

Some Shit Advice

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THE PHYSIOCRATS
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NOTHING GETS IN THE WAY OF SEX, or of shitting, so much as God. There are a few notable exceptions: mothers, or lack of reciprocity, or erectile dysfunction, or yeast infections. But though there are ways of getting around God, as there are ways of avoiding moms (and the almost pleasant bread-smell of fungal overgrowth), the religious imperative to avoid sex is less reliant on context, just as likely to follow you into the library stacks or the public bathroom as He is onto the dance floor, or into the arms of a beautiful woman, the girl you know just well enough to know that the sweat beading on her thighs is not the source of your desire, but the conversation you will have as you imagine its salt. Among these impolite intrusions, God's favorite is the bathroom, where the sacrifices He demands in exchange for answered prayers are, some

would blaspheme, disproportionate to the answer. For many letter writers, this too-religious attitude toward shit moves them to write to me for advice:

“A day after having sex with a forbidden partner (F.P.)—I won’t detail the reasons for its forbidding, as I would like to stay on topic, but it is safe to say that the prohibition had many signatories, including a wife, a cat, whose timing for making biscuits was inopportune, and whose vocal register was uncannily close to my partner’s, many states’ laws, and, I can easily imagine, a long-dead aunt, or Great-Aunt, who may have been prescient enough to have tried to warn the girl off of red-heads decades earlier—I became very ill with the flu. I deserved it, some would say, but if those ‘some’ were merciful, they should have more simply wished for my death, which I assumed was coming; if they had had the sex themselves, they would have excused my behavior entirely. Death did not come. With the help of antibiotics, my condition even improved enough for me to start thinking of a second encounter. I wrote (and rewrote) an email perfectly brief, guilty, and charming to seduce-again the girl whose situation was already fucked enough to justify a bit more fuck-

ing, and I was prepared to send it just as soon as the constipation passed. *This constipation*, my God—no, not again! my something else, my Advice Columnist, my friend—was worse than the flu, and lasted much longer, caused by some combination of the antibiotics' side-effects and the prior, flu-induced emptiness of my gut.

“It was Christmas Day, and the seventh day of my retention. I found myself in a coffee shop's bathroom, straining my ass, and hating myself, and ready, for the second time that Advent, to renounce the world entirely. Frances, I am not, or was not, a religious woman, but like many who lack faith, I like to give God a chance to prove me wrong sometimes.

“My eyes caught themselves in the mirror, which seemed inappropriate for prayer, so I redirected them to the ground. The ground was worse still—next to the plunger (which I so longed to require), streaks of someone else's successful shit taunted me—so I raised them to the ceiling, which, as you can imagine, had never been dusted, but at least had me pointed the most likely direction. I breathed in deeply, giving my body one last chance