

Meeting Myself on the London Underground in the Holiday Season

In those days between the
Tissue of Christmas and the
Splinter of New Year
You stepped into my carriage.

You made only the slightest
Impression then,
The subterranean universe was not
Disturbed by your coming as
You took a place beside me
On the train,
My urban surveillance checking off
Clothes - clean
Smell - none
Before I swam back
Into the blinding book
To read and re-read that poem
About a man embracing a
Young woman with
Learning difficulties (shall we say -
He calls her retarded)
Which was so extraordinary
I suddenly wanted to
Make a sobbing sound,
A great wail caught behind

My throat, stifled of course,
A Londoner first
Above all things.
I sat impassive.

'Excuse me', you said
From nowhere
And my body performed
An extravagant jump
'You like poetry?'

The day goes into freefall
My god! Somebody spoke,
You - sitting next to me
Rush into multicolour
As I take you in
Antennae scrambling...

Woman.
About my age.
An agreeable face.
Clothes not dissimilar to mine.
A touch of bohemia that I'd always aspired to and
somehow never achieved.
The right side of eccentric rather than my
somewhat duller side.

'And you', I said

'You write?'

And you said

'I try'.

In between Warren Street

And Green Park

You asked for the name of

The book in my lap

Because you wanted to buy

A collection of

Contemporary poetry.

We talked in shy sentences

About poems, poems

And all the time I'm thinking

I want to have this woman

As a friend,

I want to ask for her number

(I think she wanted to ask for mine)

We were utterly different

But exactly alike,

This was the exceptional chance

Of a fuller life.

I could not say what I wanted to say

The etiquette binding on my tongue

Was tied too tight.

As we drew to Oxford Circus
You gathered yourself to leave
Looked directly to my eye
My eye to your eye
Between us an avalanche
Of letters, books, art,
Music, food, film, wine
Slowly slid from what was
Almost
An ordinary miracle.

At Victoria I allowed
The slightest moan to
Sound from my mouth,
Lost to the crowd,
Went up above ground to
Grey skies, poetry gone,
Bereft,
The new year lying in wait
Like a vicious pet.

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