

Missing You Two

Breaking up a relationship can have unexpected consequences.

Northamptonshire Police is appealing for the public's help to find a missing woman from the village of Brambleford.

Suzy Grey who is 35 years old from Greets Ave., Brambleford has been missing since last Monday (25/9). Suzy is white, 5ft 4", of slight build with straight shoulder-length blonde hair. Suzy was wearing a dark blue hiking jacket, light grey trousers, and black boots when she was last seen. She is believed to be carrying a black Nike backpack. It is likely that she boarded a train at Peterborough rail station.

If you have any information about Suzy's whereabouts, please call the police on the 24-hour non-emergency telephone number 101 and quote reference 53170489090.

Alternatively, if you have information but wish to remain anonymous, please call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or online by visiting www.crimestoppers-uk.org. No personal details are taken, information is not traced or recorded and you will not go to court.

Suzy had been missing for exactly one week, seven long days since I woke up on a cold Saturday morning inside an empty bed and a bedroom with an uncannily disconsolate aura. It wasn't that unusual for Suzy to get up early at the beginning of the weekend, she enjoyed some singular quiet moments before I extracted myself from a warm duvet and our day kicked into gear. But that morning I felt a kind of spiritual alarm which instantly gripped my insides. As I slowly gained consciousness from a charitable slumber, I instinctively stretched my arm out desiring the individual unique smooth female warmth only to feel rough rejection by a cold wrinkled sheet and a depressing space. Confused, I think I called out her name, I remember that the silence of the house screamed back at me in a shrill tinnitus. Silence can be cacophonous. Frantic phone calls were made, and fruitless searches of wardrobes, cupboards, and drawers. Eventually, the truth dawned and a report was made. In the evening I was faced by a neat blue uniformed female PC wearing a well-rehearsed and a too often-used faux sympathetic expression. She took notes; she hit me with meaningless questions; did I know of any reason why she would leave so suddenly, was she depressed, did she take any medication, did I believe her to be a risk to herself or anyone else, or could she be with friends or family. My answer was simple, two letters ... No, no, no, no, no. The PC stared unblinking down at her hastily taken notes and removed her blue and white striped hat casually brushing away a tiny spec of dusk before placing it onto our kitchen table. She looked at me directly, her face worked hard at being harmonic, but I could tell that her female allegiances lay firmly with the disappeared. The PC explained in a monotone that as Suzy had taken some clothes, money, and cards; her passport was missing, there was no evidence of anything untoward and she had left of her own free will. (*Get over it mate, she's gone and left you*). Being an adult, with inherent free will, there was little the Police could do except put out a bulletin on their website and social media channels asking her to get in touch and let us

know she was safe. I spent that Saturday night and every night until today, upright in our lounge armchair, not sleeping, bereft, baffled, and bewildered.

This was my new experience, the silent misty early morning when the frost is swirling ghost-like hovering above the ground as if trying to decide whether to descend and coat the ground in white. I knew I had to leave, I knew it had to be soon and I knew it had to be early - I just didn't know how to put my instincts into physical actions - until now. Backpack packed, a change of clothes, a thousand in cash, and a further five hundred in Euros, a rail ticket booked for the 4.19 Peterborough to Dover, passport safely stored. Bank accounts were altered, in my favour. Saying goodbye was never an option, no note could be written, no words could be spoken, my exiting mouthed a million lines in an unsaid speech. As I approached the train station with its illuminated cash dispensers, the bright fluorescent lights of the station concourse beckoned me in. White stone steps and the grey corrugated roof invited me onto a windy platform 1, firstly to Kings Cross, then to St Pancras, with Dover Priory my last English destination. The train doors opened and devoured me, securely closing in ready for my one-way journey. As the train eased away southwards an exhilarating drive of decompression spread seductively across my soul. I sat back in an unaccompanied seat and sighed deeply.

OK, now I am certain that she has left me. There can be no other explanation. But the thing that I can't get my head around is that I thought we were close. Simon and Suzy, an item, inseparable, everyone said so. We were seldom apart. We went to work together, came home together, cooked together, cleaned together, and slept together. Yes, we had friends and we sometimes went out with them, you know, for a meal or a drink, but with Suzy, we had a special bond that tied us together and kept us close. Children never happened for us, I don't know why, we did all the usual stuff, but when nothing happened, we just left it alone, we didn't bother with IVF or any of that jazz, so we just accepted that was who we were and whom we are going to be. Besides, I always was afraid that a child could have got in the way of our binding relationship. It would have been an unwelcome third party, an uninvited guest into our tight relationship. I am sure that Suzy felt the same way, although she never actually said anything out loud, my intuition and our singular close affiliation meant that often words never needed to be passed between us.

A chance message from a Facebook friend unknowingly handed me the escape route that I had been so desperately yearning for. Garcia, an old school friend, had obviously moved up in life and had just moved into an adorable-looking villa in northern Italy and she was gleefully showing off an album of images detailing her new abode on her timeline. Initially, it was more of a sneaky peek on my behalf as Simon wasn't too keen about me

looking at Facebook, or indeed any social media, his interruptions and gentle appeals to know what I was eyeing often made it difficult for me to interact properly. However, loose rules regarding the use of social media in my office meant that during my lunch break, I had the ideal time to properly catch up with people from my past. Garcia's elevation to a grand domicile in a much-coveted area of Italy touched a part of my consciousness that had previously remained hidden. I messaged her congratulating her on her fine new home. She replied almost instantly, with five words screaming a lifeline to me; *"why don't you come over?"*

I had to get over it. I accepted that she has gone, I have no alternative. It was as if she had disappeared from the face of the earth. Her Facebook page had been deactivated, along with her Twitter and Instagram accounts. The fact that she didn't want to be found was all too evident, as time went on, I could see that her disappearance was calculated, well-planned, and deliberate. I thought about contacting her family, she had a sister living in Norfolk somewhere, but I never encouraged her to engage much with her family, she had me to confide in, why would she need anyone else? She was suffering from kind of mental health issues. She could have told me about her problems after all I was her closest friend and soulmate. A notion of foul play occasionally flickered through my clouded mind, but there were no grounds to suspect anything was untoward, the Police certainly didn't suggest any concerns in that direction, so I had to get over it; I just had to get over it.

Garcia greeted me like the long-lost friend I was. I explained to her why my surreptitious flight away from Simon was necessary and she agreed to keep my presence at her Italian home our secret. I had crossed from Dover to Calais, took the train to Paris, and then a TGV direct to Milan. Garcia's home was in the small village of Lovere on the banks of Lago d'Isèo about a one-hundred-kilometre bus ride from Milan. The nine-hour train journey from Gard L'Est through to Strasbourg and Basel gave me ample time to reflect. I had no regrets. Simon's mode of living felt as if someone had dropped a tourniquet over me and knotted it tightly around my personality. The bond was being tightened millimetre by millimetre squeezing out any remnants of my life each day I stayed in this claustrophobic relationship. Garcia was great, she held me together. I remembered her from school as a geeky girl, a bit of a class swot. How her personality had changed over the ensuing years was quite astonishing. She explained to me during one of our regular red wine moments how after she left school and not knowing what to do next, she set herself up as a freelance secretary, eventually building up a business to what became one of the largest secretarial agencies in the UK. She eventually sold the business to an American conglomerate, hence her semi-retirement in northern Italy. She had never married, nor had she had many relationships and no she wasn't gay, it's just that nobody had matched up to her keen expectations of what any relationship should

be. Far from lonely, Garcia had many friends in Italy and the UK, and she was very well-connected.

Things are starting to look up. Yesterday a new member of staff arrived at work. Lucy Watkins was introduced to me. She was the new lettings management assistant and had set up her workstation adjacent to my office. I could sense an immediate mutual attraction. Sometimes you just know when something is stirring. Lucy was attractive she sported stylish clothing and had striking, bright blue eyes that looked intensively and slightly disconcertingly directly into your face when you spoke with her. She had an air of confidence and assurance about her. I saw her every day, a cool operator, clever, articulate, and most importantly, single.

Things were starting to look up. I needed to work and through the tentacles of Garcia's unlimited contacts, she found me a job, initially part-time, managing some holiday apartments owned by Lorenzo Johnstone. Who despite his Italian first name was an English guy from Essex that used a family inheritance to buy some Italian property and renovated it for vacation-hungry families. Lorenzo was cool, clever, handsome, and most importantly, single.

Suzy and her still unexplained and weird disappearance were rapidly becoming a fading memory. Firstly, I and Lucy took things slowly, you know, a quick drink after work, then a meal and the odd day out in London. We got on. I'm not sure exactly how it happened but after a few dates, we began preparing to move in together. I think it was Lucy's initial suggestion, but it only took me a few moments to agree. Lucy wouldn't move into my house in Brambleford, she said that it was "another woman's home". I completely understood her views, so we decided to rent a flat nearer to the city centre. Closer to work, more convenient for the shops and many restaurants nearby, was her forthright argument. She had discovered a new development of two-bedroom apartments that had just been completed near the football ground; they were bright, open plan and just what we were looking for; so, after putting the old Brambleford place up for sale and within a few days of signing on the dotted line, 'Simon and Lucy' became an official 'item'.

Lorenzo found me a place to live, well to be precise, a place to live with him. He had just finished renovating the upstairs of an old run-down bakery into three trendy holiday studio apartments, with the ground floor set aside for his new home. We were sitting outside a small bar/café in Lovere, relishing the gorgeous autumn Italian sunshine, a wine glass each in front of us and a bottle of Chianti in between, when he popped the question – "Would I live with him in his new apartment." It took me about two seconds

to say yes! Living with Garcia was great, but my instincts were telling me that she was too used to being on her own and the pleasure of my presence, although initially welcome, was now beginning to wane. The following Sunday morning, Lorenzo's 'people' called at Garcia's and took away my belongings (such as they were) and I headed off in Lorenzo's Porsche Carrera to take up residence in the quiet village of Rivo d'Isotto. I thought at the time 'Suzy and Lorenzo' had a sort of ring to it!

I never said anything at the time; maybe I should have, but now it's too late. Coming home from working late with a slight cold and a general feeling of fatigue caused me to drop off into an uncomfortable snooze in my chair. I remember half waking up and seeing Lucy in the opposite chair studiously gazing hard into what I took for granted was her mobile phone, except, she didn't own a Samsung and I did. Just opening my eyelids slightly, I could see the intent she was putting into scrolling through my texts, emails, and WhatsApp messages. How long she has been working on this task was anybody's guess but the depth that she employed in her mission was very apparent. As I sat there pretending to doze, I thought to myself, "Isn't trust a wonderful thing".

I was sitting outside in the garden, a glass of red in hand, contemplating my new arrangement. This is the third consecutive night I will be spending on my own. The house is lovely, with a private garden, no near neighbours (apart from the holiday lets upstairs, but the design of the building with separate entrances and passageways meant that you never saw anyone come and go), so what was bugging me? Well, a third night on my own for one this would be my seventh lonely night since I moved in with Lorenzo and it was starting to grind. Had he got another woman in a different town? It had crossed my mind, but there were none of the usual signs, no furtive calls, no sudden stopped telephone conversations, and no lipstick on collars, I accepted that Lorenzo was just business mad, and doing it consumed his time. After the intensity of my life with Simon, I thought that maybe I would savour a more laid-back relationship, but three nights in a row, that wasn't being laid back, that was bordering on indifference.

The hissy fit was the final straw; it prompted my application for the advertised vacancy for an architect designing renovated properties in Italy. The job had been in the situations vacant section in the trade publication Architects Journal and with Lucy's nauseating screams still grating in my ears my application was completed and sent. What started her rant? Well, all I said was that I had agreed to go to a football match with a couple of friends from work. The football ground was our nearest neighbour. She went right off on one, accusing me of neglect, and indifference to her, and a torrent of offensive words were spat from her angry mouth. I

suppose I should have seen the signs, hovering over my shoulder when I was looking at my social media stuff, asking endless questions about “that person” who had liked something on my timeline, following me out of the office at lunchtime to see who I was lunching with and a long sullen silence when I refused to tell her who that woman was who came into my office this morning. This relationship was causing the very lifeblood of my senses to be compressed, constricted, and crushed. I had now resorted to setting up a private email address away from her prying eyes and when confirmation of an interview set in a hotel in Milan was confirmed, I knew that this was my opportunity to get away. I confirmed my attendance at the interview, surreptitiously packing some overnight clothes, switching the funds from the sale of my Brambleford house into my private bank account and I was off. With my passport in my back pocket, a train from Peterborough to Stansted, and a flight to Milan Malpensa, unconcerned whether I got the job or not, I was not going back, my time with Lucy had concluded.

Those solitary three nights turned into an unaccompanied four, and a brief telephone call from Lorenzo telling me he was “tied up in Pisa for the next few days” meant that the stalk finally fractured that poor even-toed ungulate. I was off. A few clicks transferred funds from my Euro account back into the UK bank I had kept open as a safety net and a further few clicks guaranteed my flight from Malpensa to Stansted. An overnight bag with a few essentials sat next to me in the taxi as I made my way to Milan. Stepping down the steep aeroplane steps into a windy Stansted airport, gave me a swirling adrenaline rush unlike anything I had experienced before.

I met the property developer in Malpensa; he had flown over from Pisa. During our initial telephone conversation, he had suggested that I had dinner with him and his lady friend at their home about 100km from Milan, but he rapidly and with obvious discomfort rescinded this offer so we dined together unaccompanied in a Milan restaurant. He didn’t explain this sudden change of plan, but much to my delight over coffee and liquors he offered me a one-year contract to design and draw plans to convert a series of old farm buildings into luxury holiday apartments. I was to be based in Pisa. He said English architects are the best in the world. I accepted Lorenzo’s offer. A new start in a new country beckoned.

The agency sent me for an interview for a property management role within a company that had its headquarters in Peterborough. They were opening their new practice in Ipswich. At first, I thought that this meant going to Peterborough, which is the one place in the world I wanted to avoid, but the agency confirmed that the interview was to be held in Ipswich and the position would be permanently based there. They handed me the address. I was to be interviewed by a lady called Lucy Watkins, who was tasked with the job of setting up the Ipswich practice. She would be eventually moving there

herself and she would be my immediate supervisor. Whilst walking along the river path that joined the rail station to Wherry Quay, I made up my mind, that if I'm offered the position, I will accept it. A new beginning in a new town beckoned.

The End