

Diamonds Aren't Tommy's Best Friend. I Am.

Pondering a jeweler's confusing message on Valentine's Day.

By

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It's Valentine's Day, but what to bring as tribute to that special someone? While sonnets worked for Shakespeare, surely for us lesser mortals a thoughtful gift remains the smart play. But there's the rub, as the Bard himself put it. Finding the right present has never been harder, at least for a literal man like me.

One television commercial is particularly confusing. It calls for purchasing two gemstones: "One diamond for your best friend. One diamond for your true love." I get why I would buy a diamond for my beloved wife, Devin. But why should I buy a second one for my best friend, Tommy?

The two advertised diamonds are set in a single piece of jewelry. Would Devin and Tommy share the pendant? Maybe she would get to have it in even months, and he could wear it during odd ones?

The average married guy might simply give his wife full custody of the pendant, on the theory that she is his wife *and* his best friend. But that's a crime against etiquette. A person is properly addressed by the highest honorific attained in life, since the greater includes the lesser. Will George H.W. Bush be remembered as a president or a vice president?

Thus the title of spouse subsumes best friend. When Devin and I joined our lives together, God was present. Friends and family traveled from afar. There was fondue. None of these marked the moment in middle school when Tommy intervened in a scuffle, saved my bacon, and became my best friend.

There are substantive differences to consider, too. Aristotle said we are what we repeatedly do. The person who habitually builds you up is your spouse. The one who habitually reminds you that, though he knows your ruinously embarrassing secret nickname, he'll take it to the grave? Your best friend.

Cold, Aristotelian logic was insufficient for Brutus, so like Marc Antony, I'll speak to the heart. Which song takes your breath away, "When a Man Loves a Woman" by Percy Sledge, or "Best Friend" by Harry Nilsson?

Or consider the practical problem with saying your spouse is your best friend: If the two of you have a fight and you have to spend the night at your best friend's place, where exactly do you go?

Call me a cynic, but I also find the double-diamond pitch a tad too convenient. Really, your soul mate just happens to love Civil War re-enactment as much as you do? I'm not buying it. Your best friend is the one who wants to help you re-create Pickett's Charge. Your spouse is the one who picks up the two of you afterward, still dressed for battle, at the busy kiss-and-ride.

Where will this postmodern divorce of words from their plain meanings end? Next year will the advertisement be selling three diamonds, for your spouse, best friend and confidante? I failed to speak up when the arms race for men's razors broke out: Now I shave with an absurd, multi-blade contrivance that I call the "Ocho." This ends now.

Perhaps I am tilting at windmills, but I count myself lucky to have a loving wife and a best friend. They're just different people. And only one of them deserves diamonds this Valentine's Day. Sorry, Tommy.

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