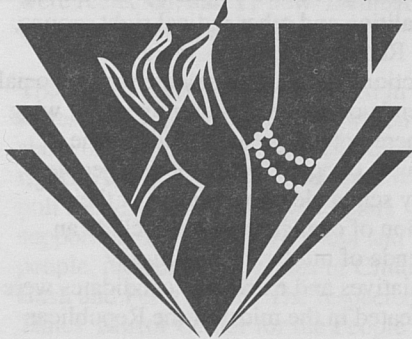


WRITE YOUR
AUNTIE PEARL



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Dear Auntie Pearl: After six years together, my partner and I have decided to separate. Our breakup has been calm and considerate with one big exception: the cats. I came home one day this week to find that "Glo" had simply taken them to her new apartment! Now we can't talk without one of us yelling or in tears. I know the cats can't get the kind of time and attention with her as they would with me. Dear Abby would probably tell me to get a new kitten and let my "old roommate" have the cats, but you know better, Auntie Pearl. I will show Glo your advice. Please help.

Heartbroken

Dear Heartbroken: If you have performed this breakup without so much as a sniffle to the idea of Glo leaving, don't take out your submerged grief on the cats. If you two can't have a good fight or cry without bringing the little

darlings into the picture, they're better off in foster care. Put your passion where it belongs. You're in tears? Finally! Let it out, and let Glo AND the cats go. Then use your calm, considerate approach to set up visitation.

Dear Auntie Pearl: Anybody reading this will probably think I'm a cold-hearted bastard, but I have to get this off my chest. My lover "Jim's" best friend, "Brad", was diagnosed with AIDS two months ago. He's Jim's first friend with it, and Jim totally flipped. At first, I understood. I've lost three friends in four years. I know what it's like. Jim began spending all his free time with Brad. Jim would get home after I was in bed, and barely had time to discuss bills and groceries with me before leaving in the morning. He started to look exhausted.

When our annual vacation week got closer, and Jim said he couldn't leave Brad, I had to say something. I explained that now is the time to enjoy our time, while Brad is healthy, and that Jim can't keep up this pace for what could be years of Brad's life.

Well, all hell broke loose. Jim accused me of everything from being callous to being afraid of Brad's illness. Auntie Pearl, I've administered to three friends' lengthy illnesses; held hands, called ambulances, planned funerals, dialed parents. I'm hardly afraid. If anything, I'm tired, and I understand the importance of living while we can.

Instead of learning from my experience, Jim won't listen. He won't talk to a counselor, his family, or other friends about Brad. It's been weeks since we've spent time together. I can't keep our relationship together by myself. So there's nothing to do but watch our relationship fall apart. I'm not writing for advice, because I know there's no way around this problem. I just needed to write this out. Maybe it will help one of your other readers. Thanks for being there.

A Reader

Dear Reader: Auntie's nieces and nephews do not simply watch a relationship fall apart. This is nothing more than the "worse" of better or worse. That means you must give more and expect less. Of course you're tired. But your beauty rest will have to wait.

So you're convinced that Jim is exhibiting a fine array of therapeutically incorrect behaviors. Bully for Jim. Let him. Leave him notes of encouragement. When he stops feeling pressure from you, he'll start reaching out on his own. Until then, keep busy. See friends. Take that vacation alone. Run the house your way for awhile. Now's the time to paint over the wallpaper Jim insisted on ... he's in no state to notice.

This is the stuff that strengthens relationships, dear Reader. Be a friend to Jim now so you can have your lover back later. You've had too many losses. Auntie will not stand by and let you lose Jim also. ▼

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