

It Would Be Funny... If It Wasn't My Life

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I suppose I should have been worried. Melanie had been standing at my dining table for a full five minutes, staring, arms hanging limply by her side, mouth gaping open. I had never seen her speechless before. In fact, I'm not sure anyone had ever seen her speechless before. If I hadn't been starting to wonder if she'd ever recover, I might have found some humour in her frozen state. Lord knows she's seen me speechless on more occasions than I can count.

Mel isn't like me and that may be how we've managed to stay friends since preschool. They didn't call it preschool back then, it was simply home where we stayed with our stay-at-home June Cleaver moms and we were neighbours; but we have been friends since before that first terrifying day on the big yellow schoolbus. Back in those days, school started when you were five and you only had to endure one year of kindergarten. I don't know if my germ-phobic, neat-freak personality could have withstood a second year of "sandbox." Whoever decided that bringing dirt inside and making you play in that dirt was important for developing fundamental social skills was sadly mistaken. Dirt and I have never been close, and failing sandbox in kindergarten still remains one of my most strongly guarded secrets. I think Mel has a better relationship with dirt and social situations; she passed sandbox. Mel is more driven than I'll ever be and is currently making a financial killing as one of the top-selling real estate agents in the area. She's a fast-talking go-getter who tells people how it is going to be, what properties to consider and how much to pay for them. Even in a state of shock Mel's hair is perfect. Like always. She is the most together perfect size four – a source of envy for me since I'll never be smaller than a six no matter how many miles I run a day – who

wears exquisite Prada shoes and carries matching handbags. Seeing her in a state of shock is uncharted territory.

Is that movement? I think I see a small subtle shake of her head. Yes, she is shaking her head. She is trying to move her lips but no sound is coming out. This is a definite one-eighty from the determined non-stop talking woman who flew into my condo five minutes earlier. I knew it was Mel by the single rap on the door. Mel is no-nonsense and sees no point in wasted knocking. She's a one-knock gal; two if she's really excited and has just closed a huge deal (huge qualifies as a million dollars or better). There is one knock. I wander over to the door, unlock and open it. Mel flies into the room like a hurricane. Fast walking, four-inch-heel tapping, arms flailing, Prada handbag flying, head twisting, hair tossing and talking. This is how Mel always enters a room. Mel entered kindergarten the same way, only with less Prada. I think she was wearing Buster Brown black patent leather and toting a little brown-paper lunch bag back then.

"Where have you been? I've been calling and calling and you're not at work." Mel always asks multiple questions and doesn't leave time for answers. Mel knows me too well to actually require answers most of the time anyway.

"What is wrong with you? Are you still in your pajamas? You don't let men see those pajamas, do you? No wonder you're on the backside of thirty and still single. Is that a glass of wine in your hand? It's only ten-thirty in the morning on a workday!" she exclaims and would continue but has to stop for breath.

"Thirty-one is not the backside of thirty and it's a lovely Australian Merlot, would you like some?" I manage while pushing the door closed behind her and glancing down at my red plaid flannel pants (circa 1996), my unmatched socks (one is blue with penguins

on it, the other is red) and an orange t-shirt that features holes in both armpits and a Minnie Mouse decal on the front (it used to boast the word “flirting” in glitter but now reads “tin” because most of the glitter has peeled off). When I look up from the pajama assessment, I notice that Mel’s perfectly coiffed long blonde hair is shinier than ever; she’s just had her highlights done. The memory of the larger-than-life three-day unwashed mess I saw in the mirror earlier makes my head hurt.

“Australian or not, you never drink before lunch and never on a Monday. Why aren’t you returning my calls? You could have been dead and you know I have no time for that sort of thing. The Corbetts are thinking Post Road and I have that Burrows fellow almost ready to make an offer on the Elm Street property. I can’t possibly fit in a funeral!” She stops only for oxygen.

“I turned my ringer off,” I slip in while she’s inhaling and take a sip of wine. The dead thing does not offend me. I know she would make time for my funeral if I really were dead; she’s only being dramatic.

“Well obviously. But you never screen calls. Mr. Right could be calling right now. Why aren’t you at work?”

“The condo market is drying up. You said so yourself,” I state flatly, taking another sip of wine. “Are you sure you don’t want a glass?”

“No and you shouldn’t either,” Mel takes the wineglass out of my hand and looks concerned. “I saw you Thursday at lunch, you were busy at work and excited about going to the hockey game. What happened? Did the Leafs lose? You know I don’t follow hockey. Don’t the Leafs always lose?” She reaches out and grabs my hand that had previously

been holding the Merlot and assesses my fingers, "Oh my God! You're biting your fingernails again! You haven't bitten your nails since the third grade!"

Yes, I have been biting my nails again and I haven't been answering my phone, or even looking at caller ID for the past two days. I don't know how to have this conversation, or any of the other conversations I must have post-haste. I'm not normally a stick-my-head-in-the-sand kind of gal. I think I mentioned my relationship with sand earlier so I wouldn't go that route unless bodily forced or backed into a corner.

Unfortunately, sand and I have bonded over the past couple of days and I'm burrowing in for a long stay if it means not dealing with the sticky situation in which I currently find myself. It has actually taken me the past two days of contemplation and nail biting to come up with the word sticky. I was referring to it as interesting but this situation rates a bit messier, so after trying out adjectives like devastating, horrific, ghastly, horrendous and gruesome I finally settled on sticky. No one has been maimed to this point, so the other adjectives just seem over the top, for now anyway. The situation could, of course, escalate. But currently, I'm thinking of it as sticky.

I can't even begin to explain to Mel what has transpired in the four days since I saw her last, so I take back my nail-bitten hand and point to the dining table of my sparsely furnished condo. Mel, determined to solve whatever is ailing me, get me back on track and still make her twelve-o'clock lunch, taps across my hardwood floor to the table. I love my dining table. It's a seven-foot-long harvest table that I bought at the Amish Furniture Market just before I moved into the condo. I love the Amish. They are so dedicated to their culture and craft; it's all very commendable. Sadly, I didn't love the matching chairs, and believe matching was a complete misnomer, so I purchased the

table only, obviously with the view to finding the perfect chairs at some point down the road. I've been travelling that road for almost a year now and still have not found the elusive perfect chairs. I did invest in two plastic Rubbermaid E-Z Step 2-steppers that are currently doubling as chairs. The thought being that the non-slip 2-steppers will come in handy after I've found, fallen in love with, purchased and taken delivery of the aforementioned perfect chairs. The 2-steppers are scheduled to become much needed aids in reaching the top shelves of the cupboards in this condo with its impossibly high ceilings that challenge my five-foot-three stature on a daily basis, but currently they are acting as chairs.

I follow Mel to the table, where she now stands speechless beside the white 2-stepper. I have a white one and a blue one. I couldn't commit to one colour when I bought them so I bought one of each. I take my wineglass out of Mel's hand, as she is in no state to argue or put up a fight, and I walk over to the cupboard, take another wineglass off the shelf and fill it from the open bottle of Merlot on the counter. As I top up my glass I notice the wine charm on Mel's glass reads Comatose. Fitting, I decide, and almost smile for the first time in days.

Since Mel is trying to make words now and appears to be coming out of her original shock I walk over and place the comatose wineglass in her hand. She looks up from the display on the table, makes confused eye contact and downs the contents of her wineglass in one long, loud swallow. I take the glass from her and walk back to the counter to refill it.

"What is all this? Tell me you robbed a jewelry store?" she finally stammers. The idea that I am a felon is easier for her to comprehend than what she suspects is the

actual truth. I walk back to where Mel is standing and she readily accepts the wineglass again, but without downing the contents immediately as before.

We both turn back to the table where three velvet ring boxes stand open to display three very different but equally stunning, glittering diamond engagement rings. The boxes themselves are impressive enough, plush velvet in various colours, and the combined worth of their contents would be impressive if either of us had the wits about us to do the calculation. Beside the green-velvet ring box is a man's high-school signet ring with a very large, heavily scratched navy-coloured glass stone with the words "Central High '92" barely legible on the well-worn and somewhat misshapen band.

"Nope. The first three came with proposals," I manage, quietly.

"But you're single. You aren't even dating one person seriously, let alone four! You invented 'Sex with the Single Ex'! You can't even commit to kitchen chairs!" Mel's voice cracks and she sounds like she has dry mouth even though she has just made very short order of a glass of wine.

"Seems the Sex with the Single Ex plan didn't go as hoped," I state, trying to be as matter-of-fact as possible even though I don't feel that way.

Having had several days to absorb the insanity of my current sticky situation, I am able to lead Mel to the couch. I discovered over the past couple of days that not being near the 'ring display' makes breathing and adjective assessing easier and I have been giving the table a very wide berth while going to and from the kitchen to get After Eight mints. I have been carrying the wine bottle around the condo with me, but the After Eights have to stay in the fridge; they are so much nicer cold.

“But...” Mel manages as I help her get seated. I walk back to the fridge and grab the box of After Eights. I suspect it is going to be a long morning and Mel may not make her twelve o'clock, but the time has come to bring her up to speed on the sticky situation. I walk back to the couch and sit down beside her.

“Mint?” I ask Mel before I begin the story. Mel does not look impressed as she takes another sip of wine. I don't think she wants a mint. I take a sip of my wine and bite into an After Eight. The story I have to tell started long before last Thursday. If I had to decide when this particular sticky situation started brewing I'd have to say about three years ago.