

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

HE'S FEELING SICK? Take two aspirin and watch out

If you've never seen your partner sick, you may be in for a surprise. Illness, you will find, can do even stranger things to his personality than to his glands. The following list describes some of the startling creatures you could find in your sickbed.

MR. HELPLESS

Some men respond to being sick by turning your bedroom into a nursery. When my friend Janice's husband came home after a minor operation, it didn't take her long to figure out that he had regressed about twenty years. "A thirty-two-year-old went into the hospital, and a twelve-year-old came out," is how she puts it. At first Janice humored him, bringing the magazines he asked for and serving his meals in bed. But by the third

day, when he called her into the bedroom to fluff his pillows and complained that there were no bacon bits on his salad, she'd had it. She told him that *she* was going out to dinner, and that if he wanted bacon bits he should try the salad bar at Roy Rogers.

There is really only one way to deal with Mr. Helpless. Invite his mother over to stay, and check yourself into a hotel.

THE HYSTERIC

Like some Woody Allen character for whom a ringing in the ears signals an inoperable brain tumor, the hysteric is likely to view any minor ailment as a sign that the end is near. This describes my friend Annie's husband to a T. Just recently, Peter was convinced that he was spitting blood and on the verge of dying from some rare, fatal respiratory disease. He'd already scheduled himself for a lung biopsy and told Annie that he forgave her for all the rotten things she'd ever said to him, when she correctly diagnosed his *real* condition. Even so, it took her almost a week to convince him that nobody in the history of the world had ever died from bleeding gums.

If you live with an hysteric, it's important that *you* stay calm. On the day he decides that his thinning hair is symptomatic of

acute radiation poisoning, you can whip out the picture of his father and three uncles, all bald from the age of eighteen. And on the evening when he mistakes a case of gas for a peptic ulcer, you can retrieve from the garbage and hold up for exhibit the three empty cans of chili con carne consumed by him and his poker cronies in your absence. He may not always appreciate your help, but he'll thank you in the long run.

THE STOIC

There are some men who, when sick, turn into Englishmen. They have such stiff upper lips that it's a miracle they can swallow any medication. If my own partner feels sick, he simply darkens our room until it resembles an underground vault, then gets into bed and stays there. He requires no help from me. Inquiries about his condition or offers of assistance are viewed as ill-considered, even malevolent intrusions on his healing process. "Leave me alone!" is the standard reply to any question, from "Should I call a doctor?" and "Can I make you some tea?" to "Will you be alive on Tuesday?"

If your mate is a stoic, think of his illness as a temporary layoff from your duties as a partner. Try planning a yearly vacation for yourself to coincide with the flu season. Any urge you might have to nurse the sick will have to be satisfied elsewhere.

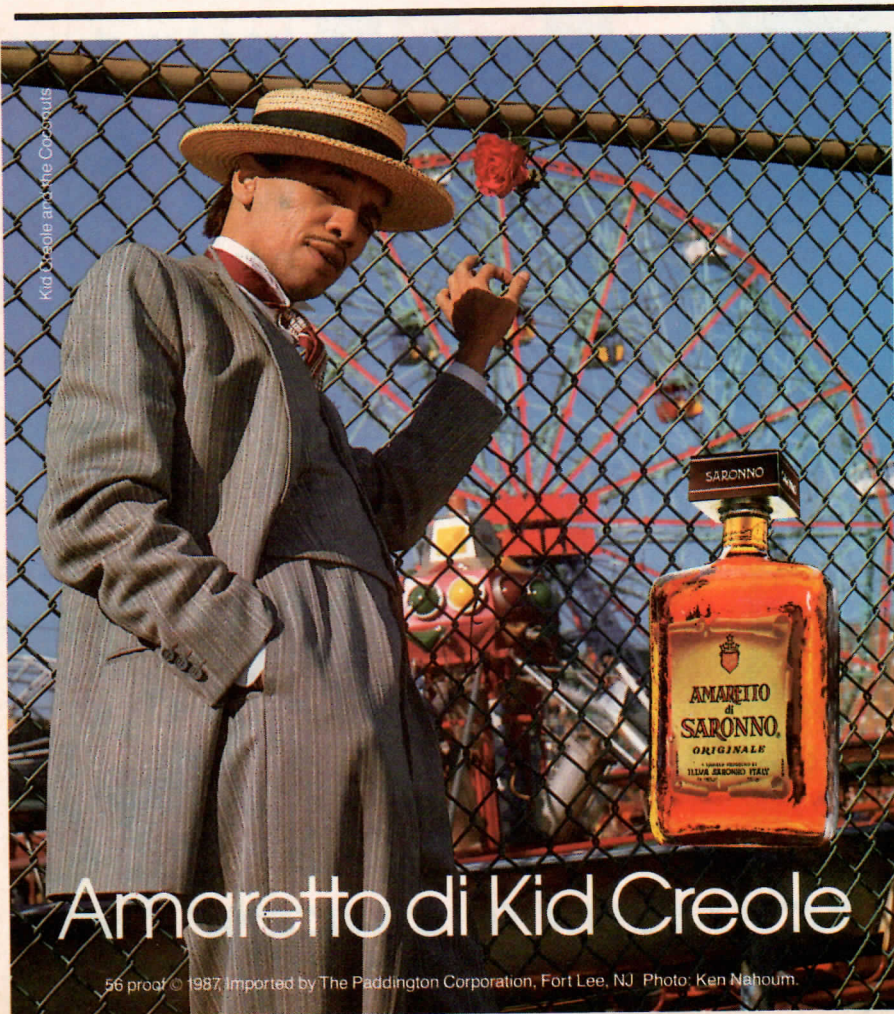
SUPERMAN

For some men, being sick is an admission of weakness. I once dated a man like this, and he always denied being ill with the same vehemence that he denied being chauvinistic. He went skiing with a temperature of 104 degrees and a voice that sounded like radio static. When he collapsed on the experts' slope and they brought him down the mountain nearly delirious with fever, he insisted he'd been pushed.

If Superman responds to your suggestion that he is ill as if you had suggested he were illiterate, then try more threatening tactics. Suggest, for instance, that he include you in a new will to be written that same afternoon.

These are the major categories, but you should be prepared for several minor ones. There is, for instance, *The Psychologist*, who believes his every illness has an emotional origin and can probably be traced back to something you've done to upset him. There's also *The Skeptic*, who maintains that all doctors are quacks, all medical treatment hoey, and your own consumption of aspirin a testament not to your headache, but to your gullibility. Finally, there's *The Adversary*, who responds to the suggestion that he is ill by saying that all illness is in the head and that only neurotics like *you* get sick.

No matter which of the above personalities your partner assumes, you can remain calm if you remember one thing: While his illness might be contagious, his craziness isn't.



Amaretto di Kid Creole

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