

## At The Mall

My wife and I have had an agreement for the 47 years we've been married. I won't lie to her and she won't murder me. I've never fibbed about anything serious, but if she had been strict about our bargain she would have widowed herself at a very young age.

When the cell phone rang, I turned the volume on the car radio down and dug into my pocket. I sure don't know how we ever got along in life without cell phones.

"Where are you?" my wife asked.

"I'm sitting up at the end of the north parking lot and I can see the Mall entrance where I dropped you off."

"OK," she said, "I'm inside walking toward it now."

"I'll be looking for you when you come out the door," I said.

"Well, start driving. I hate to stand outside waiting for you. The young guys always try to pick me up and take me out for a drink," she said.

"A word of advice..." I began.

"Never mind," she finished. "Start driving."

"I will when I can verify you're actually at the North exit. You always get your directions mixed up, come out the wrong exit and I drive around wondering where the hell you ..." I began.

"It says 'North Exit' in big letters," she finished, "in English, right over the door. Which I'm walking through now."

"I don't see you," I said from my perch up at the end of the parking lot. "You should carry the Boy Scout compass I gave you for these occasions."

"I AM at the north parking lot exit," she said heatedly. "I'm not carrying that thing. I'd look like a surveyor."

"With the flip-up mirror, anyone would think you're just checking your make-up with a compact."

"Who carries a brass compact mirror as big as a hockey puck? I'm holding up my shopping bag," she said. "You can't miss it. It's bright pink. Can you see me?"

"No," I said, "wave it back and forth."

"Oh, for ... I can't," she said, "it's too heavy."

"Set down the bag and just raise both hands and wave," I said. "Like a cheerleader," I added.

I got no answer. Perhaps I needed to explain further.

"You're too short," I said. "Can you get some height? Remember jumping jacks, where you jump up and clap your hands together over your head? Or is there a bench or something you can climb up on?"

Still no answer.

"Are you there?" I asked. "Are you listening?"

"I stopped listening to you the first year we were married," she replied. "I'm busy looking for a nice young man to buy a drink for a soon-to-be widow."

You know, it's simply amazing how we can miss the little things in life. I'd been sitting there up at the end of the North parking lot for almost an hour without noticing that the sign on the mall building

I was watching plainly read “South Entrance.” I guess that meant I was in the South parking lot.

“OK I see you!” I hurriedly shouted into the cell phone as I turned the key and ripped the shift lever down into Drive.

“Yes, that’s you,” I lied. “Gee you’re just as pretty from a distance as the day I married you,” I added.

“Then remind me to keep my distance from you,” she said.

The car in front of me stopped abruptly and waited to take the place of an SUV backing out. This always annoys me. I had stopped in time only a foot from her rear bumper. The SUV driver couldn’t see traffic in either direction and he inched out backwards a tiny bit at a time

“Where are you?” asked my wife.

“I’m in motion,” I said.

“Uh huh,” she said, “don’t hurt yourself.”

The SUV driver was now out far enough to see up and down the traffic lane. He accelerated and swooped backward, crashing into the driver waiting in front of me. Her car lurched backward and hit my bumper.

I got out to inspect the damage to my car... only a slight scratch.

“What’s going on?” asked my wife.

“I’m caught in traffic,” I lied.

The woman ahead of me was taking a long look at the front of her car while the other driver stepped from his SUV and apologized.

“No problem with my car,” I said as I approached the two, holding the cell phone away from me with my finger over what I always thought was the tiny voice pickup on the device.

They didn’t seem to notice me. “And your back bumper looks OK,” I said to the woman.

“It’s my husband’s new car,” she said to no one in particular. “He will absolutely kill me!”

“I gotta go,” I said to her, with my hand up in the air, the cell phone held as far away from me as possible. Some day I’ll find the mute button. The last time I held my hand that high was in the third grade the day I almost wet my pants before getting the teacher’s attention.

A policeman materialized to my right. “Sir, I’ll need your license and registration,” he said. “You can put your hand down now.”

“Honey, I’ve been involved in a minor accident,” I said into the phone.

“Well, you look OK to me,” said my wife, standing now to my left.

“I brought her with me,” said the policeman.

“I heard the crash on the phone,” she said.

“While you were standing on the bench, lady,” said the policeman.

“He said he was arresting me,” my wife said, glancing at me with what might have been a proud look on her face.

“I said I was rescuing you, Mam.” said the policeman.

“Well, I was only standing there, young man, and this is America!” said my wife. “You’re lucky I hadn’t started my jumping jacks.”

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