

Dear Abby,

I am a young man of a certain amount of wealth. I recently went on an extended retreat to the mountains with a few other people around my age. It was like a year-long camping trip; we all enjoyed the simplicity and beauty of nature, we got to know each other, we became a family. I went with a former friend of mine. We'll call him THE PHILANTHROPIST for now. There is one young woman who was also on this trip.

She is like fire. She burns with the brilliance of some exotic FLOWER. She's so captivating, so entrancing, I couldn't help but fall in love with her. Problem is... I can't get her to give me the time of day. She's so focused on THE PHILANTHROPIST that she can't see me. He outshines me at every turn, and I'm left by the wayside.

But I'm really concerned about the FLOWER. I'm all for women's rights and empowerment, but she's compromising her beliefs just so that she can get THE PHILANTHROPIST to like her. Her character would suggest, and rightfully so, that she would feel an indignation toward him, yet "she only looked humbled. Some tears sparkled in her eyes, but they were wholly of grief, not anger" (123). THE PHILANTHROPIST is a fool who only has eyes for this wan, waif-like thing. She's like a SPIRIT "doomed to wander about in snowstorms" (26-27).

I'm worried that even someone who is as strong and unyielding in her noble beliefs as the FLOWER that she's susceptible to falling under the "spell" of THE PHILANTHROPIST and lose her identity. What should I do? How do I save her?--SUSCEPTIBLE TO MESMERISM

DEAR SUSCEPTIBLE TO MESMERISM: It sounds to me like you should probably take a step back. If FLOWER wanted to be with you, it sounds to me like she already would be. What do you offer her, "young man of a certain amount of wealth?" Let her live her life, which, frankly, probably shouldn't include you. Let those three figure out their own love triangle. It'll play out on its own. You act like you're entitled to the information regarding the other three, but be weary of becoming a nuisance.

Dear Abby,

So, I am a strong woman with important ideas about a utopic society. Last fall, I decided to get together with a few similarly minded people to try to create that utopia. With me were two men: one is a strong, stubborn sort of man... we'll call him... OAK, an OAK who "devoted his glorious powers to such a... positively helpless object as this reformation of criminals" (21). You know, one of those humanitarian types. The other is a smaller—a writer and possibly an intellectual. He wasn't unattractive, but he had a shifty look about him, always watching everyone as though they were actors in an experiment he was conducting, so I'll call him BIRCH, the tree with a thousand eyes.

Anyway, BIRCH and OAK vied for my affections up until the point that another girl entered utopia. I won't reveal my connection to this new person, but I will say that I felt a sort of sisterly... not quite affection, but... ah! I felt a sisterly pity for her. She had the look and presence of BABY'S BREATH: unnoticeable, unassuming, and unnecessary. And yet, the minute I take her under my wing, she sets her sights on both of these men and attempts to take them from me. She could have BIRCH! I only really care about OAK, he's the kind of man I'd compromise my morals for, but as I write, I can see her with OAK through the window. She is exactly the kind of woman who could make a man "degrade himself by stooping towards" her (122).

Ever since she came to utopia, my life has been hell. It's like I'm losing a piece of myself every time I see her, and losing more whenever I see her with OAK. It's like she's sapping my strength and using it to make herself more appealing, more desirable.

Now, I won't mince words about this. I am a proud woman. I am a feminist, and I'm not usually the kind of person who would ask advice of *anyone*, but I'm really in a bind. What kind of advice can you give me about this? --DETHRONED

DEAR DETHRONED: I know it can be hard not to be the center of attention, but sometimes, you have to let things go. If you're as great and as strong as you think you are, then you're a catch. Someone else will come around eventually, and you won't need to become part of a ~~cult~~ utopia to do it. Also, BABY'S BREATH is added to bouquets as a finishing touch, something to tie everything together. Maybe the real problem is that you're not seeing the value in her, and she's started taking advantage of that. You made a tactical error, but it's not like your life is over.