A woman with dark hair and light skin is lying down, looking towards the camera. She is wearing a black strapless top. The background is a warm, orange and yellow sunset sky with dark silhouettes of trees and foliage. The overall mood is intimate and sensual.

MAKE-UP

SEX

TONIGHT!

Remember when you messed up...and she busted you? If you'd chosen your next few words just a bit better, you'd have gotten off scot-free. Our panel helps you score all-night forgiveness for all your future sins.

BY HILLARY QUINN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE SHAW



OUR EXCUSE EVALUATORS

Will Arnett: Actor-comedian, plays G.O.B. on Fox's *Arrested Development*

Dana Barron: Actress, best known for her role as daughter Audrey in *National Lampoon's Vacation*

Alexander Chaplin: Actor, best known for his role as James on *Spin City*

Alison James: Author of *I Used to Miss Him... But My Aim Is Improving: Not Your Ordinary Breakup Survival Guide*

Pepper Schwartz, Ph.D.: Professor of sociology, University of Washington, and author of *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong*

Linda Stasi: Columnist, *New York Post*

Deirdre Allen Timmons: Seattle-based screenwriter

1. THE BED BANDIT

You got caught trying to sneak your sloshed ass into bed at 3 A.M., claiming you "lost track of time."

Why it backfired...

Pepper Schwartz: "Nobody likes to be lied to, and that excuse insults her intelligence. She's also annoyed because she was worried."

Deirdre Allen Timmons: "Doesn't matter what you say. We think there was a blonde."

What to say next time? (pick one)

- a. "Sorry I missed curfew, [sarcastically] Mom."
- b. "I love our relationship and that you trust me when I'm with my friends."
- c. "I drink because you make me hate life."

Correct answer A B C

By framing the relationship in a positive light, you're defusing her sleep-deprived, I-was-up-late-and-worried-sick instinct to pick a fight.

2. THE EVIL SON-IN-LAW

In a fit of hilarity, you made fun of her mother. To her face. Then pretended to be joking.

Why it backfired...

Linda Stasi: "Under no circumstances do you insult the mother. Suppose it had been *your* sainted mother? We'd *never* get off the hook."

Alison James: "Trying to rationalize your actions is futile. Plus, it makes it seem like you're shirking responsibility."

What to say next time? (pick one)

- a. "If you think she was genuinely offended, I'll call her in the morning and apologize."
- b. "You look just like her when you're mad."
- c. "That's where you inherited your craziness!"

Correct answer A B C

You're being accountable for your behavior—and earning points for finding a solution that makes everyone happy.



THE DELINQUENT DATE

You accidentally, but totally, stood her up 'cause you "forgot" about your plans together.

Why it backfired...

Deirdre Allen Timmons: "Because she called you three times to remind you."

Will Arnett: "I think saying, 'My phone was fucked-up,' is a more believable excuse."

What to say next time? (pick one)

a. "Of course I remembered. I just didn't care."

b. "I was too loaded to drive. What, you want me to endanger us both?"

c. "I'm sorry I don't have my shit together... I just can't get organized. Can you help?"

Correct answer A B **C**

Women love admissions of failure (shows you're not too macho), and cries for help awaken their motherly instincts. And there's no project they'd rather work on than you.

THE BOORISH BASTARD

You said something kinda rude, then called her oversensitive when she freaked out.

Why it backfired...

Pepper Schwartz: "Maybe she is being sensitive, but she's entitled to her feelings."

Dana Barron: "It totally puts the blame on the woman, and it invalidates our sensitivity."

What to say next time? (pick one)

a. "My, aren't we Little Miss PMS today?"

b. "Trust me, when I'm trying to hurt your feelings, you'll know it, fatty."

c. "Tell me why that upsets you so I'll never make that same mistake."

Correct answer A B **C**

You're showing your willingness to retrain your mouth to suit her *and* giving her an opportunity to open up. What a guy!

EXCUSE-O-MATIC™

Truth hurts too much? Just pick a phrase from each column.

The 126th
cutest animal



THE BAD GUY	THE TRAGEDY	THE VICTIM
My car...	...got sick all over my...	...beloved wiener dog.
This dude on the street...	...broke my only...	...incarcerated ex-wife.
My ex...	...was arrested along with a...	...corpse.
Your cat...	...got herpes from a...	...lawyer's penis.
The weather...	...is trying to sue my...	...fish dinner.
An overweight prostitute...	...changed dramatically—ask any...	...favorite 'N Sync member.
I...	...had an affair with a prominent...	...orphan.
Some retarded kids...	...were cut to pieces by a...	...Third World dictator.
Your mother...	...crashed into my...	...sentient contraceptive sponge.

THE JOHNNY-COME-QUICKLY

You "delivered the custard" too soon... then shrugged, "Sorry," and reached for the remote.

Why it backfired...

Pepper Schwartz: "It's really lame because you're pretending nothing bad happened."

Deirdre Allen Timmons: "That would make me feel like a blowup doll. If you prefaced it with, 'I love you,' and, 'Have you lost weight?' you *might* have a chance."

What to say next time? (pick one)

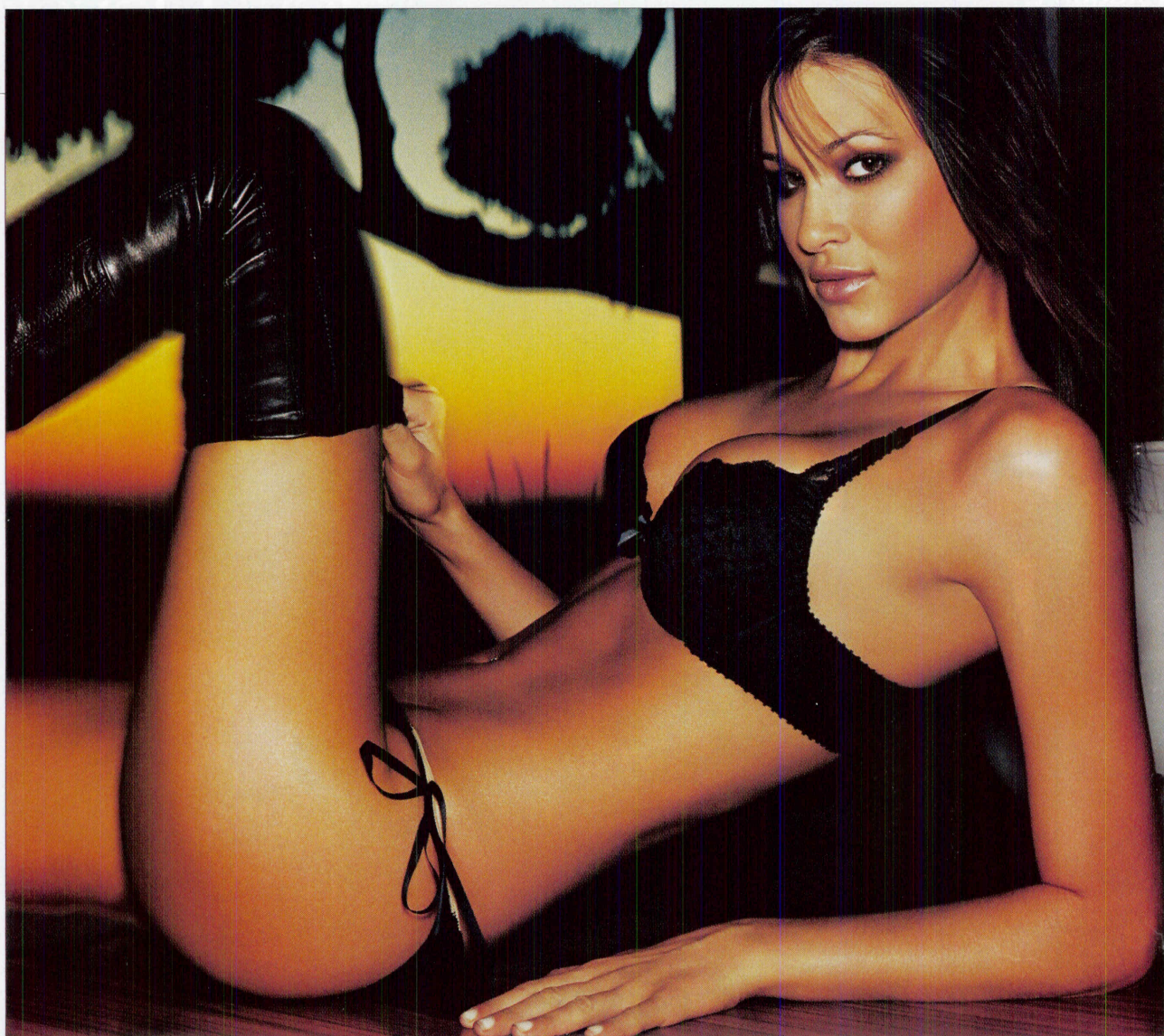
a. "God, you are so fucking hot I couldn't help myself. It's like I'm 16 all over again."

b. "Shh, I hate when I miss the first part of *Law & Order*. I can never catch up!"

c. "You can finish yourself off, right?"

Correct answer A B **C**

But only if you turn your attention to her instead of rolling over to sleep. Ta-da!



THE SELF-ABSORBED CAD

You forgot a birthday/anniversary and told her she should have reminded you.

Why it backfired...

Pepper Schwartz: "You're blaming us? There's really no good comeback. Throw yourself on your sword and tell her your behavior was unforgivable."

Alison James: "There's no excuse. Remembering her birthday, your anniversary, and major holidays is as important as 'Never use an electric razor in a bathtub.'"

What to say next time? (pick one)

- a. "Way to ruin the surprise." [deep sigh]
- b. "Put on your coat. We're going to Tiffany's/Barneys/Wal-Mart. Let's go get exactly what you want."
- c. "What am I, your keeper?"

Correct answer A B ☒ C

It still won't heal her emotional pain if you forgot, but showing you're willing to do penance by actually... ough... shopping will put you on the road to forgiveness. Plus, new shoes heal all wounds.

Bad line:
"If it can't wait until halftime, someone had better be dead."

THE DEAF MAN WALKING

You zoned out and (oops) nodded your head when she asked, "You're just pretending to listen to me, aren't you?"

Why it backfired...

Deirdre Allen Timmons: "We women already know that your hearing loss is selective. This just reminds us."

Alison James: "Not only are you not listening, but you're not even willing to feign it? That's low. Pay attention now or the rest of the game will be ruined by the argument that will follow."

What to say next time? (pick one)

- a. "If you ever? One time? Said something interesting? I might actually listen."
- b. "If it can't wait until halftime, someone had better be dead."
- c. "I definitely spaced... because I just figured out the perfect birthday gift for you!"

Correct answer A B ☒ C

She'll be curious—and derailed because even though you weren't listening to her, you were thinking of her. Sucka!

THE LIMP LINGUINI

You couldn't get it up—new Victoria's Secret panties notwithstanding—and swore "this has never happened before."

Why it backfired...

Linda Stasi: "It's the generic dick excuse. It implies that it's her fault, and she has big fat thighs, cellulite, and small boobs."

Alexander Chaplin: "You might want to blame it on the private 'dinner for one' that you had earlier in the evening."

What to say next time? (pick one)

- a. "Well, I guess this answers your 'Have I gained weight?' question."
- b. "I'm beat—and it has nothing to do with you. You're more gorgeous than ever."
- c. "Maybe if you used your mouth for something more constructive than talking, I wouldn't have this problem."

Correct answer A B ☒ C

You're having a physical problem, so chalk it up as a physical problem or she'll get paranoid that there's something icky going on emotionally and *never* stop freaking out. ►

THE BACKSLIDING BUM

You were seen with the cigarettes/friends/porn she made you promise to give up, then shrugged and said, "I'm not perfect."

Why it backfired...

Pepper Schwartz: "That just sounds like it's no big deal when you go back on your word."

Will Arnett: "A leopard can't change its spots, and women always want to change guys. Men feel like, 'Please, see history!'"

What to say next time? (pick one)

a. "This is harder than I thought it would be to kick. Thank God I've got your support."

b. "You keep nagging, I'll get my coat."

c. "Oh, I forgot: You've never screwed up."

Correct answer ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C

She'll see you as vulnerable, which brings out the best in women. The fact that you're trying to meet her expectations is what counts.

THE JEALOUS JERK

You acted like a possessive asshole in public, then claimed you were just being protective.

Why it backfired...

Alison James: "Denial is a ticket to hell. Even if you don't think you were jealous, she does. And now she sees you as a seventh grader."

Will Arnett: "Women want to feel loved, but not like a piece of property."

What to say next time? (pick one)

a. "You know, baby, I love you so much, it's hard not to be insecure sometimes."

b. "At least I kept you from making a total whore of yourself with our waiter."

c. "If you think I'm threatened by that fat loser, go ahead and hook up."

Correct answer ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C

Aww. What's she gonna say to that? **M**



The Honorable
Pippi
Lawstocking

"THE DOG ATE MY DEFENSE ATTORNEY!"

These nutso excuses were really introduced in court. Guess which ones worked?

KEANU

A San Francisco movie fan killed and dismembered his landlady. He claimed he did it because he didn't want to be sucked into the Matrix.

Did it work? Yes. Believing the dude was cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs, a judge accepted his insanity plea.

BEING NICE

A woman paid two guys to, in their words, duct-tape her sister at gunpoint and get her wallet. She said she needed the guys' help because she felt uncomfortable asking for the stuff back herself.

Did it work? No. Sibling rivalry? Try conspiracy to kill. To stir for 26 years.

COOTIES

A karate instructor was charged with sexually abusing teen girls. Witnesses swore he was gay and not attracted enough to women to molest them.

Did it work? Yes. Not guilty on half his charges; a mistrial on the rest. Super fabulous!

REVERENCE

The cops found a burglar and a rotting body inside a house. The robber said he'd heard gossip about the dead body and came to pay the corpse its due respects.

Did it work? Yes. Not guilty of burglary or murder—just trespassing.

NECROPHILIA

After mowing down a 40-year-old, a teen explained he wanted to kill her so he could have sex with her corpse. Crazy kids!

Did it work? Maybe. The trial hadn't begun at press time, but we predict his next crash is in the clink. —Amy Keyishian