

streetcake

issue 57



'raindrop' © olivier schopfer

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gaynor jackson

Did you speak to her friend? The one she was on the train with? They got on together at Waterloo but she got off at Clapham Junction.

No I didn't hear her name. I didn't know your missing girl was called Jasmine until I saw the poster.

I don't know why I said "was" sorry, her name just reminds me of the past. My mother grew up in Australia. She always used to say that the thing she missed the most when they moved here was the smell of jasmine. Their garden was full of it apparently. Dad always used to buy her perfume that smelt of jasmine but she said it wasn't the same.

Sorry...yes.. the friend. She talked about being a dancer but she looked too big to be a dancer. Big, you know... a big girl. Fat. They talked quite loudly the whole journey, I think they had been to a party. Apparently the friend had introduced Jasmine to a dancer friend called Juan but she wasn't interested in him.

What else did they talk about? Some other people at the party, I don't remember any other names. Just talked about their night really. Looked at photos on their phones. Jasmine seemed drunk but her friend didn't. She was wearing tinsel in her hair, which I thought was strange for April. They were only on the train together for ten minutes so there wasn't time to talk about much else.

I was on my own and I'd just finished my book so I had nothing to do but listen to them.

Like I said, they were quite loud.

Where had I been? To the theatre. Wicked. Have you seen it? Oh you should, it's fabulous. My friend and I meet up once a month. Both huge fans of musicals.

No she lives in Tooting so she got the Northern Line from Waterloo.

Yes her friend got off at Clapham, are you sure you haven't spoken to her? Strange, she must have been one of the last people to see her. The poster says she went missing that day. It was the date that rang a bell with me. I still had my theatre ticket in my jacket pocket. You should check CCTV at Clapham. She would have been getting off about ten-thirty, the train left Waterloo a few minutes late.

Sorry I didn't mean to tell you how to do your job. You saw her getting off at Norbiton then? If you check again, you'll see me right behind her. We both walked down Coombe Road. Now I know there's no CCTV down there. How do I know? A colleague of mine lives on that road and he had his car broken into last month. He moaned about it for days at work. "CCTV" everywhere but not when you really need it."

Sign of the times I suppose. Cars getting broken into, girls going missing.

Oh yes I suppose you're right, I was probably one of the last people to see her.

Such a shame. She seemed so happy. Singing along to whatever she was listening to.

Totally oblivious of what was to come.

What makes you think I'm lying?

Do you really want to know the truth?

Waiting for a mattress

I was on a blind date. A truly blind, even if not a date. A friend had put me in touch with an editor who was interested in the topic I was working on. We were meeting in a café. I hadn't thought it would be so busy on a weekday morning and as I navigated occupied tables, it occurred to me that I had no idea what she looked like. In fact, Laurie could be a he. When I had tried to google Laurie, followed by the person's surname and even the occupation, nothing came up. That was unusual, but I didn't think about it at the time. Why should I have? Our mutual friend had sung praises about Laurie's editorial judgment and had repeated several times – why, was that a mantra? Should not that had put me on alert? – that Laurie was a most decent person around. But hang on. Think! Our mutual friend would have used a pronoun talking about Laurie. But which one? If only I could remember.

In a situation like this, we all resort to mobiles. But let me tell you, that would have been useless. Apparently, or that's what our mutual friend said, Laurie had a pathological hatred of mobiles. Should I have rung our mutual friend? No. Our mutual friend was on a cruise in the South Pole. Watching penguins and unreachable.

I approached a table. I might just as well try a few people, in particular those who were sitting alone.

'Excuse me,' I said. 'Are you waiting for me? I am –'

'No, I am waiting for a mattress.'

I have heard clearly. Otherwise I wouldn't have made a face, a face of a dropped jaw, a face of a question mark.

'Yes, they will ring me when they are near, the delivery van people,' the person said. 'I got fed up waiting at home on my own. Here, it's easier, everyone waits.'

'What?'

'Everyone waits. Waiting for love. Waiting for a mattress.'

Lovers Late for Lunch

The sadness of these women slays me and Cassandra's
alone in the Bean & Berry after the book club it's
the scene from Friends where Ross & Rachel kiss but I
walk on with my bag of budget groceries round the corner
to the college with a critical nostalgia
and a useless degree in literature, imagining planets as light
and transparent as opium in a cheap Victorian novel.
My legs ache like ivory.

I'm in love with everything even
sadness is beautiful and lonely like cafés at night when
yellow Van Gogh light lights up my heart and I think I'm
swimming underwater with fish tail glitter and mermaid
glamour and a hat I bought with peacock feathers from
an old Moroccan Sufi.

If only I could convince you of your beauty with a touch.
My fingers are feathers someone dyed in the fall when
Prince died a torn off rag floated
down to my feet and you liked the flamboyant purple
photo I posted on Facebook.
Someone said, No way! (I think it was Arlene). Someone
said, Wow! But now
it's autumn and the spokes from my heart to
every conceivable potential are like starlit communications
and endless sweet nothings on a tormented iPod playlist.

I hope Cassandra serves me tomorrow. I hope her bright red
hair hangs low and the grace of her conversation as it veers
between pleasantries and insight at the time she saw us eating
but said nothing of your ring or stripes or sudden lunges
into crippling despair...

I'm happy to float up and down to earth
again if it means someone's amused and who knows when
but we might meet up in the novels we write for Richard & Judy's
book club.

I'll invite Cassandra. You invite the last time we kissed
and the pills you swallowed in the big metallic taxi.

The stars are a palanquin of pain no more and I always
eat lunch around one these days.

Deceit

Every Back to School Night Mom came home saying that all my teachers thought me the compass and square of the class, concentration like a needle.

For the next few weeks I was hard at nailing my times tables, my toothpick sculpture; there was no hitch I couldn't sand to paper. I was so flint in my devotion: all my love dropped into focus like a plumb line, a crowbar leveled at prying off the books' covers.

Really my teachers had complained I never was applying myself, I couldn't get the angle to circumscribe the spelling list, hammer in every comma correct; my mother told me years later, only when I had mastered it.

I think a guidance counselor said that if I got to college I'd construct a secure future. But he didn't know what to build; he didn't know what fashion the world took, or if inside me what stairs or walls could be framed, what carving up beauty?

“Walking Silently in the Mall with Jeffrey Dahmer”

I misspell financial,

on purpose

who the fuck is

General Tso

they like his chicken

now strip mall domesticated

masses crave and always get

options

laced with mercury and

sometimes if they're lucky

lies and lead

they sit lonely

under

values and hues

two

generic Hefty trash bags

midwestern serial killers

flies

and

mosquitoes

crave attention deficit disorders

and

fame,

some people
need Richard and attention
more than
others
red blots
and
red stripes
disseminate white paper
dinner conversations
with
Freud and Sun Tzu
blue metal cylinders
bow and reach for the sky
there is no god
there is no reason to capitalize
GOD
there is only barbeque sauce
herpes simplex two
Coach purses
and down syndrome
we were all made in
HIS
image,

fluid filled proteins
released
plastic Gatorade bottles
littered on interstate road sides
recycled glue removal
the screams
dull

the stomach

churns

duct taped

eyes behind doors peer

at

decaying,

life, vomit and plasma.

XXX

michelle wareham

nature and time/ beauty in moments

When what you're eating

& what you crave

come together

where sorrow ends/nothing to hold onto