EASTGATE CLOCK, CHESTER

Chester chronicles

Why didn't you park there? Now we'll be late!

Picture the scene—a Friday evening. For once in his life, he is actually home in time to get ready to go to the big bash in the local orthopaedic consultant's house. She has organised the babysitter who is already there, the kids are happy, everyone is dressed up, it's going to be a wonderful evening. He drives there (she'll probably drive home, but anyway . . .).

They can tell they are getting near to orthopaedic country as they start to see the odd Land Rover Discovery parked, and she helpfully points out—"Look, there's a parking space coming up You've just gone past it. That would have done wouldn't it?" "No, no, no" he says. "There will be something nearer further on up." Of course, there isn't. It is now kerb to kerb Discoveries and Jags, and she innocently comments—"Why didn't you park back there when I showed you where to go?" Imagine the tension. As he seethingly does a handbrake turn outside the orthopod's house and roars back down the road, the original parking suggestion is now no longer an option and they end up parking a quarter of a mile further away. "No need to get into a huff; all I said was there's a parking space." Slamming of car doors, stalking off up to the party, totally ignoring each other for the evening, will there be any sex later—not a hope?

And yet, all she said was Has she no idea what he has actually heard her say? His one and only simple task that evening was to drive the car to the party. This is a task well within his competence. He actually does manage to drive the car to work, park it, and bring it home safely on a daily basis. He can do it. What he actually hears is—"You incompetent eejit. One simple job and you couldn't even do that without my help and advice. How have I ended up with such a pathetic man?" Is it any

wonder that the poor fellow was beside himself with rage, frustration, and annoyance. This whole episode should bring on a sulk of at least 4–5 days. Yet they do actually still love each other, but one is a man and one is a woman, and they communicate so differently that there is little doubt that John Gray's book title, *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus*, is absolutely spot on. If there had been two women in the car, the helpful parking suggestion would have been acted upon with alacrity and that would have been the end of it.

There is no logical explanation as to why loving couples can get into a situation of fierce exchanges in a car. There is a simple solution. It begins with deciding who's going to drive and agreeing that the other remains absolutely quiet. No comments, sighing, groaning, poking, pointing or shifting uncomfortably; sarcasm in particular is unwarranted—that is, he's stopped at the lights day dreaming, they have now gone green, and she nudges him with the comment "any particular shade of green you'd like to wait for?"

Believe me, it is mentally and physically possible to remain absolutely silent as a passenger. It requires superhuman willpower on the first few occasions, but realistically, will there be a fatal horrible accident if helpful comments are not passed on to the driver? Several episodes of remaining passively silent, and not being involved in multiple pile ups on each occasion, gradually helps create an atmosphere of calm acceptance. This translates into a pleasant and welcome passenger, with no 4 day sulks and, let's face it, inevitably more sex!

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