

TOUGH LOVE FOR SINGLES

by Dr. James Dobson

An entire book could be written on the love-must-be-tough principles as related to unmarried men and women. The problem, quite frankly, is that many singles want so desperately to be married that they violate the laws of freedom and respect in romantic relationships. That is like turning a fire hose on a flickering flame. All that remains is black smoke and ashes.

I heard of one young man who was determined to win the affection of a girl who refused to even see him. He decided that the way to her heart was through the mail, so he began writing her a love letter every day. When she did not respond, he increased his output to three notes every 24 hours. In all, he wrote her more than 700 letters—and she married the postman.

That is the way the system works. Romantic love is one of those rare human endeavors that succeeds best when it requires the least effort. Those who work the hardest at it are the most likely to fail. And speaking of people who try harder, no one beats a determined young man named Keith Ruff, whose story was told in the *Los Angeles Times* by Betty Cuniberti. The headline read, "Man Spends \$20,000 Trying To Win Hand of Girl Who Can Say No."

A love-struck man holed up in a \$200-a-day Washington hotel has spent, at latest estimate, close to \$20,000 demonstrating to his beloved that he won't take no for an answer to his marriage proposal.

On bended knee on Christmas Day, 35-year-old Keith Ruff, once a stockbroker in Beverly Hills, proposed marriage to 20-year-old Karine Bolstein, a cocktail waitress at a Washington restaurant. He met her in a shoe store last summer. The pair had gone out a few times over a two-month period before the proposal.

To his proposal, she looked down and said, "No."

Since then, Ruff has remained in Washington and demonstrated his wish that she reconsider by sending her everything but a partridge in a pear tree.

That may be next.

He is, he thinks, "close to spending all of my money. I'm not an Arab sheik."

The tokens of his affection include a Learjet, placed on standby at the airport, "in case she wanted to ride around"; between 3,000 and 5,000 flowers; a limousine equipped with a bar and television, parked outside her door; a gold ring; \$200 worth of champagne; catered lobster dinners; musicians to serenade her; a clown to amuse her younger brother; a man dressed as Prince Charming bearing a glass slipper; cookies, candy and perfume; and sandwich-sign wearers walking around her home and the restaurant where Bolstein works, conveying the message "Mr. Dennis Keith

Ruff LOVES Ms. Karine Bolstein."

Ruff gave her father a basket of nuts and \$300 worth of cigars "to pass out to his friends at the Labor Department. It may sound goofy, but I like him."

He also had flowers delivered to his beloved's mother, who works at the French Embassy. "I don't think her mother likes me. She called the police," Ruff said. "But I'll keep sending gifts to her also. How could anyone be so mad?"

Ruff says he has not worked in some time, describing himself as being of independent means. He said he will spend his last dime and will beg for money if he has to, that he will "keep on trying for 10 years, 20 years. I'll ask her to marry me 50,000 times. It doesn't matter how many times she says no. I will do everything in my power that's not absurd or against a reasonable law. I wouldn't stop if she became a nun. I've never felt this way before!"

Bolstein, meanwhile, said she is flattered, but too young to get married. She also said the house looks like a funeral parlor.

Ruff said, "I don't want to force her to love me, but I can't stop."

Ruff said he spends a lot of time in his hotel room planning what to do next and occasionally crying. He said Bolstein called him once. "But I hung up on her. I didn't like what she said.

"Reality to me, is disturbing," he said. "I'd rather close my eyes and see her face. I'm living with hope. And some very big bills." 1

There are several things ol' Ruff needs to know about women, assuming Miss Bolstein hasn't gotten the message across by now. He could cry in his hotel room for the next 50 years without generating the tiniest bit of sympathy from her. Very few women are attracted to sniveling men who crawl, who bribe, who whine and make donkeys of themselves in view of the whole world. Who wants to marry an unambitious weirdo who grovels in the dirt like a whipped puppy? Goodbye, romance! Hello, poorhouse.

On a much smaller scale, of course, the same mistake is made by singles in other places. They reveal their hopes and dreams too early in the game and scare the socks off potential lovers. Divorcees often fall into this trap—especially single women who need a man to support them and their children. Male candidates for that assignment are rarities and are sometimes recruited like All-American athletes. I've seen no better illustration than the following item, also appearing in the *Los Angeles Times*. It was submitted to Virginia Doody Klein for use in her column "Living With Divorce":

I am a recently divorced, professional man with an unusual problem. I hope you can help me. A woman I dated once called me before I even had a chance to make a second date with her and wanted to know why I hadn't

called her again. After our second date she began to call almost daily with offers for dinner, something funny she'd read and thought I'd enjoy, etc. The crazy part is that this same routine has just started with another woman I'm just beginning to ask out. If such behavior is typical, maybe I should have stayed married! How do I extricate myself from this frenzied dating and have a nice, quiet social life? 2

Isn't it obvious what is occurring here? The women being dated by this "professional man" are chasing him around like a hound after a rabbit. And predictably, his natural impulse is to run. If they are interested in pulling him toward them, they simply must not invade his territory. Instead, they should maintain a sense of decorum in their responses to him.

I attempted to explain the "how to" of this recommendation during the mid-1970s when I was writing *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*. The concepts I was formulating then have withstood intensive scrutiny and provide the foundation for the material you are reading. This is what I wrote:

It is of highest priority to maintain a distinct element of dignity and self-respect in all romantic encounters. I have observed that many relationships suffer from a failure to recognize a universal characteristic of human nature. *We value that which we are fortunate to get; we discredit that with which we are stuck! We lust for the very thing which is beyond our grasp; we disdain that same item when it becomes a permanent possession.* No toy is ever as much fun to play with as it appeared to a wide-eyed child in a store. Seldom does an expensive automobile provide the satisfaction anticipated by the man who dreamed of its ownership. This principle is even more dramatically accurate in romantic affairs, particularly with reference to men. Let's look at the extreme case of a Don Juan, the perpetual lover who buzzes from one feminine flower to another.

His heart throbs and pants after the elusive princess who drops her glass slipper as she flees. Every ounce of energy is focused on her capture. However, the intensity of his desire is dependent on her unavailability. The moment his passionate dream materializes, he begins to ask himself, "Is this what I really want?" Farther down the line as the relationship progresses toward the routine circumstances of everyday life, he is attracted by new princesses and begins to wonder how he can escape the older model.

Now, I would not imply that all men, or even the majority of them, are as exploitative and impermanent as the gadabout I described. But to a lesser degree, most men *and* women are impelled by the same urges. How many times have I seen a bored, tired relationship become a torrent of desire and longing the moment one partner rejects the other and walks out. After years of apathy, the "dumpee" suddenly burns with romantic desire and desperate hope.

This principle hits even closer to home for me at this moment. Right now, as I am writing these words, I am sitting in the waiting room of a large hospital

while my wife is undergoing major abdominal surgery. I am writing to ease my tension and anxiety. While I have always been close to Shirley, my appreciation and tender love for her are maximal this morning. Less than five minutes ago, a surgeon emerged from the operating room with a grim face, informing the man near me that his wife is consumed with cancer. He spoke in unguarded terms of the unfavorable pathological report and the malignant infestation. I will be speaking to Shirley's surgeon within the hour and my vulnerability is keenly felt. While my love for my wife has *never* flagged through our 14 years together, it has rarely been as intense as in this moment of threat. You see, not only are our emotions affected by the challenge of pursuit, but also by the possibility of irrevocable loss. (The surgeon arrived as I was writing the sentence above, saying my wife came through the operation with no complications, and the pathologist recognized no abnormal tissue. I am indeed a grateful man! My deepest sympathy is with the less fortunate family whose tragedy I witnessed today.)

A better example of fickle emotions is illustrated by my early relationship with Shirley. When we first met, she was a lowly sophomore in college and I was a lofty senior. I viewed myself as a big man on campus, and my relationship with this young coed mattered little to me. She, in turn, had been very successful with boys, and was greatly challenged by the independence I demonstrated. She wanted to win me primarily because she wasn't sure she could, but her enthusiasm inhibited my own interest in return. After graduation, we had one of those lengthy conversations well known to lovers the world over, when I said I wanted her to date other fellows while I was in the Army because I didn't plan to get married soon. I'll never forget her reaction. I expected Shirley to cry and hold on to me. Instead, she said, "I've been thinking the same thoughts, and I *would* like to date other guys. Why don't we just go our separate ways, for now?" Her answer rocked me. For the first time in our relationship, she was moving away from me. What I didn't know was that Shirley stoically closed her front door and then cried all night.

I went away to the Army and returned to the University of Southern California for my graduate training. By this time, Shirley was an exalted senior and I was a collegiate has-been. She was homecoming queen, senior class president, a member of *Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities*, and one of the most popular girls in her class. And as might be expected, she suddenly looked very attractive to me. I began to call several times a day, complain about who she was spending her time with, and try to find ways to please my dream girl. However, the moment Shirley saw my enthusiasm and anxiety, her affection began to die. Gone was the challenge which had attracted her two years before. Instead, I had become just another fellow pounding on her door and asking for favors.

One day after a particularly uninspiring date, I sat down at a desk and spent two solid hours thinking about what was happening. And during the course

of the introspection, I realized the mistake I was making. A light flashed in my head and I grabbed a pen and wrote 10 changes I was going to make in our relationship. First, I was determined to demonstrate self-respect and dignity, even if I lost the one I now loved so deeply. Second, I decided to convey this attitude every time I got the chance: "I am going somewhere in life, and I'm anxious to get there. I love you and hope you choose to go with me. If you do, I'll give myself to you and try to make you happy. However, if you choose not to make the journey with me, then I can't force my will on you. The decision is yours, and I'll accept it." There were other elements to my new manner, but they all centered around self-confidence and independence.

The first night that I applied the new formula was one of the most thrilling experiences of my life. The girl who is now my wife saw me starting to slip away on that evening, and she reacted with alarm. We were riding in silence in my car, and Shirley asked me to pull over to the curb and stop. When I did she put her arms around my neck and said, "I'm afraid I'm losing you and I don't know why. Do you still love me?" I noticed by the reflected light of the moon that she had tears in her eyes. She obviously didn't hear my thumping heart as I made a little speech about my solitary journey in life. You see, I had reestablished the challenge for Shirley, and she responded beautifully.

The psychological force which produced our see-saw relationship is an important one, since it is almost universal in human nature. Forgive the redundancy, but I must restate the principle: *We crave that which we can't attain, but we disrespect that which we can't escape.* This axiom is particularly relevant in romantic matters, and has probably influenced *your* love life, too.

3

Tips for Loving Tough

Given that background, let me get very specific with those of you who are single but wish not to be. (No insult is intended to those who are single by design and wish to remain unmarried. That is a legitimate choice which should be respected by friends and family alike.) I have listed 16 suggestions that will help you conform to the principles of loving toughness in matters of the heart.

1. *Don't let the relationship move too fast in its infancy.* The phrase "too hot not to cool down" has validity. Take it one step at a time.
2. *Don't discuss your personal inadequacies and flaws* in great detail when the relationship is new. No matter how warm and accepting your friend may be, any great revelation of low self-esteem or embarrassing weaknesses can be fatal when interpersonal "valleys" occur. And they will occur.
3. *Remember that respect precedes love.* Build it stone upon stone.

4. *Don't call too often* on the phone or give the other person an opportunity to get tired of you.

5. Don't be too quick to reveal your desire to get married—or that you think you've just found Mr. Wonderful or Miss Marvelous. If your partner has not arrived at the same conclusion, you'll throw him or her into panic.

6. *Most important: Relationships are constantly being "tested"* by cautious lovers who like to nibble at the bait before swallowing the hook. This testing procedure takes many forms, but it usually involves pulling backward from the other person to see what will happen. Perhaps a foolish fight is initiated. Maybe two weeks will pass without a phone call. Or sometimes flirtation occurs with a rival. In each instance, the question being asked is, "How important am I to you and what would you do if you lost me?" An even more basic issue lies below that one. It wants to know, "How free am I to leave if I want to?" It is incredibly important in these instances to appear poised, secure and equally independent. Do not grasp the other person and beg for mercy. Some people remain single throughout life because they cannot resist the temptation to grovel when the test occurs.

7. Extending the same concept, keep in mind that virtually *every dating relationship that continues for a year or more and seems to be moving toward marriage will be given the ultimate test*. A breakup will occur, motivated by one of the partners. The rejected individual should know that their future together depends on the skill with which he/she handles that crisis. If the hurting individual can remain calm, the next two steps may be reconciliation and marriage. If not, then no amount of pleading will change anything.

8. *Do not expect anyone to meet all your emotional needs*. Maintain interest and activities outside the romantic relationship, even after marriage.

9. *Guard against selfishness in the relationship*. Neither the man nor the woman should do all the giving. I once broke up with a girl because she let me take her to nice places, bring her flowers, buy her lunch, etc. I wanted to do these things, but expected her to reciprocate in some way. She didn't.

10. *Beware of blindness to obvious warning signs* that tell you that your potential husband or wife is basically disloyal, hateful, spiritually uncommitted, hooked on drugs or alcohol, given to selfishness, etc. Believe me, a bad marriage is far worse than the most lonely instance of singleness.

11. *Don't marry the person you think you can live with; marry only the individual you think you can't live without*.

12. *Be careful to defend the "line of respect"* even during a dating relationship. A man should open doors for a woman on a formal evening; a woman should speak respectfully of her escort when in public, etc. If you don't preserve this delicate line when the foundations of marriage are being laid, it will be virtually impossible to construct them later.

13. *Do not equate human worth with flawless beauty or handsomeness!* If you require physical perfection in your mate, he or she may make the same demands of you. Don't let love escape you because of the false values of your culture. In the same vein, be careful not to compare yourself with others—which is the root of all inferiority.

14. If genuine love has escaped you thus far, *don't begin believing "no one would ever want me."* That is a deadly trap that can destroy you emotionally! Millions of people are looking for someone to love. The problem is finding one another!

15. Regardless of how brilliant the dating relationship has been, *take time to "check your assumptions" with your partner before committing yourself to marriage.* It is surprising how often men and women plunge into matrimony without ever becoming aware of major differences in expectation between them. For example:

- Do you want to have children? How soon? How many?
- Where will you live?
- Will the wife work? How soon? How about after children are born?
- Who will lead in the relationship? What does that really mean?
- How will you relate to your in-laws?
- How will money be spent?
- Where will you attend church?

These and dozens of other "assumptions" should be discussed item by item, perhaps with the help of a premarital counselor. Many future struggles can be avoided by coming to terms with potential areas of disagreement. If the differences are great enough, it is even possible that the marriage should never occur.

16. Finally, *sexual familiarity can be deadly to a relationship.* In addition to the many moral, spiritual and physical reasons for remaining virgins until marriage, there are numerous psychological and interpersonal advantages to the exercise of self-control and discipline. Though it's an old-fashioned notion, perhaps, it is still true that men do not respect "easy" women and often become bored with those who have held nothing in reserve. Likewise, women often disrespect men who have only one thing on their minds. Both sexes need to remember how to use a very ancient word. It's pronounced "No!"

These 16 suggestions are not guaranteed to win the hand of a lover, of course, but they will certainly beat the approach of Mr. Keith Ruff. And you'll save \$20,000 in the process! []

Notes

1. "Man Spends \$20,000 Trying to Win Hand of Girl Who Can Say No" by Betty Cuniberti, copyright 1982, *Los Angeles Times*. Reprinted by permission.
2. *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1982. From the nationally syndicated newspaper column "Living with Divorce" by Virginia Doody Klein, copyright 1982, Sun Features Inc.
3. *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1975), pp. 78-82.

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