

My wife Howard â€¦ so it goes

by Jason_Love

My wife comes from the Caribbean, where people areâ€”how can I put this gentlyâ€”nuts. The longer weâ€™re together, the more I believe she brought some nuts with her. People shake their head when I say so, but they havenâ€™t seen her around Formula 409.

I call my wife Howard after Howard Hughes, the genius who grew so obsessed with germs that his butler would buy a stack of newspapers for Howard to extract, with a Kleenex, the fresh middle paper. When youâ€™re a millionaire, itâ€™s eccentric; in our case, itâ€™s just nuts.

My wife also monitors the molecular world. She scours our dishes in scalding water before putting them in the dish-washer. She can spot a spot at 100 yards and determine, by smell, everywhere Iâ€™ve been for the past 48 hours.

I donâ€™t know if she was like this when we met. Love is blind (and in my case, deaf and dumb). But whatever she did to suppress her symptoms early on has been swept out the door and doused with Comet. And her symptoms are breeding.

The trouble starts in the kitchen, headquarters for Howardâ€™s operation. That is where she confers with her agents Colonel Windex, Captain Lysol, and the contract guy Mr. Clean. Most people donâ€™t realize, until they visit us, that there are 42 different brands of mildew cleaner. They stand rank and file beneath our sink, ready for dispatch should Jason screw up.

And Jason always screws up.

Recently I walked in with dirt on my shoesâ€”not the invisible kindâ€”and Howard shouted, â€œCÃ³o, pero que estaba pensando este idiota. Dios mio. Tiene suerte que no lo mato.â€•

Whatever she was saying, it didnâ€™t sound like, â€œWanna make love?â€•

It was, in fact, one long Dominican sentence without space between words. The angrier my wife gets, the less time she invests in breathing. Howard took off my shoes and tossed them outside, reminding me of the time I spilled grape juice on the carpet (I think it helps her cope).

What else? She mops the floor whenever I look at it, vacuums the ceiling from a stepladder, and never uses the same towel twice. She believes the air is dirty and will soil your clothes even as they rest on a hanger. She brushes her teeth after every meal!

One day I walked in to find Howard in a cleaning bender. She was taking breaks only to snort Ajax. I asked her what the occasion was, and she said the maid was coming. Then she ushered me to the porch, where I was to read a book and not touch anything. So it goes.

Itâ€™s worse when we have company. Howard scrubs and rinses and grunts and thenâ€”the part that worries meâ€”sheâ€™ll tilt her head and look at our home sideways. Like she intends to knock out a wall or go with hardwood flooring. I would hide the credit cards, but she knows the numbers by heart.

I fear that one day our house will catch fire and, before the firemen arrive, my wife is going to die trying to clean the foyer.

When Howard gets sick, she takes her temperature every three minutes as if knowing the number will help. If she doesn't like the reading, she tries the backup thermometer. 98.6 is normal; my wife is not.

Then there was the time I heard shouting in the bathroom. I thought I was in trouble, but it turned out that my wife had abused a Q-tip. The swab was lodged inside her ear. I operated with tweezers and a flashlight, convinced that I had finally found someone as strange as myself.

Howard consumes one roll of toilet paper per day. I mean, how deep can you go? I make whimpering sounds to remind her of dying trees, but she can't see beyond the germs on the nose on her face. We don't even place the rolls on the holder anymore; we just line 'em up on the counter like shot glasses.

In bed the other night, Howard thought she felt a cockroach. This has been happening ever since the Cockroach Incident of '99, when there was a real, live, actual cockroach in our kitchen's headquarters! Howard treated it as a matter of national security, calling the same men who came to pick up E.T. in those chemical splash suits.

"Did you feel that?" she asked, standing up in bed at 3 a.m.

And I, still asleep, "The foot in my back?"

"No, a cockroach!"

Before I could petition the Lord for support, my wife had stripped our bed clean, leaving me to quiver in the fetal position. Ten minutes later, she concluded that it was not in fact a cockroach but a figment of her dementia. I know so because it got dark and warm again.

The doctor said that Howard's condition is harmless, and he can say that because he doesn't live with her. She has, he claims, a mild case of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Howard cannot stop sensing cockroaches any more than I can stop whistling to "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay."

Here's the scary part: I think her disorder is airborne. I recently caught myself showering when I didn't look or smell dirty, and if I don't look or smell dirty, what makes me dirty? Molecules. Teeny, invisible, Howard Hughes molecules. Watching baseball, I actually cringed when the runner slid into home, knowing how hard it would be to remove the stain.

I can see myself ten years from now, when the illness comes full circle. I'll study my food under a microscope and wear a surgeon's mask outside. In fact, I won't go outside at all; people will find me by following the scent of Clorox to the giant bubble house. I will be the guy sitting on the high chair reading the middle paper.

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