

WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

By Alan Haehnel

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CAST: SUSAN and GEORGE

(SUSAN and GEORGE enter their home after an evening out. They remove their coats during the opening of the duet.)

SUSAN: Brr, it's getting awfully cold.

GEORGE: Definitely getting nippy.

SUSAN: Sarah Gardner was telling me that her husband winterized their cars yesterday. Checked the hoses, flushed the radiator, all that stuff.

GEORGE: Good idea.

SUSAN: Are you going to do that soon?

GEORGE: I have no idea when. I think you'd be better off taking the cars in to the garage.

SUSAN: We could save quite a bit of money if you did it yourself.

GEORGE: We could also be half-way through the winter before I got to it, frankly.

SUSAN: I feel it. I feel it.

GEORGE: What? What do you feel?

SUSAN: We're having an argument.

GEORGE: No, we're not.

SUSAN: It's in its incipient stage, but it is definitely an argument.

GEORGE: What are you talking about?

SUSAN: Doctor Sadah told us we needed to recognize our arguments when they were in their incipient stages.

GEORGE: Oh, he did? I'm glad you heard that. I couldn't understand a word he was saying.

SUSAN: He was speaking English, George.

GEORGE: Yes, I recognize that, but his accent was so thick he might as well have been speaking East Slovakian.

SUSAN: You are so insular, George. The man has an Indian accent—he is from India. You ought to be able to look past your prejudices and be able to take in what he was telling us. I think he has been very helpful.

GEORGE: I'm not saying that he isn't being helpful. I'm just saying that I don't understand him a lot of the time. I mean, at one point, I swore he was saying something like ***(in a thick Indian accent)***: "You must scent your flatulence in the squirrels of the ages." I mean, what was that?

SUSAN: No, no! That is exactly what I was talking about! He said "You must sense your argument in the early stages."

What the Doctor Ordered - Page 3

GEORGE: Oh, okay. I thought he was saying something about farting squirrels.

SUSAN: You claim you don't understand Dr. Sadah because you just don't care enough to listen closely.

GEORGE: No, I claim I don't understand Dr. Sadah because I don't understand Dr. Sadah. Believe me, at 150 bucks an hour, I want to understand the man!

SUSAN: Well, maybe you're just going to have to come out of your shell a little bit and put forth the effort required. This is our marriage we're trying to save.

GEORGE: You know what? I agree with you.

SUSAN: I'm glad.

GEORGE: We are having an argument. I listen to people. I listen to people with accents. I work at the university, in case you've forgotten. I'm surrounded by people with accents! And I'm not so sure Dr. Sadah wasn't talking about rodents with gas—why should I take your word for it?

SUSAN: Where did you feel it?

GEORGE: Feel what?

SUSAN: The tension at the beginning of the argument?

GEORGE: What? I don't know.

SUSAN: You have to get in tune with it. For me, when we came in and started talking about winterizing the cars and you started to say you were too lazy to do it yourself...

GEORGE: Too lazy? Too lazy? I said I was too busy. I said "busy"; you heard "lazy." I don't even *have* an accent!

SUSAN: That's not the point. The point is, I felt the tension right here.

(SHE points to a spot on her nose.)

GEORGE: Right there?

SUSAN: Right here. That's just where it begins—right here, above my left nostril. Tension. I call it my argument sensor. When that spot in my sinuses starts to—I can't quite come up with the right descriptor yet—when it starts to...ping, I know we're experiencing the birth of an argument.

GEORGE: When your nose pings we're giving birth.

SUSAN: You can make fun of me all you want; at least I'm trying to do what Dr. Sadah advised.

GEORGE: I'm sorry. No part of my body pings or hums or does the cha-cha when we're about to have an argument.

SUSAN: Well, you're being argumentative right now.

GEORGE: That's because you accused me of not listening. I don't like that. I listen!

SUSAN: The issue isn't the issue.

GEORGE: Come again?

SUSAN: The issue—what we're arguing about—isn't the issue.

GEORGE: Well, what is the issue if the issue isn't the issue? Look at me, I'm spitting.

SUSAN: The issue is what you're feeling physically. You have to identify the tension. Do you feel any pressure, any discomfort at all?

GEORGE: *(in a Indian accent again)* "Where do you feel the squirrels farting?"

SUSAN: George! I'm serious!

GEORGE: All right, all right. *(HE begins to squirm and move a bit, as if taking inventory of his body to find the tension.)* Not there. Not in my right foot. Not in my shin. Not in my upper thigh. Ah, ha!

SUSAN: What? What? Do you feel it?

GEORGE: I feel pressure.

SUSAN: Good!

GEORGE: Definite pressure.

SUSAN: Now we're getting somewhere.

GEORGE: Yes. I have to take a leak.

SUSAN: Oh, George!

GEORGE: I'll be right back.

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