

Deliver Us From Sock-Gobblers

By Jamie Buckingham

After years of theological debate, I have finally discerned we have a sock-gobbler in our washing machine. In short, my machine is possessed of a demon.

My wife disagrees. She does not believe a washing machine can have a demon. I, on the other hand, believe a washing machine can have anything it wants to have.

"If there really is a sock-gobbler," Jackie asked, "why does he eat only one sock out of a pair? If one sock fills him, why doesn't he eat the spare sock on his next visit?"

I had no answer. I only know he is there. To prove it I have 17 unmatched socks in my sock drawer—widowed victims of the sock-gobbler. And that's just this year's count. Each year about this time I go through my drawer and throw away the singles. Last year I put 13 of them in the trash can. This year set a new record.

I keep my unmatched singles in the bottom drawer of my dresser hoping their mates will somehow reappear. It never happens.

Each year I reluctantly round them up and drop them in the waste basket in my bedroom. Expensive racquetball socks, formal blacks, blues, greens, grays, fuzzies...all were favorites, but without mates they're useless.

I've considered forming a club: Socks Without Partners.

At first I thought it was Jackie's careless washing procedures. "The reason my socks don't come out even is you don't put them in even!" I howled when my most expensive and favorite pair of socks became a single.

"Not so," she argued. "I gathered them two by two. Believe me, Noah didn't do a more complete job. I took two pairs from your shoes under the bed, a pair of wet ones out of your boots, a stiff pair from the ceiling of the closet where you had kicked them when you came in from racquetball, a mud-caked pair from under the front seat of your pickup, a moldy pair from under the dryer...."

"Aha!" I screamed. "I bet the rest of the mates are under the washing machine." However, my search turned up nothing but a bucketful of lint, three green pennies, two rusty washers, a 12-year-old skate key and a flea collar from our cat that died last year.

"Inside this washer is a little trapdoor that pulls in one sock from each pair and holds them captive. Somewhere in this machine is a secret treasure chest of unmated socks."

Several years ago I was greatly embarrassed when I stepped off the plane in Washington, D.C., for a book editorial meeting and discovered I was wearing one blue sock and one gray one.

I explained to my snickering friends that these were the only ones in my drawer when I got up that morning to catch the early flight.

A week later I received a package in the mail from my friend



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John Sherrill, who had been at the editorial meeting. It contained a little mesh nylon bag with a zipper across the top. "Put your socks in this before you put them in the machine," John wrote. "Then the sock-gobbler can't get at them." (John, you see, agrees that washing machines can have demons.)

But he misjudged. The sock-gobbler not only ate my socks, it ate the bag also.

"The machine is possessed!" I screamed at Jackie.

"Oppressed," she said, trying to straighten out my theology. "Not 'possessed.' See, your maroon socks always come out perfectly."

She's right. I hate the maroon pair. The elastic is stretched out at the top and they have

a big crease across the top of my big toe. They come out of the washer even when you don't put them in. In fact, I distinctly remember dropping them in the trash when I threw away my last batch of singles.

The next evening I was in the den watching the news on television when Jackie came out of the utility room with an armload of clothes. I couldn't believe my eyes. On top of the stack were those ugly maroon socks. I knew then I was dealing with something more than trapdoors. Oppressed...possessed...this was no time to get hung up on theological semantics. The machine had a demon and needed deliverance.

The next morning, after Jackie had gone to a Bible study, I opened all my dresser drawers and pulled out my mismatched socks. I laid them out on the bed. The only ones left in my sock drawer were some black fuzzy socks that have shrunk up until they look like those little things golfers pull over the heads of their clubs, two pairs of racquetball socks with the tops stretched out and, of course, the maroon pair.

I went out the next day and bought 10 pairs of new socks—all the same size and color. Then I stopped by the church office to see if someone with a deliverance ministry would come out to the house.

The church secretary suggested I exorcise the machine myself, or switch to a Maytag. She doesn't believe a washing machine can have a demon either—especially a born-again Kenmore with a sanctified lint trap. Me? I'm hesitant to agitate the demon too much. It might start in on underwear.

My only recourse has been to wash my socks out by hand and hang them on the shower rod.

However, our oldest son, who lives with us, wears socks the same size as mine. Each time he wears them they disappear completely. Not just one, but both of them—before they even get to the machine. Early in the morning he comes in and gets mine off the shower rod, stretches out the tops, tears holes in the toes and leaves them on the back porch stuffed into his shoes when he comes in from work.

So I'm back to wearing mismatched socks. All because no one agrees with my theology. ■