



She Says...

Getting The Last Word

In any relationship, there are some petty squabbles that refuse to die, but Aoife Stuart is not going to back down easily – where's the fun in that?



Man is obsessed with plugs. Not the

Wayne Rooney hair transplant variety, thankfully, but the electrical kind. As a result, every one of our household appliances has its own dedicated extension lead and adaptor, which means that behind our television set there's a spaghetti junction of intertwining cables for the DVD player, the Orbit Showtime box, the external hard drive, the Wii, the weird-looking box he bought to watch the football on... And I'm not supposed to touch any of them.

Back story: I have a history of accidentally leaving electrical items on. Primarily, we're talking hair straighteners, the TV and the iron (though I have, on occasion, forgotten to turn the oven off, but technically that is gas, so it doesn't count) but the cable crime which finally stripped me of my socket rights and saw me branded a pyromaniac was when I left the external hard drive on all night.

An external hard drive, for those of you not shackled up with someone with a gadget fetish, is a small black box plugged into the TV which stores photographs, movies and TV shows. And FYI, leaving it on all night is apparently tantamount to popping it in the microwave for a quick zap. ("Feel how hot it is! I'm amazed it's still working!") My laissez faire attitude to our rocketing DEWA bill has since become the fuse (excuse the pun) for a recurring battle of wills.

Pressing His Buttons

It's not that I'm particularly interested in touching his plugs, you understand, (if I'm honest, I don't even know what half of them do) but like most modern women, the quickest way to get me to do something is by telling me not to do it. Besides, there's nothing guaranteed to send him into a tail spin like a crafty plug reshuffle. And then of course, there's the told-you-so feeling of accidentally leaving the GHDs on all day and returning home to find our flat has not, as predicted by him during a lengthy lecture in the car, burnt to the ground.

In fairness, his penchant for plugs is not his fault. Men (even the ones evolved

enough to watch *Glee* with you and even fake tan your back if you ask nicely) seem to be biologically programmed to be territorial over things they deem 'manly' (money, cars, DIY etc). The fact that plugs fall into this category has several advantages for me: a) I don't have to worry about fiddling about with those pesky red, yellow and white cables every time we want to watch a DVD and b) during a fight, I (quite literally) know how to press his buttons.

To put this in context, sometimes if he's really in the bad books, I've been known to flick every switch and socket in our place on, and light the place up like the Burj Khalifa, just to spite him. He'll tut and blow out my beloved scented candles ("You don't need candles, if you already have all the lights on..."). And, with both of us being stubborn Taureans, in these situations, neither of us is inclined to back down. The result of putting two bulls in a one-bed apartment? The lights switch on and off so much, the neighbours must think we're trying to communicate with them via Morse code.

Refusing To Admit Defeat

Then there's the air-con – which also coincidentally falls under the remit of the plug police – and is permanently set to sub-zero (side note: how come boys are so warm all the time?) so I have a blanket I like to snuggle under when we're watching TV. To up my cosy factor, I'll often flick



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the air-con down a notch, sometimes even off. Half an hour later, I'll inevitably be passed out in a sweat on the sofa, but rather than give him the smug satisfaction of knowing that he might have gauged the temperature control just right in the first place, I'll bake under the blanket to save face. Similarly, he'll often freeze rather than admit he might have turned the air-con up a tad too much. Childish, granted, but when it comes to trivial tiffs, there is nothing more irksome than admitting the other person might be right.

Seeing The Funny Side

There is also a very good reason petty squabbles are called 'petty': nothing is off limits, and you can bring up anything – no matter how irrelevant/insignificant/unrelated and use it as ammo. Take driving: another catalyst for a perpetual slanging match between us. Now I'm the first to admit, I have a bit of a rap sheet as far as my driving record goes (I once bumped into a car that was actually stationary). But despite the fact that this was *three years ago*, he insists on bringing it up at every turn. To retaliate, I love to remind him that he failed his driving test three times, 15 years ago (I warned you it was petty). It's difficult to pinpoint why it started – it could have been due to my innate ability to get lost on even the most simple of journeys, or because of his incessant road rage – but suffice to stay, any time we get into the car together, we're prepared for verbal battle. And the more ridiculous the insult, the better.

You see, the best thing about petty squabbles is that they very quickly descend into farce, making it impossible for you to stay mad at each other because the fight is so absurdly childish. Take last week when a bitter stand-off ended in hysterics, just as he was scrambling to confiscate all my scented candles, while I ran after him screaming in protest, and flicking as many switches on as I possibly could in my wake.

The one thing we can agree on, it seems, is that thankfully, neither of us takes these petty squabbles seriously. So he might get the last word in sometimes, but it's only because I'm laughing too hard at the stupidity of the argument that I can't even speak. So for now, I've agreed not to touch his plugs, if he keeps his hands off my candles. Everyone's a winner. ■