# Former best friend becomes secretive

**R. Eric Thomas**
Asking Eric

**DEAR ERIC:** I have had the same best friend for the majority of our lives and today I am confused and saddened due to a huge change in our relationship.

For most of those years we were each other's therapist, helping each other through a series of very trying times. No secrets and a lot of honesty. She is historically fragile, now suffering stress from a work issue caused by her manager. This happened years before, in such a serious way that my friend had to take a three-month medical leave of absence due to what was likely a nervous breakdown.

I am confused because now my friend won't enlighten me with any details. During COVID she and I began doing FaceTime once a week (we live 100 miles apart). These meetings have become for me more like an obligation.

She works from home, has little to talk about, whereas my life is full and complicated. So, I'm doing most of the talking. A few times a year she and I meet for a day of shopping and a long lunch. My friend has always been ultra-sensitive, easily offended, misconstruing my questions. So, I in turn keep things inside, especially lately.

We are at an impasse, damned if I say something, damned if I don't. I am very frustrated. I wonder if perhaps we need a break from the weekly FaceTime. Or, has this friendship reached its expiration date? – Missing My Old Bestie

**DEAR BESTIE:** From your letter, it sounds like you've always had to censor yourself around your friend, at least a little bit. So, I wonder if what is feeling like a huge change is actually a slow progression. That's not to say it's a lost cause.

Every friendship goes through seasons and it's clear that, even without knowing the details of what else is going on in her life, this is a season where she feels more isolated. Even though you want and have tried to be there for her, there just may be a narrative playing in her head that tells her to keep it all in.

You can address it, gently, in a state of the friendship conversation. Use "I" statements and try not to make broad generalizations. "I would like to share more with you and hear more about what's going on in your life, but I feel sometimes that that's not what you want. Have I got it wrong?"

True, she could also take these questions the wrong way, but at least you'd be opening up the door for clearer communication.

Another option is to ask that you pivot your conversations to a topic or activity, like a book club or a TV club. Something that you both can have opinions and thoughts about that may feel less like a minefield.

**DEAR ERIC:** I've been thinking a lot lately about the "epidemic of loneliness" we keep hearing about. After a few recent outings, I've come to a frustrating realization: for many, loneliness isn't caused by a lack of people in their lives, but by a profound lack of social and emotional skills.

I've spent time recently with two friends out of a sense of obligation because they are both quite lonely. However, witnessing their interactions was eye-opening. In one instance, a woman shared her beautiful wedding dress with us. My reaction was genuine excitement; my friend's reaction was a flat, "Oh, uh-huh." In another, a mutual friend announced her pregnancy. While I was celebrating the news, the other "lonely" friend's only comment was about the mother's weight gain, before immediately pivoting the conversation back to photos of her new car.

It's exhausting. These individuals struggle to get "into" someone else's life. They don't seem to realize that you get out of relationships what you put into them. They are standing in the middle of a social circle, yet they remain isolated because they lack the ability to provide emotional resonance or celebrate anyone other than themselves. It makes me wonder – can people like this actually be helped, or are they destined to stay lonely because they can't see past their own reflection? – Less Lonely

**DEAR LESS LONELY:** Communication and empathy go a really long way in relationships. It's possible that these friends lack social skills, yes, but it's also possible that they're engaging in a way that feels comfortable for them. Everyone has different levels of enthusiasm and different conversational needs. In relationships and friendships, it behooves us all to ask for what we need, especially if we're starting to experience resentment. So, the next time one of your friend's comments rubs you wrong, consider kindly but directly saying something to them using "I" statements. If they don't know they're exhausting you, they can't fix it or address it.

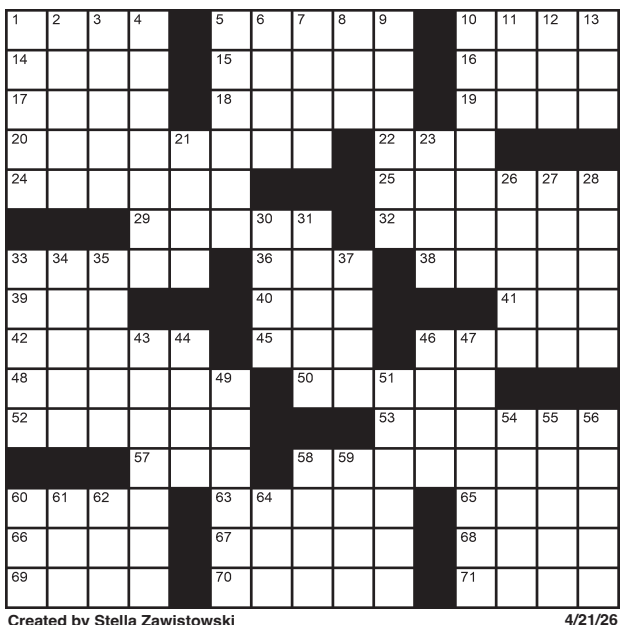
*Send questions to R. Eric Thomas at eric@askingeric.com or P.O. Box 22474, Philadelphia, PA 19110.*

## CRYPTOQUOTE

One letter stands for another.
In this sample – **AXYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW** – A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

EJQEJVJKALAPZK OLAAJEV — JXJEC QJEVZK NJVJEXJV AZ VJJ AMJOVJYXJV PK LEA. — LOC VMJELYN

## THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE



Created by Stella Zawistowski 4/21/26

**ACROSS**
1 Patriotic symbol
5 Type of jazz
10 Petty quarrel
14 Go up
15 Bring to mind
16 Doily material
17 Still alive, competitively: 2 wds.
18 As a consequence
19 Notion
20 Where Ford is headquartered
22 Once around a track
24 Strengthen, as steel
25 Spews, as a volcano
29 Tax inspection
32 Say again
33 Chastise
36 Keep after taxes
38 Humane group: Abbr.
39 Armed conflict
40 Sticky black goo
41 Take a load off
42 Standing straight
45 Mined material
46 Hotel option
48 Hooded coat
50 Family car
52 Fix, as shoes
53 Require
57 Spider's creation
58 Colorful handkerchief
60 Prayer-ending word
63 Suspect's story
65 Fail to hit
66 Earth's center
67 Model Hadid
68 Australian birds
69 Warty animals
70 Alloy in knives
71 Floor model

**DOWN**
1 Artist Kahlo
2 Cloth made from flax
3 From China or Japan
4 "Quit dreaming!": 2 wds.
5 Lay eyes on
6 At any time
7 Beethoven's birthplace
8 The Thunder, on scoreboards
9 Potato gadget
10 Minor mistakes
11 Protective dressing
12 Valuable poker card
13 Brewed drink
21 Modem speed unit
23 Region
26 Coke competitor
27 Unspoken
28 New York or New Jersey
30 Go __ detail
31 Rips
33 Curse
34 __ asada (beef dish)
35 Nabisco cookies
37 Genealogy diagram
43 Made a king or queen
44 Story
46 Makeup of a beach
47 Feral
49 Shish __
51 Refusal of a request
54 Japanese film genre
55 "To recap...": 2 wds.
56 Rodeo rope
58 Liver secretion
59 Highly competent
60 Perform in a movie
61 Cow's sound
62 Pitching stat: Abbr.
64 Live and __ live

**Today's solution**



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**Cryptoquote solution**

REPRESENTATION MATTERS — EVERY PERSON DESERVES TO SEE THEMSELVES IN ART. — AMY SHERALD

## SUDOKU

**How to play:** Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9.

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 6 | 7 | 4 | | | |
| | | 8 | | | 3 | 4 | | |
| | 5 | | | | | | 6 | |
| 9 | | | | 6 | | | | 2 |
| | 1 | 2 | | 4 | | 8 | 5 | |
| 4 | | | | | | | | 1 |
| | 7 | | | | | | 3 | |
| | | 6 | 9 | | | 5 | | |
| | | | 8 | 5 | 6 | | | |

## HOROSCOPE

**APRIL 21**

**ARIES (March 21-April 19)** Whatever you're thinking of doing will likely get a better outcome if done today or tomorrow – on Thursday stars begin to slide for the remainder of the month. Hold off on money moves today or tomorrow too.

**TAURUS (April 20-May 20)** It could be easy to feel more negative than usual for the next four to five days. Once your mood lifts, Universal stars will be saying 'stop,' not 'go,' for a few days after that. Cool your jets and be patient.

**GEMINI (May 21-June 20)** Hitting them with too much force or hitting them with too much vulnerability are both extreme choices, a more moderate approach could be more effective. Learn from the past, don't fear its lessons.

**CANCER (June 21-July 22)** A friend or group could get discouraging news today or within the next few days and need your support. One of the greatest improvements happens when you reframe your role from victim to survivor.

**LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)** Things could look grimmer than usual for a few days even before the stars truly start their march into the sub-zero day score swamp. Less action would likely be wise from now until May 3 at least.

**VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)** Examining a fear could knock you into better alignment with your destiny – sounds odd but that's the story the stars are telling for you today – the fear could relate to a friend group or social anxiety.

**LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)** Career fear or imposter syndrome could be up. Make a list of all you've accomplished then ask yourself, "Who actually did this stuff?" If it's you, if you were the doer, then how could you be an imposter?

**SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)** If it's feeding your worries, click away fast, no need to consume anything making you feel worse and less hopeful. Get hip to emotional language trying to manipulate your reactions. You are what you consume.

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)** A financial fear or concern around shared resources could be high today but should pass within just hours. A health concern could arise but may not be lasting. Have faith that you can get everything done.

**CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)** A lot could feel forced, your heart may not be in your efforts today as much as you'd like – too much attempted control creates resistance. Freedom could seem like an impossible dream but it's not, it's just not happening today.

**AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)** If the vibe in your living space is depressive, be patient, things should feel a little better in about four days, though greater improvement should come in the first week of May. Let your creativity out to play.

**PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)** Approaching a situation in your domestic space from a place of empathy could yield much better results than trying to lay down the law. While you might feel a little silenced now, that won't last forever.

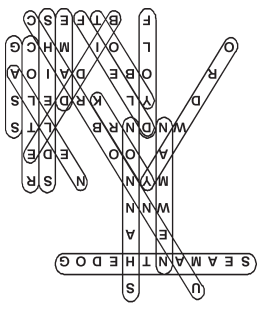
**Sudoku solution**

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | 7 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| 4 | 1 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| 8 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 7 | 5 |
| 1 | 9 | 7 | 2 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 4 |
| 6 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 2 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 7 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3 | 6 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 2 | 7 |
| 5 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 7 | 9 | 3 |

**Jumble solution**

TARDY AWARD BASKET MOTION
When they heated slices of bread on the campfire, they were — WARM AND TOASTY

**Sleuth solution**



## JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

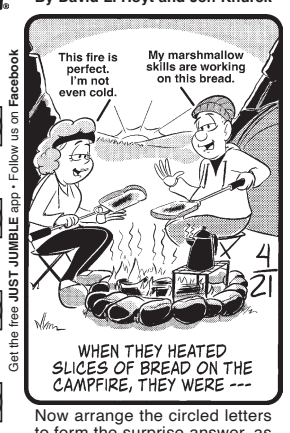
Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

ADTYR

WDAAR

STKABE

OTMINO

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

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## WORD SLEUTH

TRAVELED WITH LEWIS AND CLARK

G N K U H E B S Y W T R O L J
S E A M A N T H E D O G G E B
Y W U R A E W A G A C A S P N
K I G D B W N N Z X V S Q O M
K I G E C M Y N A Y N W S R U
S Q P N L A J O O H F E D E E
C A Y X W N D N R B V U L T S
S Q P D N M Y L K K R D E L S
J H R F E C O B E B D A I O A
Z O Y X V U L T O I R M H C G
Q P O M L K F I B T F E S C H

Monday's unlisted clue: EARL

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions - forward, backward, up, down and diagonally.
Tuesday's unlisted clue hint: FEMALE GUIDE

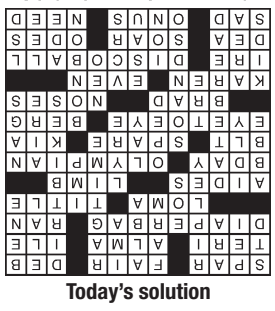
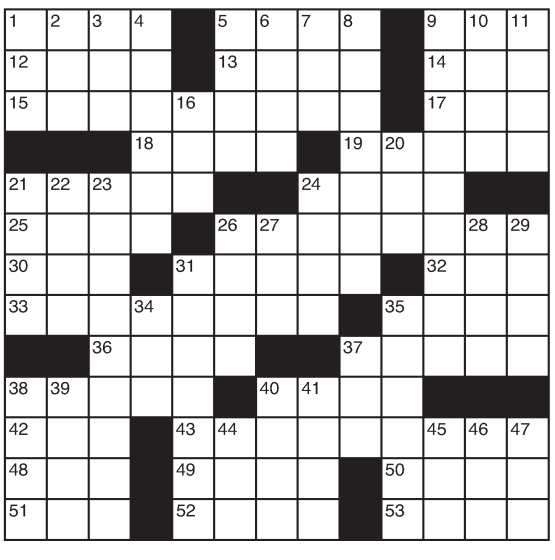
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Allen | Dame | Newman | Shields |
| Biddle | Field | Ordway | Toby |
| Charbonneau | Floyd | Seaman the dog | York |
| Colter | Gass | Shannon | |

## SHEFFER CROSSWORD

**ACROSS**
1 Mast
5 Equitable
9 Cotillion celeb
12 Actress Hatcher
13 Mater lead-in
14 Land in la mer
15 Holder for Pampers
17 Campaigned
18 — Linda, Calif.
19 Boxer's dream
21 Staffers
24 Branch
25 Party time, briefly
26 Alysa Liu or Simone Biles, e.g.
30 Diner order
31 Extra
32 Sportage maker
33 One way of seeing
35 Floating ice mass
36 Pitt of "Moneyball"
37 Schnozzes
38 Singer Carpenter
40 Tied
42 Fury
43 Dance club sphere
48 Narc's org.
49 Fly high
50 Praiseful pieces
51 Blue
52 Burden
53 Must have

**DOWN**
1 Norm, for short
2 Architect I.M.
3 Coach Parseghian
4 "The Talented Mr. —"
5 Crop-growing tract
6 Jessica of "Dark Angel"
7 "— Little Teapot"
8 Scott Joplin's music
9 Off-road vehicles
10 Mideast airline
11 Nota —
16 Daybreak goddess
20 Naughty child
21 French cleric
22 In a lazy way
23 Fruity loaf
24 Apollo's instrument
26 Pundit's piece
27 Non-clerical
28 Suffix for million
29 Kvetches
31 Scoundrel
34 Three, in Rome
35 Chocolate-coated treat
37 "The Matrix" character
38 Children
39 Vicinity
40 Jacob's sibling
41 TiVo forerunners
44 Physics particle
45 Citric beverage
46 Director Spike
47 Hallucinatory drug

**Solution time: 22 mins.**



**Today's solution**