

Access Denied

A true story written by
David E. Gates

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Dedication:

For Julie
For Shelley
For my Mum

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James Holmes
Graham Wheatley

This book is based on true events.
Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

Chapter One

I had been working at Oracle, the second largest computer database company in the world, for about seven years when I first met Meg.

Oracle's offices were in Bracknell, based within the ring-road known as "The Ring." Housed in a brown-coloured, hideously square, block-styled and rather drab building, I worked as a Shift Leader of a team of computer operators in the company's I.T. department for about five years before moving into the role of Media Team Manager within their customer support organisation.

The Shift Leader role had been one that involved working shifts, as the name implies, and the new Media Team manager position meant that I now worked regular office hours, from nine-to-five or thereabouts.

The new role was much better because it meant I had a social life once more and could interact with people during the day. I ran the small but vital department from a small area in the offices on the ground floor.

One morning, I went to the in-house gym on the top floor of the Oracle building to weigh myself. My weight was somewhat over what it should be, as usual, and I was on yet *another* diet and checking my progress.

When I got to the gym, I found the scales to be absent. I returned to the ground floor and went to the Reception area where the security guard, Dave, advised me the scales had been used in the call-centre by the receptionists.

Dave took me around to the call-centre area and we entered to retrieve the scales. Inside the room were the receptionists who took it in turns to be on the phones and to man the reception desk in the main atrium of the building. My attention was drawn to a girl at the far side of the room, blonde, pretty and smiling.

I saw the scales at the foot of the table and retrieved them stating I would return them to the gym. The girls, all busy on calls, smiled and nodded their "hellos" and "goodbye's."

When Dave and I exited the room, a tall, leggy blonde came past.

Dave said "Hello" to her and, as we moved along the corridor, Dave gave me a nudge.

"I'd do some damage to that," He said. "Wouldn't you?"

"Not really my type, if I'm honest." I replied.

“What? You’re joking?” Dave proclaimed. I was, but felt she was somewhat out of my league.

“I tend to go more for that type in the corner.” I said, nodding towards the pretty girl with blonde hair.

“Meg?” Dave asked.

“I don’t know what her name is, but yeah the one on the far side in the corner.” I said.

“Meg.” Dave confirmed. “I’ll see what I can do.” Dave said. I rolled my eyes as, knowing Dave as I did, I thought he would be crude and therefore ruin any chance I had with her.

“Well, don’t push it. Just find out if she’s seeing anyone.” I said.

“Leave it with me.” Dave said.

I returned the scales to the gym. I stepped on the scales and convinced myself by leaning this way and that that I’d lost some weight but knew for sure it would be put on again sometime soon and no amount of leaning or lifting my feet up would make any difference.

* * *

Later that day, whenever I had an opportunity to walk across the atrium, I’d look across at the main reception desk. Meg was there on one occasion and I nearly walked into a huge plant that decorated the lobby area as I looked over at her. She smiled back sweetly and I became somewhat embarrassed and hastily walked through to the offices back to my desk.

Shortly after I returned to my desk, my phone rang. It was one of the older and more “gossipy” women from the call centre, Lydia. It was obvious Lydia and the other girls were having some fun at the fact that Dave had gone into the room shortly after I’d left and announced that “Someone was interested in Meg.”

It hadn’t taken the girls long to work out who of course. I grimaced.

“When you going to ask her out then?” Lydia laughed.

“Who said I was?” I replied.

“Well, you nearly walked into the tree in the atrium because you couldn’t take your eyes off her.” She countered. I could hear laughing in the background. My embarrassment trebled.

“Well, I don’t know. I mean, I know nothing about her.” I said.

“If you ask her, you can find out all you need to know.” Lydia teased.

“We’ll see.” I said. I was keen not to make a spectacle of myself or be the subject of someone else’s amusement. Last thing I wanted was to be the subject of gossip.

“Well, I’ll tell her you fancy her if you don’t ask her out.” She warned.

* * *

Over the next few hours, whenever I was in the computer room, the windows of which faced into the atrium, I could see the girls in the call-centre room smiling, laughing and waving at me. Once they were sure I’d seen them, they’d point at Meg on reception and then at me, signalling us “together” by intertwining their little fingers on each hand.

I decided that there was nothing for it but to ask her out. What did I have to lose apart from a little dignity?

I went back to my desk. From there I was able to see the reception area. I picked up the phone and dialled the main front desk. Meg answered. She had a nice voice.

“Hi. I don’t know if you remember me from this morning, when I came in to get the scales, but I wondered if you fancied going for a drink sometime.” I blurted out.

“Sure.” She answered coolly.

For some reason, I never expected her to agree to go out with me. I guess I was out of practice in respect of asking girls out – usually you just met in a pub, chatted, snogged then progressed from there. When she agreed, I was totally unprepared.

“Err, okay. Err, well, when, er, and where?” I stammered.

“I don’t mind. Next week?” She offered.

We agreed on a date the following week and I said I’d pick her up.

* * *

Over the next couple of days, I found out it was Meg’s birthday. Exactly three weeks after mine. A number of “18” balloons were hanging around her chair. I sent her

a card and felt quite pleased with myself that a girl twelve years my junior was happy to go on a date with me. Not that she knew how old I was at this time of course.

The women in the call-centre were delighted in the “union”. They teased me at every opportunity and constantly stated that they thought we would make a “good couple.”

Meg lived with her parents and her brother in Bracknell in an area called Birch Hill. Her sister, Faye, lived with her boyfriend just a few doors away.

I arrived in good time to pick her up and met her mother, a large, imposing but very friendly woman and her father who seemed not much older than I was.

We left the house and I drove us through Great Windsor Park towards the town of Windsor itself. We parked up and walked along the river to a small, quiet pub.

We had a couple of drinks, chatted and got on surprisingly well.

On the way back to her house, I somehow managed to take a wrong turn and had to pull into a dark lane to execute a U-turn. Meg joked at how I was “driving her down dark lanes,” especially considering that I “hardly knew her.”

I parked at the same point I had when I collected her and we agreed we’d go out again. She left the car and her mother would comment to her later how surprised she was I hadn’t tried for a kiss.

I was a gentleman after all.

Chapter Two

Over the next few weeks, I saw Meg regularly. We would drink in her local pub, called The Silver Birch, which she'd been a regular of since she was about fourteen years old.

We were falling in love with each other and grew closer and closer as time went on. The age difference hadn't bothered me. If anything, I felt somewhat privileged to be thirty years old and dating a girl twelve years younger. Not many men my age dated women that young.

I was due to travel with work to the United States to see how their operation was run and exchange knowledge on practices which worked best for each of our departments.

A day or so before, when I was at her parent's house, Meg called me into her bedroom and said she had something to tell me. We sat down on the edge of her bed. Meg rummaged through a file and pulled out a document. She passed it to me. It was her birth certificate. I looked it over briefly and couldn't find anything obviously amiss and looked at her quizzically.

"What?" I said.

"Don't you see?" Meg responded.

"No." I looked again. I couldn't see anything. "What am I looking for?"

"Look at the date of birth." She said, directing me to the part of the document which noted when she was born.

"And?" I said, still somewhat perplexed as to what I was looking for.

"The year." She said. I looked closer.

"Nineteen-seventy-nine?" I asked. "So?"

"Well?" She asked. And waited.

"I still don't get it. What?" I said.

"I'm not eighteen. I'm seventeen." Meg said, putting me out of my mathematical misery. I smiled.

"So?" I asked.

"You're not bothered?"

"No. Why would I be?" I said. "Truth be told, I'm even more chuffed."

It appeared that someone in the receptionist's area had assumed it was Meg's eighteenth birthday and Meg hadn't corrected them. Once the balloon and cards arrived she felt it was something she couldn't resolve with them.

Meg hugged me and told me she wanted to tell me before I went to America in case it changed things between us. I hugged her back and told her she was daft.

* * *

Meg ended up spending more and more time with me, as we became closer and continued to fall for each other. Frequent evenings and almost every weekend we'd be together.

At weekends, we'd invariably be at my home in Portsmouth. The first night I took Meg there, I was anxious about our sleeping arrangements. Meg was a confident woman and she took the lead somewhat regarding this and said she'd be sleeping in the same bed as me.

We spent the evening at a friend's birthday bash, where Meg was to meet a number of my close friends; Sean, Adam, Greg and several others.

After this, we spent the weekend mostly in bed.

* * *

Whilst our relationship was good, Meg's jealousy was something I was to witness first-hand on the first New Year's Eve that we spent together. We agreed to go to Shamus O'Donnell's – an Irish themed pub which most of my friends gravitated to, to bring in the New Year. We all got on very well with the landlord and his wife and having a lock-in was the norm. That was one of the main attractions of going there as, before licensing hours were extended, most pubs chucked out at eleven o'clock at night.

When the chimes of Big Ben echoed throughout the pub via the television or radio, everyone moved around the pub hugging and kissing each other.

I can be something of a flirt at times and when it came to my moving around the pub, and finding myself kissing the rather attractive barmaid, Meg's jealousy came to the fore. She blew up and made it clear that my enjoyment of celebrating with the barmaid was overstepping the mark. Feeling I'd done nothing wrong, I disagreed with

Meg. We argued. I could have understood it if I'd had my tongue down the barmaid's throat, but I hadn't.

I ended up leaving the pub and then walking away from Meg as she continued to argue with me in the street. I hate arguing in public and felt it best just to go home.

I got home and waited for Meg to turn up. By the time I went to bed, she still hadn't come home and I got a text message saying she was staying over at Adam's house. I wasn't altogether surprised. Adam and Meg got on very well together and it was clear he'd looked out for her when I'd gone home and left her there.

Meg turned up the next day, wearing one of Adam's t-shirts which made me initially suspicious that something had gone on between them. I was assured nothing had and it wasn't long before we made up.

Friends would later come to describe my relationship with Meg as "turbulent", "up and down" and "on and off".

We broke up several times in the first couple of years. I didn't attribute this to any particular party's fault. The age gap may have had an influence to some degree but I don't remember being aware of this being an issue per se whilst we were together. I think that we just wanted different things from the relationship.

Even when we'd split up, during late 1998, we were still sleeping together and spending evenings together from time to time.

So, when Meg phoned me in early February of 1999 to tell me she was pregnant, I was a bit tactless to say the least. We hadn't been together properly for a while though had continued to sleep together. I still remember the first thing I said to her when she told me she was pregnant:

"Is it mine?" I asked.

"Of course it's yours, David." Meg said.

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