

Wrong number

I'd known Dilys Morgan since my first year in college but through a series of misunderstandings on both our parts, she and I hadn't really hit it off until the night of the Graduation Ball. It had been even more galling that there had remained so little time at college before we were obliged to go our separate ways. Dilly had declined my invitation to stay at my parents' farm in Devon during the summer. Her father, a professor of something, she'd told me, was taking the whole family with him on his extended lecture tour of America during the summer vacation. This also scuppered my hopes of a few days' holiday beside the sea at her home in Aberystwyth.

Just the one unforgettable evening was the sum of our relationship to date, apart from a brief encounter at the graduation ceremony where we were both in the restrictive company of our parents and siblings.

"Ring me when you're back in Wales," she'd said, with a modest farewell peck on the cheek.

I had hurriedly scribbled her number down on the receipt for the obligatory graduation photograph, and even transcribed it to my pocket diary that same evening, lest the piece of paper should have gone astray. When Jake was out of earshot tackling a mountain of accumulated washing up in the kitchen, I dialled the number in hopeful anticipation, and, I confess, with a little apprehension.

"Yes?" rasped a voice at the other end of the line.

"Is that the Morgan residence?" I enquired tentatively.

"Yes. What do you want?" The curt response was punctuated with a hacking cough.

"Could I speak to Dilys, please?"

"Phyllis? There's no Phyllis here!" he barked.

"It's Dilys... Dilly," I said patiently.

"You'll have to speak up, young man. What did you say your name was? Billy?"

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. In the background I heard a female voice say, "What's up, Gramps, who is it?" followed by the reply, "Dunno, says his name's Billy." Christ, she hadn't told me she'd got a senile old grandfather. No reason to, I suppose.

"Hello, hello, can I help you?" a soft voice with lilting Welsh accent enquired. It didn't sound quite like Dilly though. However...

"It's Rob here. Is that you, Dilly?" I said hopefully.

"N...no." She sounded puzzled. Like me.

"Could I speak to Dilly?"

"Well," she chuckled, "you could do, but you won't get much of a reply."

"I don't understand."

"The only Dilly here is our cat. I think you must have got the wrong number."

"But that is the Morgan family, isn't it? Professor Morgan's house?"

"Morgan, yes. It's a common enough name round here. But my dad's a bus driver."

"Oh... er... oh," I was lost for words.

"I'm sorry, but I really think you have misdialled."

"Okay, er... thanks! I'm sorry to have troubled you." I felt like slamming the phone down but it wasn't the poor girl's fault.

Driving lesson

I pulled into a makeshift car park where the road passed through high moorland. Stony tracks led off in several directions. We had the place to ourselves.

"Never been out here before," said Jake. "Where are we?"

"On the route to where I did my first teaching practice."

"Pretty desolate, if you ask me."

"All the better for our purpose."

I spent the best part of half an hour trying to get him familiar with the position of the various hand and foot controls, together with their function and operation. Jake was impatient to take charge of the car for real.

Eventually I uttered a silent prayer and allowed Jake to start the engine. Many times he'd seen me give the handle a swing but I was confident that operation could wait until a later occasion.

"Okay, left foot down, select first gear," I said in my best schoolmasterly voice. "Now, gently down with your right foot and ease the pressure with your left foot until you feel the car begin to move."

The engine raced. "Gently!" I yelled, "Ease back on the accelerator!"

"Is that right or left foot?" asked Jake, lifting both feet almost simultaneously. Jessica lurched forward and stalled.

I took a deep breath. "Shall we try again?"

Again meant four more attempts before Jake got the correct degree of co-ordination to move Jessica forward more like a tortoise than a kangaroo. At least it wasn't my vehicle whose internal workings were being tortured.

"Right, let's try reversing. Same principle with the feet. Let out the clutch slowly and accelerate gently."

"What's that mean in plain language?"

"Left foot up, right foot down. You do know your left from right, I suppose?"

"I'm not an idiot!"

Matter of opinion I suppose. Jessica rolled forward slightly then shot back like a rocket into a tangle of blackberry bushes. I insisted that Jake extricated the vehicle himself without my assistance.

"Right, listen," I said a few minutes later. "You should always have the handbrake on before you get ready to move. It didn't matter this time because we are on almost level ground. Imagine you had to reverse up the road from Ty Melin. You'd also have to release the handbrake at the same time as you engage the clutch. And keep one hand on the steering wheel."

"Darn complicated this," Jake complained, "How on earth is my brain supposed to cope with each limb doing something different?"

"You managed okay with morris dancing," I said.

"Yeah, well, if I got something wrong I didn't end up with my arse in the brambles."

A key problem

“Aren’t you going to give me a goodnight kiss?” Sandra said as I heaved myself out of her car and offered profuse thanks for a most pleasant evening.

“Er... ”

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to seduce you,” she said mischievously.

I leant through the open driver’s window and gave her a peck on her cheek. As I withdrew my sleeve caught on her door handle. “Oh, bugger it!” I exclaimed.

“What’s the matter?”

“I’ve just dropped my front door key! I think it’s fallen down the drain.”

“Hang on, I’ve got a torch somewhere. Let’s have a look.”

We crouched down beside the car. No sign of the blessed key. Sandra moved her car forward away from the drain, and we searched again. The drain had obviously not been cleaned out for some time, and there on a tuft of grass clinging to the side of the drain was the key. About six inches down.

We looked at each other. “Any suggestions?” I asked.

“Try to get the drain cover off?”

Tyre levers and screwdrivers would not budge the cover. I was also wary of dislodging the key.

“You could knock on the door and get the landlady to let you in.”

“I don’t think she’d appreciate being disturbed at gone midnight!” Another idea was forming. “Do you by any chance have a length of string or twine in your handbag?”

“Yes, I have as matter of fact. Why?”

“Well, I’ve got a little horseshoe magnet in my car – came out of a Christmas cracker, and I thought it might come in useful sometime. Put the magnet on the string, lower in into the drain and hey presto!”

A police constable came across us peering down the drain, Sandra shining the torch while I dangled the string. “Fish not biting?” he said sarcastically.

I lost concentration momentarily and the key which was almost within touching distance caught the underside of the drain cover and disappeared, with a plop. “Oh shit, shit, SHIT!”

“May I ask exactly what you are trying to do?” the bobby asked.

I explained my predicament.

“You live here?” he enquired, rather superfluously I thought.

“Just taken digs here. It’s my first night.”

“Well, there’s no way you’re going to get that key now, however good an angler you may be. Best just knock up your landlady. She does live on the premises, I assume?”

Bravado

“Rob, I'd like you to come with me,” said Jake.

“Okay.” I shrugged. I couldn't think why he'd need a chaperone.

On route, he explained. “I'll drop you off in town, so you can buy three bras and six nappies, cloth not disposable.”

“What?”

“Six... “

“Yes, yes, I heard! Why, for Christ's sake?”

“Ah, surprise!”

I groaned. “Wouldn't it have made more sense for Janet to buy them?”

“Didn't want the girls to know.”

“Hmff!” Further explanation - if, indeed, it had been forthcoming, was curtailed by our arrival in Haverfordwest.

“See you later, by the bridge at the bottom of the main street,” said Jake, as I clambered out.

“What time?”

“Oh, an hour should be plenty.”

Jake and his schemes! I doubted whether the town was big enough to have one of those amorphous department stores where I could 'accidentally' creep into the lingerie department. I wondered whether bras actually counted as lingerie. Was there a Mothercare shop? Would they even cater for the mother's clothing as well as the baby's needs?

I wandered up and down the two main shopping streets.

Boots! Yes, they'd probably sell nappies.

“I'd like six nappies, please,” I asked the young female assistant.

“We only sell them in packs of five,” she said.

“Um, okay. Two packs then.” And as I was paying, I asked, discretely, “Can you tell me where I can buy a bra?”

She looked at me oddly. “For your wife, is it?”

“Yes, yes,” I replied, trying to hide my blushes.

“Turn left out of here, and just go straight across the next road. You'll find the shop. It's called Women's Own.”

“Thank you,” I gabbled, and hurried away. I glanced back briefly to see the lass talking to her colleague, point in my direction and shake her head.

Women's Own was a short way along a street I hadn't hitherto explored. There was no mistaking its purpose. The window was full of slim mannequins scantily dressed in sexy underwear and see-through dresses. A bell rang as I entered the shop.

Deep breath. I approached the counter. From behind a curtained partition appeared a shapely young woman with ivory skin every bit as perfect as her mannequins in the window. It must have cost a fortune at her hairdresser's to set her mass of copper red hair into such intricate waves and curls. Her matching dress

barely covered her ample cleavage.

“Yes sir?” she said

The objects of my desire were all too clearly displayed before me but even so I found my voice with difficulty. “I want to buy three bras,” I croaked.

“What size?” she asked without batting an eyelid.

“E ...” Jake hadn't specified and I hadn't asked. “My wife... she didn't say.”

“I see.” She looked at the packs of nappies under my arm. “Is she nursing?”

“No, she's a teacher.”

She pursed her lips briefly in frustration. “Is she breast-feeding your baby?”

“What? No... I'm sorry... I mean... yes,” I stammered, as my mind made the fictional connection.

“Right.” I'm sure she thought she was dealing with an imbecile or a pervert. “Now we just need to get the right size.”

Large, medium, or small? God, how was I supposed to know whether Jake had big or small boobs in mind? I made a decision on the basis of what you see is what you get. “Very similar to you,” I said.