

DUE DILIGENCE

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MELANIE: We didn't meet on the Internet. Is that something you wanted to know? How we met?

That's the first thing everyone asks me. Where'd you meet? On the Web? And I say 'no'. We met at work. I think people hope we met on the Internet. I'd considered doing that a million times but I hadn't. Not sure what I'd get. Ha.

We met at work. I'm an Accountant and he works in Sales. Accountant is not a job that wins a lot of points for interest with anyone. Bit of a conversation killer.

No one wants to be an accountant when they grow up. It's like being a Librarian.

My boss used to come in after talking to him.
"That bloody Martin...He could sell ice to Eskimos" and I'd think
"Who is Martin?"

So we met. Eventually. At a farewell for someone I didn't know.

Everyone said. "He's a ripping bloke" or "a fantastic guy". It's not like I was even looking but it just seemed stupid not pursue it.

We had a chat, then a coffee, then lunch, then dinner, then a film, then another one.

The thing that clinched it was a trip to Ikea. I needed a bookshelf. He helped me choose one and then he brought it home for me in his car. I knew then it was serious. I'm sure we're not the first couple whose eyes have met over an allen key.

It was a Billy. The bookcase. White.

He asked me to do his tax and while I was saving the file, he said
"I think there's something really sexy...intimate about this. You doing my tax." He didn't have many deductions.

And it was nice. He was great.

But I wasn't breathless. Over the moon. Wasn't seeing fireworks. But who does? And I wasn't looking but I was fed up with going out or looking profile after profile. Too much work. Not much return on investment.

He was attentive and my friends loved him.
"He's fun. Mel. He can talk to anyone. He's a keeper."
And he is, he was. He was great.

It wasn't perfect...but what is?
And the thing that wasn't perfect seemed so minor in the scheme of things. It seemed petty to worry about it.

It's just ...He didn't seem to have much interest in sex. Not with me, anyway and not often but it wasn't a deal breaker.

And it was so good in other ways. More important ways.

I'd think "There is no reason it shouldn't work because he's attractive to everyone." That's the thing. On paper we're a smart, funny, attractive couple. We should be perfect.

And it's not like we never had sex. We do. We did.
Just not very often.

I had this idea that it elevated us to a more cerebral connection. We didn't need the physical as much as other couples because we're connected on a deeper level.

And then I thought maybe he just couldn't open up. He's always been very outgoing at work but so different at home. That seemed quite sweet because it's like he has lots of layers.

At home he can be. ... almost lonely.
Extroverted but introverted.
Like he needed someone to love him.
And what's not to love?
So I did. I wanted to.

One night, not long after IKEA, he appeared at the front door. Out of the blue. It was actually a bit unnerving but quite sweet and vulnerable. He said, "I love you and I don't love many people and it's really important that you understand that. Do you understand?"

Yes.

"It's really important that you get that. Do you?"
He had tears in his eyes.

Yes. No. Not really.
He had tears in his eyes.
So we got engaged.

I kept thinking, "We're too old to be engaged. Who gets engaged?"
Then I wanted it to be small, intimate. No engagement ring.

He bought me ring. He wanted me to have it. He wanted me to have anything I wanted. I didn't want a ring.

And then he wanted a band. At the reception.

"I don't think we need a band....Do we?"

People don't have bands now, do they? Or a DJ? They have an iPhone stuck in the corner. Cheaper. Less fuss.

But he wanted a band. A band that almost outnumbered the guests. I thought we had to have a band because he loves to dance but he doesn't. He doesn't dance.

"The band is for you. I want it for you. I want you to have anything you want." I didn't want a band.

So at my wedding I danced to the band my husband wanted, with my brother.

He sat at the table watching us dance and I looked over and caught him zoning out. Miles away. I thought, "I've married a complete stranger. There are so many things I don't know. So many questions I probably should ask"

But then the "Chicken Dance" started.
And I just let it go.

Marriage hasn't been what I expected but I don't know what I expected. He's handy around the house. He can do things. Change a washer. I can do those things but I'm sick of it.

But that's not why we got married.
I'm not sure I know why we got married.

A few months ago, he took a week off work to build a pergola. He was different. While he was doing it. Excited. Affectionate. Open. He seemed happy.

Every night when I'd get home he had dinner waiting and then we'd go straight to bed. We made love more times in that week than we had the whole time we'd been married.

It was passionate. Ecstatic. Like it probably should have been from the beginning. It was nothing like us. Like who we are normally.

It was fantastic. He was so different. We were so different. We were happy.

Then he went back to work and it stopped.
Everything went back to normal.
Everything.

We went back to our deep cerebral connection and a big part of me missed our shallow physical one.

That sounds awful doesn't it?

One night there was a knock on the door. It was Mrs B. Our neighbour. I don't even know what the "B" stands for. Her cat had gone missing. Truth be told, I found Mittens very irritating he used to spray and kill birds but I could hear Martin talking and she's old and he was lovely.

I've lived there for 5 years and said two words to her the whole time and he was so sweet. So compassionate. He walked around the block for two hours, looking and I thought "I am so lucky. What is not to love?"

Mittens had been shot in the head with a nail gun. He was outraged the day we found out. "Worse than animals" he said, "Not even an animal would do that".

I thought "I could really be in love with you."

We had sex twice that night.

I thought it was the start of something. Something new and unexpected. And it was.

Just not for us.

For us things went back to normal. Post pergola, post nail gun killing of Mittens and post briefly exciting sex life.

He just seemed so solitary. Moody. Except at work, At work he was the life of the party. Everyone loved him. He did handstands in the tearoom and organised the Kris Kringle.

I started to resent it. The difference. The gap.

How can you tell anyone that? It should have been perfect.

So last month he was late from touch football. Hours late and I was worried. Was I worried?

It was just so late.

He was really angry with me. I've never seen him so angry.

"I went for a drive."

"Why didn't you say? You could have just phoned"

"You've wrecked everything. You don't trust me. I love you and you don't trust me. Do you know how that feels? Do you? I love you and you make me feel like shit." He started to cry.

I longed for something to distract us. An allen key. A tax return. Mrs B. Anything.

He started to cry and then he started undoing my shirt.

Meanwhile a shelf collapsed on the Billy bookcase and my high

school netball trophy smashed into a thousand pieces. Glass everywhere.

Then Wednesday, I read the paper. Not in the morning. I read it after work. And then it was on TV and I was just really aware of it.

It's weird isn't it? Seeing someone you know. In the paper or on the news. I mean I always watch those re-enactments and wonder "Do I know that person? Could I be of any help?"

I never can. Does it count for anything that I always hope I can?

But as soon as I saw it I knew I knew her. From the cafe. Very pretty. Young. Always pleasant. Smiled when she took your order.

I looked at that picture and I knew her.

I knew her.

I knew her.

We knew her.

And then you came. You came.

Because we knew her.

He knew her.

I was going to put flowers...On a doorstep or something.

Or write a letter.

I don't know what to say.

I want to say, "I had no idea." But who believes that?

And who cares what I know or didn't know or thought or think.

Sometimes I don't care.

She was in my car. How could I not know that?

I have friends and family and a good job and a life. I had a life.

But people will think I knew.

I know I didn't ask. But who would think to ask that?

What should I have asked?

I had questions.

But the "Chicken Dance" started.

I just let it go.

And then the shelf collapsed on the Billy bookcase

And my netball trophy smashed.

LIGHTS DOWN