

Waiting

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They emerge from the George Street underpass and walk along the concourse holding hands, husband and wife style. She takes a phone call, her pace slowing a little and I note how their hands slowly separate as she slips behind. It's nothing more than a five second film clip on the TV news update. It's surprising I even noticed, seated as I am, towards the Central Station end of the concourse, thirty metres or so ahead of them. I return to my breakfast.

Looking back up I expect them to have merged into the thousands of little events that are the peak hour rush. It surprises me then that my eyes zoom in on them immediately. He's reached the stairs that lead upwards and back towards George Street, and here he peels off and begins to climb. She's not following however, ambling past him, still engaged in her conversation. Part way up the stairs he stops - I suspect he knows she's not following - and turns around. For a moment he watches her drift onwards but then resumes his ascent. At the top he again turns back towards her and waits. Without looking down I break off a piece of croissant; I'm interested to see if she keeps on going. I have this amusing picture of her phone call ending and her looking around, confused, not knowing where the hell she is. A sort of mild rebuke.

A new sound intrudes upon the steady hum of people and traffic. From deep within the subway comes the shock wave that precedes a stampede. Sipping my coffee, I watch the herd of commuters break free onto the concourse and wait to see the woman and her phone swept before the rush. About to take another sip the cup remains suspended. *I can't believe it, she doesn't miss a beat.* She meanders across the onslaught, still talking, dreamlike, untouched.

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A couple stops by my table obscuring the view so I stuff down the rest of the croissant I would normally savour. Now she's listening, drifting directly towards me in what seems like a long arc, as if she's doing a circuit of the concourse. Once she's closer, I notice her eyes, unfocussed, oblivious of her surroundings, oblivious of her patiently waiting husband.

She's almost level with my table when I consider getting her attention and, without being openly critical, making some comment. Perhaps catch her eye and smile, then simply point towards him, holding my smile; a gentle reminder. However, while I'm still nursing these thoughts, she stops and slowly turns back to look up at him, not a wave, just a look. He meets her look and I imagine he's silently saying to her, 'This way', in the tolerant manner you would to a child. As she continues her circular trajectory, away from me, I try to understand him: waiting so long, so calmly. There's the beginnings of a gnawing in my gut, familiar and unwelcome.

Finally her circuit brings her to the stairs. Still on the phone, she looks up at him. What would he be wanting to say to her right now, running it through in his mind? I know, 'Grow up, you can't be a dreamer all your life. This way, come on, hurry up.'

She starts upwards, a vague step or two, then stops. A moment then another, her gaze down, intent on the call. As soon as she reaches the second last step, he turns towards George Street and walks, slowly, as if encouraging her to follow. However, having finally reached the footpath, she laughs at something the caller has said and turns to meander in the opposite direction.

The knot in my gut tightens. Jenny and I are now separated but the thirty years of waiting still eat away at me. Waiting for her to be ready to leave when we're already late, knowing I'll have to drive like a maniac and will arrive with stomach cramps. Forever standing on a street corner, sitting in a restaurant or waiting outside her work at knock-off time. The worst was when we'd plan something special together and she'd decide that one of the children needed her attention and I'd be left alone, waiting.

Now this woman has stopped again, laughing again. It's too much, I have to speak, have to let someone know what's happening here. I look around, searching for understanding in the faces of others but no one else seems to have noticed. Thoughts overwhelm me. *Bitch. Self-absorbed, totally*

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unaware of him, ignoring his needs. How can one person, especially the person who's supposed to love you, not know the hurt they're causing? Unawareness is not an excuse. Now my heart is racing and I have to catch my breath. She's still laughing, he's still waiting yet he appears calm. I'm confused. I bump my cup and a few drops of coffee slosh onto my laptop. *Damn.*

At last she turns towards him and closes the distance between them. Snapping her phone shut, she looks up at him and smiles. He puts his arm around her, kisses her on the forehead and they disappear from view into the crowds on George Street.

'Another coffee, sir? A beautiful morning to just relax.' I look towards the voice. The waitress smiles and continues. 'You seemed to be enjoying just watching the passing parade, I thought you might like another coffee.'

I fumble for my wallet and throw down ten dollars. 'I'm late, very late.' Closing the laptop while getting to my feet I knock the chair over. The waitress steps back suddenly and gasps. I know I've frightened her but my reply is defensive rather than apologetic. 'Sorry, I'm late.' Leaving the fallen chair, I rush into the subway, charging the oncoming crowd, desperate for the noise and crush to overwhelm the pain.