

THE ADOPTION (THE PERFECT MURDER)

Meg and Don met at university and fell head over heels in love. Their families and friends could sense the chemistry between them and the happiness that radiated off them. Life followed the predictable pattern of graduating, commencing careers and getting married. Of course they expected children would follow when they were ready and approaching thirty.

Life, however, had other plans. Getting pregnant wasn't the issue, but staying pregnant was. They endured eight miscarriages. Feeling broken and unable to face any more, they decided to adopt. Meg and Don were happy to give a home to a young child and not a baby. They thought they could skip the sleepless nights, and as their friends and siblings had young children, an adopted child would settle quickly into their lives.

Meg and Don adopted Lee at the age of almost three. He had been removed from his birth mother aged two owing to abuse and neglect, and then spent nearly a year in foster homes until the adoption completed.

However, this adoption did not complete Meg and Don's lives. They simply weren't prepared and were unable to cope with Lee waking repeatedly at night, soiling his bed and his pants by day. And however hard they tried with Lee he didn't want to be cuddled and he wouldn't play with the many toys and games available. Meg and Don stopped seeing friends and family; they were too tired and embarrassed; they felt they needed to get to grips with parenting.

Little Lee turned all his pain inside, as though he was not lovable and could not show any love himself. He was now turning five and had periods of deep depression. He became violent, lashing out at Meg and Don. As Lee grew his behaviour became more volatile, throwing things and screaming. It was difficult to take Lee out in public let alone start socialising again. Friends and family who were busy with their own lives assumed that Meg, Don and Lee were in their own bubble cementing their relationships.

Meg and Don didn't express it except to social workers, and they felt blamed for Lee's emotional and behavioural difficulties. Their concerns were brushed off by social workers who blamed Meg and Don and said Lee's behaviour and unhappiness had to be to do with what was happening at home. They felt increasingly alone, battling the system, with Lee's trauma not being recognised nor addressed. They weren't put in touch with other adoptive parents so they couldn't know that what they were experiencing was not uncommon.

Meg and Don researched what might happen if they couldn't do this any more – they didn't feel they could ask their social worker about this. It looked as though they could be prosecuted for child abandonment. Their mental health began to deteriorate. They felt threatened, harassed and pushed to the limits of what they could endure. They knew that adoption was lifelong, but the support was not.

On days when it wasn't raining they would take Lee out to remote places where they would rarely see anybody and they could breathe fresh air. Moments like that were the only thing keeping them going. This particular Saturday in May, the FA cup final was on so the roads were exceptionally quiet. Meg and Don drove down to the South Foreland Lighthouse at St Margaret's Bay.

They began their walk from the village, hoping to tire Lee out so that he would sleep better. They walked up through the valley and told Lee he would be able to see the sea really well from the lighthouse. For a rare moment being in nature seemed to calm Lee. And then he became over-excited. He wasn't interested in the lighthouse when they came upon it but he started running fast towards the sea. The bank was steep, and slippery as it had rained in the preceding days. Then Lee was out of sight, gone. Meg and Don called Lee's name and rushed to the cliff edge. A small figure was quiet and completely still at the foot of the white cliffs.

The lighthouse staff came, the emergency services came. Meg and Don could scarcely speak. They were treated for shock. There was an investigation of course but no blame apportioned. Nobody knew the secret of the relief that Meg and Don felt. Perhaps it was the perfect murder.

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