



Awkward marriage moments!

There are times you want to smile, wish your husband well, and back slowly out of the room (possibly into a getaway car). The good news: They happen to every happy couple. Read and relate, ladies. By Erin Zammett Ruddy

“Your husband knows and sees things *no one else does*—and he’s probably unfazed by 99 percent of it.”

COUPLE: STREETANGEL/GETTY IMAGES; WOMAN'S RING: LEW ROBERTSON/GETTY IMAGES; MAN'S RING: JENA CUMBO/GETTY IMAGES.

it was our first holiday as a married couple, and my husband, Nick, was walking into the kitchen at my parents’ annual Christmas Eve party. He had a plate of food in one hand and a glass of wine in the other, and he lost his footing on the step and, well, *splat*. I should add that Nick is 6-foot-3 and about 220 pounds, so when he went down, the festivities came to a screeching halt. Nick bounced right up and laughed it off, but the awkwardness—and the image of him splayed out next to my mother’s life-size drummer boys—lingered. It was the first time I ever felt embarrassed by my husband.

In the six years since, I’ve had plenty of these out-of-body, who-is-this-person-I’m-spending-my-life-with moments. Lest you think I’m cruel, I am sure his list of such moments would be even longer, and undoubtedly include doozies like, “When I see Erin tuck her postbaby belly flab into her underwear, I think, *Dayum, that ain’t right.*”

Sure, these embarrassing/ridiculous/pathetic encounters (which nobody talks about, but everyone has) chip away at some of the allure in a marriage, but they also reinforce just how intimate that bond is: Your husband knows and sees things *no one else does*, and he’s probably unfazed by 99 percent of it. Feeling like a stranger in your relationship from time to time isn’t strange at all—it’s the stuff real-deal couples are made of. And often, as I learned from grilling dozens of them, it’s kind of hilarious. Enjoy their stories, and prepare to feel, well, awkward.

Aging unbeautifully

When Michelle,* 34, met her 15-years-older husband, she thought the age gap was sexy. Now he’s almost 50—and it’s beginning to show. “The other day, the refrigerator door alarm went off for like two minutes, and he didn’t budge,” she says. “I was like, *Oh, my God, does he not hear that?! Uh oh...*” For the first time, she started to think of him as an old man. Fortunately, when she caught a glimpse of him dancing crazily with their kids later that night, she remembered why she fell in love with him in the first place, “rapidly multiplying gray hairs” and all.

A friend of mine who’s gained some weight since her wedding a few years ago recently got stuck in her Spanx, and her husband literally had to peel them off her. “Slowly, every layer of my body—layers I keep hidden from everyone—was spilling out over the material, and there was nothing we could do but laugh,” she says. “But later he told me I really shouldn’t wear things I can’t get in and out of myself, which I suppose is true!”

Is this gift returnable? Is my husband?

The year her husband got her a bike for Christmas, Tara, 31, cried—in front of her in-laws. “I’m a runner. I run every day. It’s a huge part of who I am. So when my husband walked in with a bike, I was just overcome with this feeling that he didn’t really know me,” she explains. “And worse, I worried that he never would. I felt bad for upsetting him, but I had to ask where the idea came from.” Turns out Tara’s husband had recalled the two of them watching a commercial with a couple riding bikes, and,

*Some names have been changed.

allegedly, Tara had said, “We should start riding bikes together.” *Awaw.* “It was such a great story and showed how much thought he’d put into the gift,” says Tara. “But what’s funny is that while I do remember seeing the commercial, I don’t remember saying that! I didn’t use the bike until the next summer, when I did a 45-mile ride with coworkers for charity. It was awesome. But sadly, that was the first and last time it’s been ridden.”

On our anniversary a few years back, my husband disappeared to run a few errands. Shortly after he returned, he casually said, “Oh, yeah, I have your present. Let me find it.” When I opened the box and saw a so-not-my-taste, blinged-out horseshoe necklace, my first thought was, *Have we met?!* My second thought: *Dude, I know you bought this an hour ago, so maybe it won’t hurt your feelings if I tell you I’ll never wear it.* Of course, I feigned gratitude (I didn’t want to ruin our day), but I knew we’d have to have The Talk, where I’d tell him that if he’s going to duck out on a holiday to buy me cheesy, meaningless, overpriced mall jewelry (I saw the receipt—it cost \$400!), I’d rather he just... not.

I love you, but you repel me!

Sometimes the awkwardness gets so unbearable you just have to leave the room. This is the case for Liz, 39, every time her husband does his “funny-sexy” dance. “He starts moving in on me with this weird booty shake and his tongue lolling out of the side of his mouth, and I think, *What the hell did I marry? Is this going to be happening for the rest of my life?*” she says. The last time he whipped out his moves—while Liz unsuspectingly sipped a glass of wine on the couch—she fled. “I think I might have actually jogged away, using gastrointestinal distress as an excuse. As I hid in the bathroom cringing, I realized he is going to be doing this dance for the rest of our lives. And I have to make peace with it, because it’s part of who he is. If I can’t laugh at it, where are we gonna be?” Now she just pours more wine when the music starts.

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Alice, 42, had a similar experience at a karaoke bar while her husband belted out Neil Diamond’s “Sweet Caroline.” “He started pointing at me, much as a lounge singer might target a pretty lady in the audience,” she says. The singing was bad enough, but the pointing made Alice want to die. “If I could have curled up like a hedgehog and rolled out of the bar, I would have,” she says. Instead, she twitched and winced and averted her eyes until the song was over. “I was more than a little disturbed that I could be so repulsed by my beloved,” she says. “But now I believe that this was, actually, a sign that we had grown. I was now close enough to my husband that I could get embarrassed for him.”

Sam, 34, has a very naked husband, which took some getting used to, particularly when he exposed himself in a shocking new way one night. “I dropped an earring in our bedroom, and he ran out of the bathroom, grabbed a flashlight, got on his hands and knees, and with his nose to the floor began searching,” she says. “It was definitely a sight—and an angle—I didn’t need to

see. And while I wanted to say, ‘Whoa, whoa, whoa, put on some clothes,’ I realized he was doing me a favor. He was my knight in shining... nothing.”

Mood killers

All married women have had that moment where he busts out a new move in bed and you think, *Huh? Really? Now?* “My husband recently criss-crossed his legs with mine and got all into it, and I was lying there wondering if I should tell him my foot was asleep or not,” says Lauren, 33. “Eventually I gently tapped his shoulder and gave him a sweet but slightly pained ‘This isn’t working’ look. He got the message and quickly switched it up. I’m dying to know where he got that move, but I don’t want to embarrass him, so I haven’t brought it up—yet.”

Or try telling your husband you don’t like the way he kisses—after five years together. “I love kissing my husband,” says Janelle, 31. “But he has this habit of pushing out his bottom lip, and I wonder where the

rest of his mouth went. I used to think it was cute, but now it seriously annoys me.” One night in bed, Janelle just blurted it out. “I snapped at him, which I’m not proud of, but I couldn’t hold it in anymore! It was harsh, since we both agree kissing is a superimportant element in our sex life,” she says. He looked crushed, then got defensive, then told her he wished she’d said something sooner. “It was very uncomfortable, but it also felt good to admit something so personal, even hurtful, and not have it be the end of the world,” she says. “And he realized that I didn’t want to stop kissing him; we just needed some new techniques. So far, so good!”

This, however, takes the cake for booty-related embarrassment: “My husband has a stronger libido than me, but I didn’t realize how strong until I walked in on him taking care of himself in the shower—an hour after we’d had sex!” says Christina, 33. “I was a little confused—*Didn’t we just have sex? Was it not good enough? What was the point?*—but then I felt bad for him, because when we were first dating, I was ready for it all the time too! If we were newlyweds it might have been a bigger issue, but after 12 years together, he wasn’t even embarrassed. And I just told him to lock the door next time and do whatcha gotta do!”

The case for separate bathrooms

Nothing says “We must be in this for the long haul” like the first time you have a stomach bug in front of your significant other. “It’s just not something you want to be a part of unless you’ve already said the in-sickness-and-in-health vow,” says Taylor, 26, whose husband once had to borrow clothes for her to change into after a particularly mortifying bout of food poisoning at a friend’s party. “I definitely felt closer to him after that, but it did blow away the illusion of bathroom privacy for good.”

When Elizabeth, 41, had major back surgery, her husband had to bathe her, feed her, and, quite literally, wipe her butt. “Thankfully I was on a lot of pain medication, so I barely remember that part,” she says. What she does remember: “I was a terrible patient, and he was kind and gentle and never made me feel awkward. I realized that he is way nicer to me than I am to him,” she says. “I don’t think I could handle being his caregiver. When he has a hair he wants me to pluck, I’m like, ‘Ask the kids!’”

Speaking of stray hairs... Jeanine, 32, was in a hotel room getting ready for a wedding while her husband was—supposedly—downstairs at the bar. “The sink wasn’t closed off from the rest of the room, but I was alone, so I figured it would be a good time to slather hair-remover cream not only on my upper lip but all over my neck and chin, where I occasionally see strays,” she



“I wanted to say, ‘Whoa, whoa, whoa! Put on some clothes!’”

recalls. “All of a sudden I heard the door open, and my heart stopped. But rather than run from danger, I turned right toward it, leaving myself completely exposed to my husband.” Jeanine screamed, ran into the shower, and hid behind the curtain. “Luckily, I am married to the greatest man in the world, and he started laughing hysterically and then turned on golf and kept his back to me while I wiped myself off and put on a robe,” she says. Jeanine spent an extra long time on her makeup and hair and went straight for the bar at the cocktail hour, by which point, she says, “my husband was getting the color back in his face. We never spoke of the incident again.”

I adore you, I swear

When Sarah, 44, brought her husband along on a business trip and they saw that the hotel had given them a

room with two full-size beds instead of the king-size bed they’d requested, they didn’t freak. Sad but true, says Sarah: “Instead of changing rooms, neither of us said a word—we each climbed into our own bed and got an amazing night’s sleep, without elbows or dogs or kids in the way.” In fact, at breakfast they laughed about their “incredible” night. “We weren’t in the same bed, but we were definitely on the same page,” she says.

Jill, 40, and her husband both forgot their anniversary last year, which is definitely an awkward milestone. “His mother called and asked us if we were celebrating, and I said, ‘Celebrating what?’ We just looked at each other and laughed. I couldn’t get mad at him and he couldn’t get mad at me, but it was kind of pitiful,” she says. “He kept telling me how bad he felt, and I told him, ‘Babe, no one died. We still love each other. And we think alike!’ I actually felt lucky that we are at such a solid point in our relationship that we don’t need to put emphasis on the anniversaries—and that we could share in that hilarious moment.”

Jessica, 40, had a similar revelation when she showed her husband some old love letters he’d written to her. His response spoke volumes. “He said, ‘Wow. I used to be so sweet!’ Then... silence,” she says. “All I could think was, *What happened to that gushy guy I married?*” She felt bummed for a minute, then got over it. “Our lives are so jam-packed now that we barely have time to say ‘I love you,’” she says. “Hopefully we’ll write letters again one day, perhaps when we’re sitting in his-and-hers bathtubs like the couple in the Cialis ad.”

In the meantime, it’s not terrible to be able to look back on how romantic and in sync you and your husband once were and feel good, not lousy. If you can say, “Aw, that was fun!” and not, “What happened to us?” you’re doing just fine. ●

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