

AT A PARTY recently I heard a husband say, "I've been married to Ellen for 25 years, and I still don't know whether she means what she says, says what she means, or remembers what she said."

"Listen," answered his friend, "I've got a mother, two sisters, a wife, and three daughters. I ought to be wise when it comes to women. But I'm not! The females in my life—from 2 to 70—are exactly like Russian foreign policy: a mystery wrapped in a puzzle enclosed in an enigma."

Whenever two men get together, those same sentiments are heard. Around the globe, and ever since Adam, the human male has cried in anguish, "I don't understand women."

The amazing thing about it all is—what's the mystery? Who created this who-done-it about the unfathomable femme? As a woman who has a mother, a daughter, a sister, and endless female friends, I'd say that my sex is as transparent as Scotch tape, as clear as a mirror, eminently practical, and altogether sensible and sound.

It's my honest belief that the average man likes to think of his women as unpredictable, slightly flighty, and a bit mysterious. In short, each man gets a feeling of strength and a taste of superiority by secretly believing that no one else could put up with things the way he does.

I'd be the last person on earth to pull these props from under the male. But I'm the first to insist that my men friends separate fact from fancy when they malign my sex.

I'm tired, for instance, of the old saw about women having "no business sense," and understanding "only those figures which come in fur coats." A cruel gleam lights the masculine eye when talk turns to wives and money. Inevitably someone tells a variation on an old joke. You know, the one about the little wife who rushes in the front door, stumbles under a vast load of packages, and burbles happily, "Darling, I've just saved you a fortune with all these bargains."

I say nonsense! Walk into your local stores someday and see for yourself how women spend your money. They twitch the lettuce heads, tilt with the butcher, and examine every label. It's no small feat these days to keep a happy balance between vitamins and dollars, but women are doing it.

It may be argued that the average housewife is out of her element in the stock market or the curb exchange. But I maintain that there are few traders anywhere who get

as much yield on their money as the woman loading her market basket. And statistics show that the American female now controls more than 50 percent of our total wealth, makes more than 80 percent of all purchases, and in most homes manages the checkbook. Has all this hurt the national economy? Quite the contrary; we're enjoying a period of record prosperity!

"WELL," YOU say, "maybe she's penny-wise, but she's certainly pound-foolish. Look at the way she diets—and why? To squeeze herself into some of those utterly ridiculous fashions."

Foolish? Foppish? Faddy? Perhaps, but there's no mystery about it at all. Your wife keeps down on the pounds and up on the fashions for you. This is her way of saying that she considers you a dashing attractive fellow, well worth holding.

She lifts her spirits—and she hopes yours—by keeping in step with the other women in your life: your fe-

male colleagues at the office, your secretary, and the chic career girls you see in restaurants. You ought to be flattered, not flustered, that she cares so much.

You ought to be delighted, too, when she begins to nag about going out at night. Remember, you're not the only one who's tired at the end of the day. If your wife is willing to curl her hair, powder her nose, and slip on her best dress, it's because she desires your companionship and because now and then she likes to have others see what a fine "catch" you really are.

I've never understood why men find this female penchant for fun and romance so baffling. Or why they are so perturbed that their wives are eternal matchmakers. Sometimes I suspect that men can't spot a compliment right under their noses. That's exactly what the business of matchmaking adds up to.

There's no doubt that women get dreamy-eyed when they plot the future of two "unattached" persons;

and no doubt either that they strut like Caesar when these well-laid plans work out. But I insist that this is the best testament I know that your marriage has been good—so good, in fact, that your wife wants all her friends to be as happy and as fortunate.

Of course, men always say that when women were created, one rib and all logic were forgotten. I've heard fathers and brothers and husbands emphasize this idea with endless stories. Have you heard the one about the wife who gave her husband two neckties for Christmas? Poor guy. He thanked her heartily, then an hour later waltzed into the living room wearing one of them.

"Nice, eh?" he said, kissing his wife. She looked up at him with hurt eyes. "What's wrong," she asked, "didn't you like the other one?"

JUSTICE Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "Life is not logic." He should have added, "Thank goodness." For if we rationed each kiss

