

Coffee Talk: Two Sugars One Life

The IKEA Test

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I'm convinced IKEA furniture is a government-designed stress test for relationships. Last month, my partner and I decided to assemble a MALM dresser together. "It'll be fun," someone said. I think it was me. I was wrong.

By hour two, we'd discovered that one of us reads instructions like a legal document and the other treats them like vague suggestions. By hour three, we were communicating exclusively through pointed sighs and the aggressive rattling of hardware bags. By hour four, we found the missing screw. It had been in my pocket the entire time.

If you've ever assembled flat-pack furniture with someone you love and briefly wondered if prison would be more peaceful, you're in excellent company.

Relationships are basically flat-pack furniture. You get a pile of parts, wordless instructions featuring a cartoon person who's somehow smiling, and a collection of Allen wrenches you'll lose before the next project.

The pieces don't always fit the way the diagram promises. Sometimes there's a screw left over and you just have to pretend that's fine. Sometimes you build the whole damn thing backwards and have to start over, trying not to blame each other while you're both clearly thinking blame-adjacent thoughts.

But I've learned something from approximately seventeen furniture-related near-breakups: the fights aren't really about the furniture. The screw isn't hiding because IKEA is malicious. It's hiding because you're both stressed, and stress makes everything feel personal, including inanimate Swedish particleboard.

The couples who survive IKEA aren't the ones who assemble things perfectly. They're

the ones who can look at a half-built bookshelf at 11 PM, acknowledge that this is ridiculous, and decide together that the remaining shelves can wait until morning.

If your relationship can survive a KALLAX unit, it can survive anything.

What I've noticed about the furniture fights: they always end the same way. One of us says something that accidentally breaks the tension. The other one laughs despite not wanting to. And suddenly we're just two people sitting on the floor surrounded by wooden dowels, remembering that we actually like each other.

The mysteriously remaining washer at the end? It's not a problem. It's a souvenir. Every piece of furniture in our house has one. They're like little monuments to the arguments that didn't win.

So if you're in the middle of an IKEA assembly gone wrong, here's my hard-won advice: put down the Allen wrench. Look at your partner. Remember that you're building something together that's bigger than a nightstand. And maybe order pizza, because nobody makes good decisions when they're hungry and surrounded by hardware.

Here's to the missing screws, the leftover washers, and the relationships sturdy enough to survive flat-pack chaos.

Cheers, Clayton

Coffee Talk 2.0: For anyone who's ever read "FLÄRDFULL" and wondered if IKEA was mocking them.

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