

“THE AGONY OF DECEIT”

BY: Kerrie Houston Reightley

What Oscar Wilde said about marriage--that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary--might be more aptly said about being single today. This was driven home in 2000 when a girlfriend and I, new arrivals on the Seattle singles scene, ventured through the doors of the swank Metropolitan Grill.

Once inside this seemingly safe singles haven, it wasn't long before we started feeling like a couple of deer during hunting season, with some 150 arrows shot into them. Hors' d'oeuvres, drinks, flowers made out of paper napkins, chocolates, etc., came shooting at us from, well...everywhere.

For two forty-something single moms who no longer got invited to their married friends' parties, this was a bracing change, to say the least. When one considered all the offerings at our table, and the male/female ratio that evening, the singles scene seemed tremendously advantageous to women. So much so that when a quintessential tall, dark, handsome, and well-dressed man entered the bar alone, my friend Cici, emboldened by our reception, got up, turned to me, and said, “That's the man I'm

going to marry....” And the last I saw of her, she was at the other end of the bar with him, looking ever so angelic--as deceptive a presentation as you could ever hope to witness.

Cici has the most duplicitous nature of anyone I've ever known. She changes her identity for every interesting man she meets. One year she pined away for this Little House on the Prairie existence with a Montana man who turned out to be only dressing the part of a Cowboy. Soon after that, she discovered a penchant for French men and their Dom Perignon. So now here she was, head tilted to one side, hands locked squarely behind her back (her breast in full tilt), aping a look of utter rapture with whatever this suitor was saying.

Given her attention span, this was yet another Tour De Deception. Watching her, I remembered telling her once about going “all night long” with this man I adored (did I forget to mention that we're two mature, classy women?) and her response was, “What did you think about all that time?” Before I could answer, she continued, “I mean, I would be thinking about how my ceiling and wall aren't quite at a right angle.. And Oh, I forgot to pack my son's lunch for tomorrow... and Why did I leave the bathroom light on?”

That's how bad her attention span

is: she can't even keep her mind on sex when she's having it.

The life story he, Marc Spencer (not necessarily his real name, as things turned out), told her that night seemed plausible enough at the time and place. He was 46, had never been married, was an "attorney for Major League Baseball," and in Seattle that weekend to negotiate the Safeco Field cost overruns. He also played baseball in the minor leagues, in Arizona. His employer, the Baseball Commissioner's Office, is of course in New York, but he worked out of his home in San Francisco. His "work" took him all over the country, on behalf of the Commissioner's Office. And he was currently contemplating buying a "Triple A team in Portland," or perhaps a national pharmaceutical company.

Well, OK, maybe our credulity organs were a little...over stimulated or something. When I finally ventured over to them, having come away from a man coming on to me with his Amazon.com stock, Marc was mid-monologue about his baseball stats (from 20 years ago) and some of his "famous" plays. As Cici savored Marc's serenade--at least, that's what she was hearing--I found myself secretly wishing that the noise would stop.

So they finally exchanged phone numbers, and he went back to the

Alexis Hotel alone. In the weeks to come, she was inundated with late-night telephone calls, mainly of the phone-sex variety. When he wasn't asking her what color panties she was wearing at the moment, he was intimating the sweet promise of a lifetime of happiness, promising her everything from I'll teach your little boys how to play baseball, to you'll never have to pump your own gas again.

Music to a single mom's heart.

As promised, Marc did make his way back to Seattle soon after. Cici picked him up at the airport, wearing one of her new black outfits (his favorite color) culled from an entire new black wardrobe she had purchased to impress him (including La Perla lingerie he intimated he so enjoyed); and he, in turn, was wearing the same attorney ensemble that at first had so impressed her--dark gray sports jacket, black cashmere turtleneck, black slacks, and expensive shoes. They went directly to the Four Seasons Hotel for the weekend, where he played to the hilt his role of the big-time attorney with a taste for all things fine. But a different sort of man emerged in the bedroom, which my sense of decorum and decency prevent me from recounting.

By his second visit, a couple

weeks later, things went from seeming a little strange to seeming a lot strange. This is when his cloak-and-dagger lifestyle and its implications became too hard to ignore even for my determinedly credulous friend. Aside from the little detail that he was again wearing that same outfit (a veritable uniform, apparently), and again had it dry cleaned at the hotel before leaving...he had arrived early on a Friday, for a day of "business" without so much as a briefcase or even a business card. When she met him that evening, he was in an agitated state. Or perhaps a state of transformation. She woke up in the middle of the night to find his arms all but strangling her body, his body quaking, his mouth making frightening guttural sounds. The next morning he had no recollection of what he'd done.

Then on Sunday, (Sunday!) morning, he excused himself from their hotel room to "listen in" on some "baseball negotiations." Next morning, he went back to San Francisco. And now his phone calls grew fewer and farther between, and were reduced (or, elevated, perhaps) to conversations about the weather and what was on TV that day.

Had it ended there, perhaps this story would be no different from any other seduced-and-abandoned story. But it didn't end there. He mainly kept in touch to

tell her why he couldn't keep in touch. And he never again made himself available, even for her to use an electronic air ticket to San Francisco that he'd sent her. Now it was the baseball umpires' strike that forced him to fly all over the country at a moment's notice! Now he was having undisclosed meetings in undisclosed places because "The Media" were following him!...Now the Commissioner was calling!...Now his mother was dying in Maine....

By the time Cici figured out that something was definitely wrong, the relationship was definitely over. And he finally disappeared altogether, as if into thick, cigar smoke-filled Metropolitan Grill air. She subsequently discovered through some checking on the Internet and other places that--shocking!--he didn't work for the Commissioner's Office, he wasn't an attorney, he didn't own his home in San Francisco, and he had been operating under various aliases. Lovely.

I cannot bear to end this on a colorless note by stating any of the obvious bromides about imbalances of power in relationships, dating, etc. More than anything, Cici's sojourn into the singles world brought Wilde to mind again. This exceptional deception made me wonder then if deception isn't the rule rather than the exception. That it is part and parcel of all relationships,

good and bad. At the time, I remember thinking that there exists a fine line between couples who work things out and couples who don't, that marriages and other relationships of long standing, so prized by society, are sometimes less about a bond of love than about two people bonded by their exceptional ability to keep the deception going.

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