

Over the Back Fence
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Approx 620 words

Advice to the lovelorn
By Alva Wood

Ever since the Evil Empire bought *The Disturber* from Lew Grant, they've been trying to slash their expenses.

"These syndicated columns cost us too much," Darth Vader wheezed at reporter Cynthia Hiebert the other day. "We need local columnists who'll write for free."

"What kind of columns?" Cynthia asks.

"Advice to the lovelorn," says Darth. "Read this," he says. "I swiped it off the Internet."

He hands her a printout:

"As a nurse, I work night shift. The other evening I set off for work leaving my husband watching TV as usual. I hadn't gone more than a mile down the road when my engine conked out. I walked back home to get my husband's help. I caught him on the couch making mad passionate love to a neighbour lady. He claimed she had fainted and he was giving her mouth to mouth resuscitation. When I asked why they both had to be naked to resuscitate her, he admitted that he'd been having an affair for six months. I told him to stop or I would leave him. Ever since I gave him the ultimatum he has become increasingly distant. He sent me flowers, but they were so wilted, I think he got them secondhand from a funeral parlour. What should I do?"

"She should dump him," says Cynthia.

"I didn't ask you to write it," says Darth. "Send that out to your local contacts, and see how well they do at responding."

She did. Here's what came back:

Yvonne Wentz: Be grateful. Walking has been shown to have many beneficial health effects. Your heart and lungs will certainly be in better condition for having walked home from your car.

Veejay Ramcharan: A car stalling after being driven a short distance can be caused by a variety of faults. If your car is pre-fuel injection, the problem is probably its automatic choke. There are three things you can do. If you open the hood and jiggle the linkage you can probably free the place where it is sticking, and get your car going again. Or I could install a manual choke that you control from inside the car. Or you could trade in your car and get a newer model with fuel injection.

Tessa Vanderkam: When I caught my cat Augustus fooling around in the alley, I took him straight to the vet and had him fixed. Now he just lies around and gets fat.

Terry Brown: Mouth to mouth artificial respiration is effective only in cases of drowning. Unless your neighbour was soaking wet, an emergency would normally require cardio-pulmonary resuscitation as well. Your husband should have been pressing her chest vigorously. I recommend that he attend the free CPR clinics held in River City several times a year.

Astrid Bowers: To revive wilting flowers, make a fresh angle cut on the ends of the stems. Place them in slightly warm water that has had an aspirin dissolved in it. Flowers can get headaches too.

Henry Hill: In my line of work, six months is an insignificant time. Nothing ever gets accomplished in such a short period. We've been trying to revise our zoning bylaws for over seven years now, and we haven't begun to come to a climax yet. So I doubt if you have anything worth worrying about.

Eleanor Frost: At my retreat centre, we do breathing exercises to develop calmness and tranquility. Panting is usually a sign of excessive stress, possibly precipitated by your unexpected appearance in your home. If you sent your husband and your neighbour up here for a weekend, I'm sure I could help them relax more with each other.

The Evil Empire has decided to keep on paying for syndicated columns.