

A Cautionary Tale

I lay on the ground with my leg in the air, blood gushing from my shattered big toe. This was ignominious enough but worse was to come. What led to this sanguinary debacle you may ask. I'll set the scene for you.

In 1988, after twenty-plus years working in various blue-chip companies, I joined the world's premier Executive Search firm as a lowly consultant. My aim was to learn the ropes as a headhunter and climb the greasy pole to partnership as quickly as possible. Our UK Managing Partner was extremely wealthy with a huge estate in deepest Kent. When I say huge I mean humongous. It had a swimming pool, several tennis courts, a boating lake and numerous sylvan acres. This fellow...let's call him John, had a planet-sized ego and an unparalleled capacity for showing he had 'loads 'a money'. Unfortunately his penchant for self-aggrandisement was matched by a monumental lack of taste.

Each year John threw open his estate for the office summer party. So it was that a few months after joining the firm my wife Annie and I drove through the imposing gates into John's domain. What greeted us just in front of the Georgian mansion was a gleaming brand new Aston Martin with a ribbon tied round it. John hailed us with these immortal words. "Just bought this as a little birthday token for my darling wife."

The afternoon progressed agreeably enough. The buffet was delectable and the booze free-flowing. Annie had said she would drive home so I cannot deny that I partook freely of the grape. I wasn't sloshed exactly but let's say two sheets to the wind not three. In my convivial mood I was determined to show everyone what a good catch I was for the firm. I ignored Annie's sound advice...."Don't try to be clever, amusing and charming, just be yourself."

Later in the afternoon John's teen-age son Tim was skateboarding down the drive. I'd never been on a skateboard but was determined to show everyone what an intrepid soul I was. I teetered along for a few yards then gathered speed and headed towards a wall. I had neglected to ask how to stop this wheeled plank. I foolishly tipped the board forward and allowed my overlapping foot to act as a brake. I was wearing flip-flops with catastrophic results. My toe virtually exploded. I elevated my leg to try to stem the flow and a wasp stung me in the open wound. My mortified wife had to patch me up and take me to the nearest A & E. When we arrived my toe was the size of a large duck egg.

They say pride comes before a fall. I wish I could tell you that this incident cured my propensity to show-off but Annie would convincingly squash that claim.

By the way, I did make Partner in three years. I can't help thinking though that it could have been two but for that early fall from grace.

500 Words