



FLOWERS ARE NICE, BUT TELL HIM WHAT REALLY MAKES YOU SWOON.

Love in Bloom

Finally: hard proof that when he makes you happy, the relationship soars. And when his efforts backfire? That's where we come in. *By Faye Brennan*

Cheers to us, ladies: We definitely wear the pants in our relationships. A recent study found that when a woman is happy in her marriage, both her and her hubby's overall marital and life satisfaction increase. But if she's less than thrilled with her other half, you better believe they're both miz. "A happily married woman may be more likely to offer support—such as helping with meals, giving encouragement, or even having more sex—which enhances the husband's life," explains study author Deborah Carr, Ph.D., a professor and chair of sociology at Rutgers University. See that? Everyone wins!

But here's the catch: What men *think* will make us blissful in our union is often very different from what actually does. Allow these scenarios to explain what gets lost in the nicest of men's efforts. Then use our pro tips to ensure that, no matter what happens, you and he won't worry...you'll simply be happy.

HISMOVE

Your guy comes home with an unexpected gold necklace for you, "just because." It's a gaudy bauble that he says he's noticed a lot of coworkers wearing.

You feel: Annoyed...and slightly invisible. This piece is so clearly not your style (can't he see that?!). Not to mention it required zero originality on his part, which stings.

Make happy happen: "Look for the intention behind the gift rather than the immediate circumstances," says Karl Pillemer, Ph.D., author of *30 Lessons for Loving: Advice from the Wisest Americans on Love, Relationships, and Marriage*. Clearly, your guy was thinking of you and wanted to get you something nice. Why he hasn't picked up on your unique taste in jewelry yet? Perhaps he's too busy noticing all the other awesome things about you. At the very least, you should give him credit for attempting to surprise (and delight) you: In Pillemer's research of long-married couples, he found that spontaneous present giving boosts relationship satisfaction. But it's also fine

(and good) to let your dude know that, next time, it would mean even more if he picks out a more personal prezzie.

HISMOVE

He says "You clean up nice" or "You look skinny in that dress" as you're heading out for drinks with the girls.

You feel: Um, oh-kaaayyy. So usually I look messy, pudgy, or both? Thanks a mil, honey.

Make happy happen: "Although you know he's complimenting you, what he said does have a mixed message," says Margot E. Brown, Psy. D., a marriage family therapist and author of

You should give him credit for at least attempting to surprise you. /

Kickstart Your Relationship Now! Without getting defensive or passive-aggressive, just ask him to clarify (a simple "Sorry, I'm confused. Does that mean you like this outfit?" works). Odds

are, he'll explain that he simply meant to applaud your beauty, not offend you. In which case you should thank him, then offer a helpful hint: "Say, 'When you look me in the eye and just tell me I look hot, it makes me love you even more,'" suggests Brown. No confusion there.

HISMOVE

He brings you to a work event and won't leave your side. For a second. He even waited for you outside of the bathroom.

You feel: Like a dog on a leash. Is there a trust issue here?

Make happy happen: If he's



not usually such a stage-five clinger, then “his behavior is probably a noble attempt to make sure you’re having a good time and not feeling lonely,” says Pillemer. While you may not appreciate it, being up your ass the whole night is his way of showing he cares. (Now there’s a Hallmark card we’d like to see.) Reassure him by saying, “Babe, I’m having a great time, so why don’t you go talk to your office buddies? I think the way you’re shadowing me is even freaking them out.” Once you’ve acknowledged his intentions, he’ll lighten up, says Brown.

HIS MOVE

He typically takes the trash to the curb, but tonight it’s chillin’ in the kitchen. However, you notice the laundry (your chore) is all done.

You feel: Irritated, somehow—as if this is his sneaky way of getting you to

handle his dirty work. Couldn’t he have done both? *IS THAT SO MUCH TO ASK?!?*

Make happy happen: Slow your roll, sweetheart. “A solid relationship is made up of many small gestures like this, and he was likely expecting you to be pleased,” says Pillemer. Should he have trashed the trash *and* washed the clothes if he really wanted to wow you? Of course. But it’s wrong to assume that he didn’t do both because he’s trying to put one over on you. “Research shows that chores are one of the most contentious issues couples face. However, your man already has the right mindset because he’s willing to share the load,” says Pillemer. So stop overthinking things, recognize his efforts with a gracious “thank you,” then meet him halfway by leaving the garbage bag by the front door for him. Teamwork! ■

WHY MEN F--K UP

Writer and comedian Josh Gondelman explains the well-intentioned reasons fellas can get grand romantic gestures so very, very wrong.

In college, I was dating a lovely girl for a few months before we went home for summer break. Being the creative gent that I am, I decided to send her weekly packages stuffed with trinkets I came across (like a comic book starring Bon Jovi) and letters I wrote as myself or another character (like the head of the Bon Jovi fan club—did I mention she liked Bon Jovi?). I wanted each mailing to convey that I was fun, exciting, and devoted to her. Instead, I came off, at best, like a desperately needy child—and, at worst, like a serial killer in training.

“You don’t have to send these every week,” she told me over the phone. Of course I didn’t have to, I said. I *wanted* to. Isn’t that what good guys do? (Answer: No, it’s what creeps do.) Determined

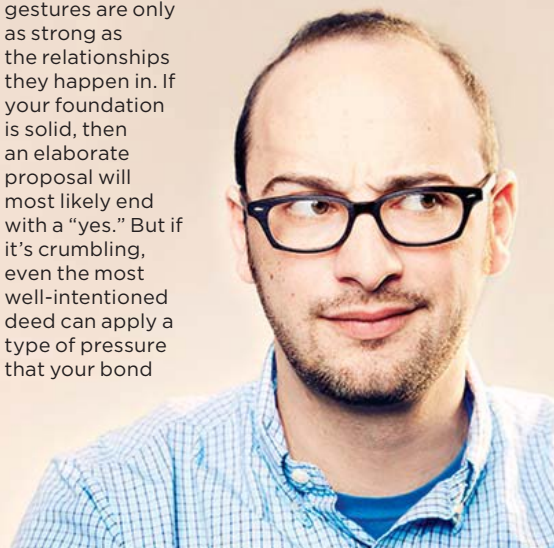
to be more lovable, I doubled my delivery efforts. She broke up with me as soon as we returned to school.

Years later, I was dating another lovely woman, but after 18 months, we were on the outs. Naturally, I suggested we take a trip to San Francisco. It would be fun! It would help us fall back in love! Right. It was not fun. We ended things on the last night of the trip.

What I’ve learned?

Big romantic gestures are only as strong as the relationships they happen in. If your foundation is solid, then an elaborate proposal will most likely end with a “yes.” But if it’s crumbling, even the most well-intentioned deed can apply a type of pressure that your bond

may not be able to handle. That’s why it’s important to ask yourself: Is it your partner’s efforts that annoyed you, or is it him? Because if it’s the latter, chances are you’d still be cranky with him on a private jet while wearing a bathing suit made of hundred-dollar bills. But if it’s the former, you can calmly explain to him that comics about a New Jersey rocker are not the way to your heart.



Follow Josh on Twitter:
@joshgondelman