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My first internet dating experience

I was checking my emails and, to my amazement, there was an email from the dating site. An email! My profile had only been live for about four days.

I'd read that guys would check out a woman's profile and initially send a free 'kiss' or a 'flirt' because there was no cost involved. The site info stated that a guy would wait for a response from the free contact. Only after they knew you were interested in them would they pay to send an email. Making contact by email cost about \$15, and both parties could then email each other on the site for up to a period of 30 days. This allowed time for couples to determine if they wanted to meet or not.

I was in shock. Someone thought I was worth \$15 with no photograph on my profile. The email read, 'I want to meet you.' That was all!

I assumed that I was supposed to check out his profile. I was getting ready for an appointment so I'd have to follow it up when I was back from my meeting.

When I got home there was another email from him which included his mobile and his name. His name was

Matthew (another Matthew!) and he wrote that he'd meant to send his mobile number with the previous email but had forgotten. No way would I ever have sent my mobile to someone I didn't know. I clicked onto his profile name to check out his details.

Reliable, educated, interested, mobile, tactile, 68, divorced, retired university professor, 180 cm, presently staying in the mountains looking to settle here.

There was no photo on his profile but I thought he sounded okay. I emailed him and thanked him for his messages. I told him it was my first email so it was very exciting to get a contact after only a few days. I didn't acknowledge his mobile number, feeling it was far too early to call him.

His next email read:

Why don't we talk on the phone? I'm very new to this internet stuff and finding it very frustrating. My laptop wireless coverage is bad where I'm staying. Call my mobile and we can arrange to meet face to face without the complicated techno stuff.

Security warnings on the dating site advised users not to let a contact you don't know take you off their site by giving you another email address. Keep on the site, it stated, until you feel comfortable enough to take the contact any further. Many guys who are scammers want to get women to an alternative email address so they can't be traced later. It didn't have any warnings about telephone numbers.

I didn't know what to do. I thought about calling Liz in Sydney. She knew all about internet dating. But at that stage I didn't really want to talk to anyone about what I was up to as I was a little embarrassed.

He emailed again.

Can you send a photo? I want 2 meet.

I decided I would give the Photo Booth on my Mac another go for a photograph. Surprisingly, I took one I was happy with and managed to upload it onto my profile.

I emailed him and told him:

I've put up a photo on my profile so now you can check me out. I don't want to leave it up long – let me know when you've seen it.

Less than an hour later, another email from him.

Thanks. I'll return the compliment and send you a photograph of me soon. You have strong features, interesting, lovely.

Bullshit, I thought. What he meant was, you look okay for a slightly overweight dame past her mid-sixties!

Next day he emailed his photo. WOW! He looked great and very interesting (that's if it was his photo). Be careful, I thought – looks mean nothing. I should have learnt this years ago with Georgio, the Italian husband.

About a week later on a Saturday morning I gave in and rang his mobile. He was really surprised. I liked the sound of his voice. We talked for about an hour. He was very easy to talk to. He expected to meet straight

away but I wanted to give myself time to mull it over. I suggested that we meet up for a coffee the following Thursday, as I'd be going past where he was staying. It was about twenty kilometres west from where I lived. I think he was disappointed that I wasn't prepared to rush straight out to meet him.

I needed time. I had to have my eyelashes and eyebrows dyed, colour the hair and madly try a crash diet. It was five days away so I thought I might be able to get another kilo off by then. I'd been dieting for about a year and was already back into size 14. If only he'd contacted me in a couple of months, I would have been back to a size 12 and much happier with myself. Like many women, my weight had become a constant struggle since menopause. It was winter then so at least I could cover myself up.

We had several telephone conversations before we were due to meet on the Thursday. He was really into national politics. I was politically aware but did note that I was doing a lot of catching up with the latest political happenings in the days before meeting him.

Thursday arrived. We were meeting at 10.30 am. I felt panicky and started to get ready at about 8.30. I was going on to lunch with a group of arty people so I decided to wear my brown kimono with a black top under it and black pants. The weather was cool so I added one of my favourite possessions, an olive green shawl I'd bought in Paris. I felt good. I looked at myself from every possible angle in my bedroom mirror to make sure I didn't look too fat.

Oh God, I'd forgotten to paint my nails. Not going unless they were done. That was going to take at least ten minutes. I was the one who'd written that I was reliable. I had to make sure I wasn't late. Hair was okay, just clipped back as usual. It was 9.35. Damn it. I still had to do a second coat on my nails. It was supposed to dry in 60 seconds.

That was it – no more time, I had to leave. I was really shaking and my face was getting quite flushed. Fuck! I hated my face being red.

The temperature that morning was about 12 degrees. Even so, when I got in the car I turned the air conditioning full on, hoping it would cool my face down. There I was, driving far too fast, shivering because of the air conditioning and trying to keep from messing up the second coat on my nails which for some unknown reason hadn't dried.

I don't remember the 20-kilometre drive – I must have been on autopilot. All of a sudden when I was trying to find a parking spot I started packing it. What was I doing? This was crazy! I really wanted to do a runner. I checked the time on my phone: 10.29. Too late. Just get across the road and into the café.

The door of the café was shut due to the wind. I fumbled with the door, finally working out I should pull not push. I saw him straight away, sitting to the left. A bunch of flowers was on the table in front of an empty chair, obviously meant for me. He was incredibly good-looking although he looked much older than his photograph,

not so much in years but very weathered. He stood up. I kissed him the European way on both cheeks, which surprised him. He had hair, he was tallish and no beer gut!

At the last minute I had decided to take him a gift. With so much time on my hands living in the mountains, I'd become a knitaholic. I had been knitting these amazing pure wool diagonal scarves. I thought one would be a nice simple gift for him, as he was supposed to be moving to this cooler area. When I saw the flowers, I was so glad I'd brought him the scarf.

As he handed me the flowers he said, 'Great to finally meet you.'

'I wish it was in another two months when with some more dieting I would have been back to a size 12,' I replied before thinking.

Of course he said, 'There's no need for you to lose any weight. You look great as you are.' What else could he say?

We ordered our coffees. He ordered a long black with separate milk, which I thought was unusual. I gave him the scarf. It was a darkish denim blue which really matched what he was wearing. He put it around his neck.

'You actually knitted it?' He sounded surprised. 'I didn't know people knitted any more. It's amazing – you're so clever.'

'I know,' I said. 'Everyone tells me.' I thought, how many times I had heard this in my life. We laughed.

Silence ...

Okay, start saying something. I was an expert at small talk so I started prattling about life in the mountains and what I'd been doing since I'd been here. I found him interesting and he seemed to be fairly intelligent.

When he told me this was the first time he'd met anyone from the internet, I believed him. Why wouldn't I! He commented on me being a non-drinker which was on my profile. I told him it was a decision I made almost 30 years ago when I was in advertising and my drinking was out of control. He was delighted I didn't drink.

'Most women drink so much now. I hardly drink myself, only on special social occasions,' he commented, seeming to make an issue of it. I thought it sounded as if he was trying to convince himself he hardly drank, rather than me.

He wanted to know more about personal stuff and asked me how long I'd been divorced and about my children. I told him I'd been divorced for about twenty years. As I said it, I thought to myself, wow, how about that? I really did manage to stop getting married. I hadn't thought about it for years.

I told him my son had two children and my daughter three. He informed me that he'd been divorced for two years, and had five grown children and seven grandchildren spread over several states. He noticed that I checked the time on my phone. 'How much more time have you got before you need to go to your luncheon?' he asked.

‘Only about 30 minutes max – the lunch is at Secret Creek restaurant down in Lithgow,’ I replied, wishing then that I didn’t have to go on to the lunch.

‘Why don’t we get out of here and go for a walk in the fresh air?’ he suggested.

‘Sure, but it’s really windy outside,’ I said, although I didn’t really care about the weather. We left the café. I put the flowers in my car and we walked off down the main street. Shock horror ... He reached for my hand and held it while we were walking. It felt really strange walking down the street holding hands with a 68-year-old guy I’d only met an hour ago. I knew very few people in that area, so what the hell, I thought.

Then I heard, ‘Hi Carole, fancy seeing you out here!’

I looked across and saw Jennifer, a woman I knew from a book group. She walked straight over to us. There was so little time left to be with him, I hoped she wouldn’t hold us up.

‘We’ve just had coffee. This is a friend of mine, Matthew.’

What did she say but, ‘I assume so as you’re holding hands.’ And turning to him, ‘Did Carole make that scarf for you?’

‘Yes, I love it,’ he responded, obviously feeling uncomfortable.

‘I thought it looked like one of hers. Her knitting’s wonderful. She’s so clever.’ She smiled. I thought, here we go again with the bloody ‘clever’ stuff. Would it ever go

away? I was so embarrassed I could have shrunk through the pavement. (I still found it difficult at times to take compliments, given the treatment I had received from my parents as a young child.)

Thankfully he said, 'We must be going. We have an appointment. Good to meet you.'

As we walked away, I said, 'I'm so sorry. I only know about twenty people in the mountains and we had to run into one of them.'

'Don't worry, it was okay.'

Time was almost out for me. 'I really will have to go.'

'Have dinner with me tomorrow night?' he asked me suddenly.

To my surprise, I found myself saying, 'I'd love to.'

He asked tentatively, 'Can I pick you up?'

'Sure. I'll text you my address. About 6.30 at my place.'

'I don't know the area so can you make a booking somewhere?' he asked, which I thought was sweet and it meant some of his story was true.

'See you tomorrow.' I kissed him on the cheek and bolted to my car, my face red again, naturally.

I was in a state and didn't understand why. It had all gone quite well, considering my low expectations. He was a surprise. I'd really expected to just meet him, have a quick coffee and take off. I found him really interesting and attractive and was dying to see him again.

I wasn't taking any notice of my driving when the next thing I heard was a siren. I looked in the rear vision

mirror and saw a patrol car, which was unusual in that area, especially during the week.

‘Can I see your licence? Are you aware this is a 70 km zone, lady. You were doing 83k. I’m going to have to give you a ticket.’

I couldn’t have cared less; I was floating.