whether it's right or enough for you, and therefore whether to stick around.

In other words, whatever he's giving is the best he has for you right now. Do you want it, or not? It's on you to decide.

Dear Carolyn:

How does one tell the difference between a best friend of the opposite sex, and an emotional affair?

Baltimore

With whom would you rather be, the mate or the best friend?

For Baltimore:

I've been the "best friend." Zero physical attraction, but he's one of the best guys on the planet. When he married, I cut the wedding cake for them. When he divorced, I helped to pick up the pieces. When he dated, I listened. When I dated, he did the same. When I was on bed rest, he sent me books and told me funny stories on the phone. When he remarried, I flew 2,000 miles to meet her.

We will never sleep together, and that's clear for both of us. We've traveled together, and that gets old after about a week.

If I had to choose between my husband and my friend, I'd choose my husband. But I hope I never have to.

Anonymous

That certainly defines "a best friend of the opposite sex": as... a best friend! "Opposite sex" is irrelevant. Thanks.

Re: Baltimore:

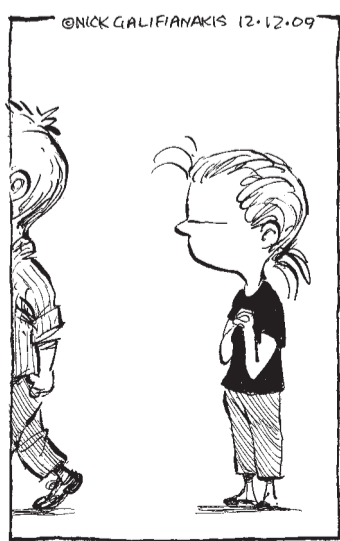
I thought maybe Baltimore was asking how you tell if one's partner's opposite-sex friend is just a best friend or an affair. Any suggestions for that situation?

Anonymous 2

Ah. If your partner is present and accounted for in your relationship, then accept the best-friendship. If the partner is not present and accounted for in the relationship — meaning, you feel lonely, even though you supposedly have someone at your side — then tell your partner. If you attack the best friend, then you risk missing the point, which is the deterioration of your bond with your mate.

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.



NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 843

In which we asked for a line that might humorously precede the first line of a well-known book, poem or song. Virtually everyone led into the first line of "Hamlet" — "Who's there?" — with, duh, "Knock, knock."

2 the winner of the voodoo doll toothpick holder: "Mr. Beck, you've got your hand up her rectum. Um, that's not how you milk a cow." "I hardly ever read instruction manuals."

— "Arguing With Idiots," by Glenn Beck (Peter Metrinko, Gainesville)

3 "Hey, Bobby, how do I tell my girlfriend she's prickly and has a strong smell?"

"O my Luve's like a red red rose . . ."

— Robert Burns (Ron Nessen, Bethesda)

4 I'm sorry, but I think your last facelift was one too many: You never close your eyes anymore when I kiss your lips . . .

— "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling," by Mann, Weil and Spector (Vic Krysko, Surat Thani, Thailand)

SEMIPRO-LOGUES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

"What's wrong with Seattle's catcher tonight?"

"It is an ancient Mariner, and he stoppeth one of three."

— "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Russ Taylor, Vienna; Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

"President Clinton, do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"All this happened, more or less."

— "Slaughterhouse-Five," by Kurt Vonnegut (Drew Bennett, West Plains, Mo.)

"Ms. Winsky, when did you realize the president was going to ditch you?"

"Seated one day at the Organ, I was weary and ill at ease."

— "The Lost Chord," by Adelaide Procter (Peter Metrinko)

You think I'm a fool, dontcha? Well, I didn't just fall off a turnip truck this morning, you know.

They threw me off the hay truck about noon.

— "The Postman Always Rings Twice," by James M. Cain

(Craig Dykstra, Centerville)

"Honey, you won't believe how much I saved today at the mall!"

Alack! what poverty my Muse brings forth.

— Sonnet 103, by William Shakespeare

(Judy Blanchard, Novi, Mich.)

Thanks to Hooked on Phonics . . . I read the news today — oh, boy!

— "A Day in the Life," by Lennon and McCartney (Ward Kay, Vienna)

He voted for the health-care bill, just like all of the other Democrats, but Elmer Gantry had an excuse:

Elmer Gantry was drunk.

— "Elmer Gantry," by Sinclair Lewis (Jim Noble, Lexington Park)

Justice Scalia, how would you describe obscenity?

"I can't tell you — but you feel it —"

— Emily Dickinson (Peter Metrinko)

Underwear with a string called "G" — 'Twas awkward — but it fitted me.

— Emily Dickinson (Dion Black, Washington)

Whew — THERE's the Minneapolis airport.

O Captain! my Captain! Our fearful trip is done!

— Walt Whitman (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

Oh, Toni, they've canceled our show — no more "Muskrat Love" duets! O Captain! my Captain! Our fearful trip is done!

(Russ Taylor)

I must remember to specify no MSG next time:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my sense . . .

— "Ode to a Nightingale," by John Keats (Roy Ashley, Washington)

What would you advise the people of New Orleans if Katrina floods the city, Director Brown?

When you walk through a storm, hold your chin up high . . .

— "You'll Never Walk Alone," by Rodgers and Hammerstein (Chris Doyle)

Why can't I understand a single word

you say?

"Oh, I come from Alabama . . ."

— "O Susanna," by Stephen Foster (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

"Do you understand the plot now, Miss Hedren?"

"Why do birds suddenly appear every time you are near?"

— "Close to You," by Bacharach and David (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

"Maw, we need a new Sears catalogue in the outhouse!"

"Why's that, Paw?"

"All the leaves are brown . . ."

— "California Dreaming," by "Papa John" Phillips (Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D.)

"Dear prince, dost thou know the name of the gentleman on yon first base?"

"Who's there."

— "Hamlet," by William Shakespeare (Stephen Dudzik)

And last: Eventually, there were only two people left in the world who had not succumbed to the lure of the Style Invitational.

Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.

— "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone," by J.K. Rowling (Christopher Lamora, Arlington)

See more honorable mentions at washingtonpost.com/styleinvolitional.

Next Week: Healthy Choice, or Once More, With Healing

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

DANCE REVIEW

This 'Nutcracker' has special charms, local flavor

BY SARAH KAUFMAN

Septime Webre's "Nutcracker" may not appeal to purists, but if you relish a party scene that truly parties, a battle scene swirling in smoke, cannon fire and a regiment of soldiers who borrow some high-stepping precision dancing from the Rockettes, as well as a second act full of acrobatic one-upmanship, this is the "Nutcracker" for you. (And for me.)

The brazenly fresh approach that juices this production, which the Washington Ballet is performing at the Warner Theatre, doesn't stop with placing the traditional German tale in a Georgetown setting with Frederick Douglass on the guest list. The theme that runs through the Edith Wharton-era costuming, decor and cast of characters is vintage Americana, from the Nutcracker Prince's resemblance to George Washington to vestiges of the American West: a dancing kachina doll and a Daniel Boone-ish frontiersman.

But just as important, there's a different feel to this "Nutcracker," one of showmanship and neovaudivillian razzle-dazzle, which is Webre's specialty and his gift. To wit: A kid slings a dead rat across the parlor and the butler traps it in a chafing dish. The kachina doll wears a platter-size headdress that creates a dazzling, whip-whopping weathervane effect when he turns. The cavalry buck and canter on nearly life-size ersatz horses as they charge the Red Coat Rats. And later, a corps of cardinals, dripping scarlet feathers, prances around like Ziegfeld beauties, while in the background an oversize tomat courts the birds' queen like a hound dog.

Through it all, we're told the familiar story of young Clara and her parents' Christmas Eve party (though it's rowdier than in most accounts), the wooden nutcracker she receives from her godfather, and the dream of a fantasy land that the doll inspires. But Webre adds plenty of elements of his own devising. One especially nice touch is the ragged soldier stooped outside the gates to Clara's mansion at the start of the ballet; as the guests parade in, one stops to



RICKY CARIOTI/THE WASHINGTON POST

HOLIDAY TREAT: The Washington Ballet, here in dress rehearsal, has freshened an old chestnut.

give him a food basket. The scene is over in a moment, but it's a moving reminder both of those serving overseas and of those on these shores who are going without.

One bizarre note: The "live" Terra Cotta Warrior, Chi Chang, who has been showing up around town as a gimmick to promote the statues in the National Geographic exhibition, will make a cameo appearance in the party scene at Saturday's 2 p.m. performance, in his full baked-earth regalia. (Other spe-

cial guests, including George Stephanopoulos, have appeared in past years.) Which prompts the thought: As the next party pop-ins — the Salahis?

Financial strain has led the company to use taped music in place of a live orchestra playing Tchaikovsky's score, and this takes the festive atmosphere down a notch or two. It's a shame that the dancing and the opulent production values aren't further enhanced by theater-filling sound. But despite that, Thursday's cast whisked up momen-

tum and kept it going straight through to a singularly pumped-up finale, with Brooklyn Mack's frontiersman windmilling through space in a run of no-hands cartwheels and double back-flips that nearly shot him into the wings.

As Clara, Washington School of Ballet student Talia Startzman embodied girlishness in full flower, with note-perfect animation. One of the least showy but most memorable segments is for the Anacostia Indians (the Arabian dance, in other productions).

Here, in stunning un-costumes that bared more than they covered, Laura Urgelles and Tamás Krizza were steeped in understated nobility. Overstatement was more typically the order of the evening, but it wasn't out of place, not in this world where, at one point, a gigantic Mother Barnum whirls atop a carousel that spills out little clowns.

The full-on energy of this production is well-framed by Peter Horne's beautifully painted sets, which don't strive to be realistic. Rather, they are entirely two-dimensional; the effect is of a Victorian pop-up Christmas card, which throws the live performers into relief. The lighting has been improved in the second act, adding more warmth to the antics here among the bumblebees, mushrooms, deer, foxes and other adorable fauna. Rather than conjuring up a land of bonbons, this "Nutcracker" takes us to springtime, on the banks of the Potomac, and it's quite a nice place to end up.

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THE NUTCRACKER

presented by the Washington Ballet through Dec. 27 at the Warner Theatre. Call 877-598-8497 or visit www.washingtonballet.org.

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