

# Tongue in Cheek: Friends & Lovers

The winter holiday season has come and gone, but here comes Valentine's Day – and with it yet another really awkward time for dealing with friends and lovers.

No, not my lovers. I mean the friends who have within the last year become newly single, and their lovers, boyfriends, girlfriends, playthings – heck, what am I even supposed to call them?

During this last year, one friend of mine split with his partner of many years. I had never known him except as part of the couple. And though I'd had hints, I had never known that the relationship was not a healthy one – a fact his ex readily confirmed, by sending out some of the most hateful emails that I'd ever seen to mutual friends who tried to remain friends with both. It was worse than Liza and David, but minus the Botox injections.

**kevin  
isom**

under his nose. "See! You can't be seeing this guy so often. You need to explore! Find you! Not get tied down!" And not fall into the same traps that you fell into with your ex. Been there, done that, shredded the t-shirt.

Plus, for me, there's the "don't get attached to a puppy that ain't yours" element. I have to keep telling myself that this might be the very last time they go out,

of the newfound sexual freedom you might be enjoying. Like Dave, for example. Another couple we know seems to take some delight in making sexual comments around Dave and whoever his date of the moment is. I only do it for sport. They seem, after a few drinks, to leer just a little. But some of the guys Dave goes out with are pretty cute. Is it wrong to use them for your sexual fantasies? Or just a free gift with purchase?

Maybe it's been a while since I was single, but I don't remember what it was like to take a date to a holiday gathering or a restaurant on V-Day. It seems to me that a party is the absolute worst for forcing a false sense of intimacy. With all your coupled friends around, often with their arms around each other, with the festive décor of red hearts and lace, the reasonably good wine, and the schmaltzy lovey-dovey music, it's inevitable that you want to be more of a couple than you actually are.

It's as if you can't help jumping from a handshake to a deep prostate exam. I saw this with Dave and one of his repeat dates. In Dave's case, it involved wearing matching harnesses. He and his date reminded me of Santa's reindeer: the kinky ones, Thrasher and Vixen. Unfortunately, I thought Thrasher was a really nice guy. I could feel myself getting attached. Or was it that he looked really good in a harness?

So I'm trying desperately hard to keep for another month, at least, my New Year's resolution: to call all of Dave's dates "Guy." As in, "Hey, Guy, good to see you." Or, "Hey, Guy, nice to meet you." That way I won't get attached, and I won't inadvertently pressure Dave to get attached.

That, and I won't feel so awkward when I can't remember his name, but I can remember the harness. ▼

*Kevin Isom is the author of It Only Hurts When I Polka and Tongue in Cheek and Other Places, available at bookstores and online. He may be reached at isomonline@aol.com or www.KevinIsom.com.*

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Yet the fact remained that the friendship that stayed intact after the divorce was fundamentally changed. Dave (not his real name) was now single, which meant that he would bring dates to dinners, parties, and so forth. Sometimes it was the same date. Sometimes it was a new date. Sometimes my head began to spin as I desperately tried to remember their names.

As an experienced writer on the subject of relationships, I knew that Dave shouldn't get into any serious relationship soon after a divorce, so seeing the same person more than a few times actually made me nervous. I'd want to go dig up a column or two to wave

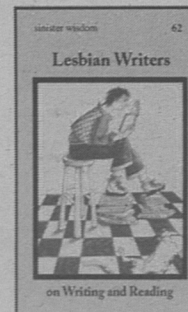
so I may never see this person again, and if I do, I'll have the stigma of "you were friends with the guy I went out with who wasn't right for me" all over me. I also can't let myself like the new guy too much, because then I might unduly influence Dave into liking him more than he actually is ready to. He could fall harder than he would have, get hurt, have another divorce, and it would all be my fault. Okay, maybe not, but it's nice to imagine that I have that kind of pull with people.

I'm guessing it's pretty hard to be newly single, especially on Valentine's Day, when you have lots of coupled friends. Some of them are probably secretly envious

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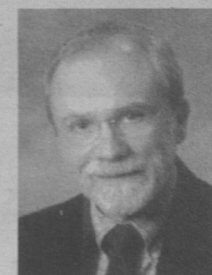
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