



TONGUE IN CHEEK BY KEVIN ISOM

Forget Auld Acquaintance on V Day

SOMETIMES, LIKE WATCHING RYAN Seacrest smooch Mariah Carey at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve, you just want to go ahead and forget about "auld acquaintance." Especially with Valentine's Day and all its shameless romanticizing of relationships coming up.

I'm having such a moment now. My Valentine's Day was preceded by the news that a friend who is turning 40 is inviting my ex-partner to his birthday party. Now, if I had had an ideal divorce and an ideal post-divorce, or even anything remotely resembling it, this would not be a big deal.

But my ex simply vanished. It was couched as a separation, by which he really meant a breakup, as he told me a few months later. I've spoken to him three times in the last five and a half years, by his choice. So how uncomfortable, if not downright painful, will it be to see him at a small party? I'd just as soon eat a handful of ground up red and white doilies.

I think my family was hurt almost as much as I was by the David Copperfield act. My mother tells me she still thinks fondly of him and feels sad that he's not around. Then I remind her what a number his disappearance did on me, and she adds, "Well, I was very upset that he acted that way."

I still remember the pain like it was yesterday. Even though intellectually I knew we were not a good match, I'd never felt anything so searing. But mostly what I feel now is disappointment that four-and-a-half years together were worth no post-relationship effort. That when he made the decision to go, that was that, and all attachments were cut. It was as if, Poof!, at the stroke of midnight, four-and-a-half years vanished.

The problem is that, in a normal world, attachments are never cut so easily. Not after so much time.

Sure, after I ended a dating relationship with a guy I went out with non-exclusively for three months right after my separation/divorce, I find it a bit weird that years later, that fellow does not speak to me. In three months, lasting attachments do not form – not without the appropriate leather restraints, anyway. But in four and a half years, they do.

So how to deal with this? My current significant other, Derek, immediately suggested that we go visit my sister the weekend of the party. My mother weighed in with the suggestion that I skip the party – better to avoid discomfort. My sister said she didn't know how she could even attend herself without having some choice words for him.

I asked a lesbian friend of mine how she would cope in a similar situation. She simply looked at me in astonishment and said, "You mean you're not friends? Like I am with all my ex-girlfriends?!" I suddenly wished I'd been dumped by a lesbian.

But my best friend noted that I can't avoid



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every event where I know my ex will be present. And she wickedly suggested that his tendency to disappear when I'm around might at least be consistent.

Last summer, I stopped going to a weekly pool gathering after he began to attend. I'd been going for years and years, and apparently he'd been invited for years after the disappearance, but he had finally decided to begin attending. A clothing optional pool gathering, like a small birthday party, was not the way I wanted to see my ex for the first time in years, so I opted out, and I chalked it up to the hosts being inconsiderate to invite us both. Besides, I'd been going for a while, and I simply thought of it as his turn.

So do I stay or do I go? No one else at the party is going to have a clue about my internal dynamics. In fact, the only person it really matters to is me.

I suppose I could pretend he was only an acquaintance and not acknowledge any prior relationship. But then, that would be buying into the total detachment and devalue a large chunk of my life. Or I could pretend that he had died – so that I would be pleasantly surprised to see him. Or maybe I'll just think about that Ryan Seacrest-Mariah Carey smooch and be glad that, like that ridiculous smooch, the evening will be over soon.

Come to think of it, considering my options, that Mariah Carey kiss is actually starting to look pretty good. ▼

ITS ALWAYS A SUNNY DAY IN THE WORKSHOP!

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