

Flash Fiction 2309

By Terry Miles

Missing

David telephoned Tim, it was that time of night, just before both of them went to sleep, unless of course, David was going to draw some grids to work on or Tim was going to type yet another Flash Fiction type of text. Something both of them did after they had spoken, hence this text.

“I’ve lost my teeth,” David began. “I can’t find them anywhere.”

“Where were you, when you last had them in?” Tim asked.

“I was sleeping in my chair, you know how easy it is for me to go to sleep sitting up in it.”

“Have you looked under the cushion?”

“Of course I have, that was the first place I looked, you think I’m daft or something.”

“Did you go to the toilet?”

“Yes, but they’re not there. I’ve looked there too.”

“What do you normally do with them?”

“I put them in some water, to steep all night.”

“What do you actually put them in?”

“A plastic cup, the kind you get coffee in.”

“How many have you got? Have you checked them all?”

“Just the top one. They’re all in a pile.”

“What will happen if you can’t find them?”

“I think I might have to cancel the optician’s appointment.”

“Why, David?”

“Because I can’t be seen without my teeth in, besides I find it difficult to be understood.”

“You’re not finding it too difficult right now, David.”

“It’s when they come loose or fall out.”

“Perhaps it’s better without them in, then.”

“I’ve told you, I can’t be seen like this.”

“I’m sure they will understand.”

“What can I do?”

“Stop worrying! The important thing is to find your missing teeth.”

“They must be somewhere but I can’t think where.”

“Have you got some washing up?”

“Yes, it’s in a basin in the sink.”

“Go and feel in the water.”

David goes into the kitchen holding his phone in his right hand. He puts the tips of his, left hand fingers in the water.

“The water’s cold, Tim.”

“It’s September!”

“And a cold one.”

“Put your hand in the water. You’re from Newcastle, you must be used to the cold by now.”

“I left Newcastle 70 years ago.”

“Fish around in the water and see if you’ve put them in there with the washing up.”

David puts his hand in the cold washing up water and feels around for his false teeth.

“They’re not in there. Let me dry my hand.”

A second or two later.

“Are they on the clavichord ?”

“No, I’ve looked.”

“What about on your bed?”

“I’ve taken a look just in case... but I wasn’t in there.”

“On the floor under the chair”

“I’ve looked under there, twice. I’ve also been through my rubbish bin. Unraveled every piece of paper, I did. It took forever.”

“Not forever!”

“And I went through the recycling stuff, too. Nothing!”

“They won’t have disappeared like that, David.”

“It’s driving me nuts!”

“You’ll find them tomorrow.”

“People used to use diviners, either wooden ones or scraps of metal on a piece of string.”

“I haven’t heard of bits of metal on a piece of string being used.”

“I’m going to draw out some grids to take my mind off my missing teeth.”

“They’re still not in your mouth, are they?”

“No they’re not, definitely not. Jesus, you have to be joking!”

“I’ll see if I can think of something to write about, don’t know what at this time of night. Bye for now.”

“Goodnight, Tim.”

The next morning.

Tim’s telephone rings. He answers it.

“Morning, Tim.”

“Morning David, I’ve just opened the back door. It’s sunny outside. Just been listening to Melvin Bragg’s *In Our Time*. It’s his 1,000th edition and it’s on Bergman.”

“It was like you said.”

“What was?”

“I got up this morning...”

“You’re going to give me a second to second account to where you’ve progressed to right now?”

“Don’t interrupt me. Let me tell it in my own way.”

“You’ve found them?”

“You’re so impatient! Just as you’ve said.”

“I only said they’ll turn up tomorrow, which is now today.”

“I went straight to them.”

“Were you dreaming of diviners?”

“Yes, and I got up and went straight to the chair, felt behind the cushion and there they were. It was weird. I wasn’t really thinking what I was doing. I mean, I wasn’t even going to sit down on it. I call that weird, I do. It was uncanny, call it what you will.”

“Canny or uncanny! It’s all the same to me.”

“Well, I found them.”

“You told me, that was the first place you looked. In future, do I have to ask you to double check everywhere you’ve looked?”

“Tim, they must have stuck to the cushion with the glue I use to keep them in my mouth. you know, when I looked under it.”

“Well, at least you can go to the opticians now.”

“I’m going there straight after I’ve spoken to you.”

“Better let you go, then. Wouldn’t like you to miss your appointment. Speak to you later.”

The End

Blue Moon by Terry Miles

It happens once in a while. As they say, once in a blue moon. Closest to the earth it was too. As close as it gets, or so they say.

Who?

Astronomers of course! Was it bright?!

Who are you asking?

Just an exclamation to myself. I was surprised!

Surprised, but you knew it was there!

And it wasn't blue at all.

It was a little misty when I looked up.

What did you expect? It's Britain after all!

When I say, misty, I mean a thin layer of cloud.

Towards the end of August, it was.

I meant to put the entry into my journal, but how could I? I'd forgotten what the date was.

Just a day or so before I was to go into the hospital to have a cataract removed. That was to happen on the 2nd of September.

Afterwards, I had to wait two hours for transport. My left eye was all covered up.

I was offered some food. A coronation chick pea sandwich, a bag of crisps, a cereal biscuit and a small carton of orange juice.

Bang goes my non ultra-processed food diet!

And in a hospital, too.

"Enjoy," someone said.

"What, salt and vinegar!"

"It's all the crisps we have."

I ate. After a while I was given some eye drops, Pure water, swabs and some other things too tedious to mention.

A little later, I was taken downstairs to the waiting room.

In my case it was the waiting for a cab room. Which has to be cheaper than hospital transport.

I was guided to a seat. I sat and waited and waited.

There was some irritation within my eye.

I thought about the coronation chick pea sandwich.

Still! That was only a couple of hours ago.

I wanted to visit the toilet.

I had to go!

What would happen if the driver called my name and I didn't hear him to respond? Would he go away without me. Another two hour wait. And I didn't have a smart phone. Reception closed! A member of staff responded to my call. What else could I do but use my voice? I couldn't see around me. All those eye drops! Not to mention the stress. I did go but I won't go into details, only to say the motion was somewhat loose, to put it mildly. And the paper! Thin it was, so thin. Cutting costs! Every institution is doing it.

I had to wash my hands so thoroughly! And trying to dry them! The paper towels kept disintegrating! and afterwards there were so many doors I had to try in order to find my way back into the waiting area! I opened a door but it only led me into a storage room. I tried another door and stepped in. A woman shrieked. I was entering an occupied toilet. Good job I had my white cane in hand. My shades were over my head because my left eye was all bandaged up. I tried another one! I re-entered the waiting room. I sought to find the seat I had vacated just a little earlier. By the door it was. I walked until I hit the wall. That is with my cane. I sat on someone's handbag. The owner, on the next seat withdrew it. She went outside. She wanted to smoke a cigarette. She returned soon afterwards. She couldn't find someone with a light. More waiting.

Eventually, the transport came. The driver was an Eritrean, a breakaway province of Ethiopia, now a nation. I got into the car. He helped me with the seat belt. The driver got into his seat and after switching on his navigation aid we were away. We had a number of conversations. All due to me! What with the Covid pandemic shutdown and me not used to

being in company. I just let loose until the journey was over. I went on about my encounters with a store manager, a professor, not to mention two volunteers. And the story of the Scottsboro boys. When he arrived at his destination, I even invited him into my passageway to see my bathroom and toilet which is just a pace away from my front door.

The End

Passageway

There didn't seem any point to the day. I was almost five. I had a tricycle. I had nowhere to go. I was too young to have any ambitions. No drive to speak of! Too working class to boot. Life has always been like that. Back then and seventy years later. The passageway led from the front of the house to the back garden which faced north. There was a bed of Lily of the Valley in the border at the beginning of the back garden, where a cold wind would make them feel as though they were deep in a valley with damp cold air to nurture them. I was bored. I must have been bored because an idea came into my head. The passageway led to the back entrance to the council houses. There was a concrete post that separated the two front gardens. Mrs. Sewel lived next door with her husband. They were nice people. She was friendly with my mother. She got Woman's Own and my mother bought Woman, two magazines for working class women. They swapped magazines after they had read them. Once I was playing ball in the passageway when it disappeared. I just couldn't find it. It was like magic. A couple of days later I learned that it was found in the gravy with Mrs. Sewel's roast beef. Her larder window was open and I hadn't noticed. The concrete post had spikes protruding from it, there were also bolts that held the wire fence that divided the two front gardens. I took my bike to the other end of the passageway and rode it into the post. My wheel hit the spike that

was just at the right height. The tyres were solid rubber so there was no innertube to deflate as it was punctured. Mrs. Sewell's front garden was smarter than ours because it had special roses planted in it. Ours had a golden privet hedge by the fence next to the sidewalk. There was a wooden gate too that squeaked when opened or closed. I turned my bike around and rode to the back garden. I cycled around the concrete area where the dustbin was and returned to the passageway. I focused on the concrete post and rode back into it. To have missed it might have caused me an injury but I was careful. There was a peony and some gladioli in our front garden. There were carnations along the path from the front gate to the front door. Between the front door and the passageway was a bay window. But there was no bay to look at, or around. Just more council houses. There might have been some other plants too, perhaps some London Pride, but the others I can't remember. I pulled my bike from the spike that made another hole in the tyre and went back to the back garden. There was a craved path that went towards the end of it, not quite to the end, mind you. There was a very imperfect lawn which was almost always in the shadow of the house, even in the summer. Beyond that was a rockery that had some snow-in-summer in it. One year there was a couple of rows of Sweet Williams. Another year there were sweet peas growing up the back fence. For some reason they made a great show. Never to be attained again. Between the two rows of Sweet Williams and the end of the garden were potatoes and cabbages half eaten by cabbage white caterpillars. Oh! There was also a gooseberry bush which I was told I was born under. It had more thorns than sour berries. And some rhubarb plants bucketed over during the winter. Later on, I had a small garden patch by the back garden fence. The fence was about six feet high. The neighbours, the Barons had bought some fencing to enclose a chicken run. There were

some left over so my father and the Sewell's were able to enclose our gardens. Beyond the fence was a field that had been forgotten by city planners. It was a great place to play in, to dig dens in and to have a bonfire in on Guy Fawkes night. There was an entrance at the two ends of the field. The entrance nearest to our house was two houses away. There were the Sewell's and the Sumpton's. The field had lots of nettles too. Once I found myself stranded inside a clump dressed only in my bathing-trunks and socks and shoes. As I began to get stung I started to wail and was eventually rescued by my father. Those on the whole were happy memories. I rode my tricycle back into the spikes. Again, I was on target.

Graham, who was my age and I got to know as I went to school, lived opposite the entrance to the field. One night the lamppost by his front gate fell down just inside his garden. I jokingly said, "What a pity it didn't go through your bay window that would have been dramatic." Graham didn't think my joke was funny at all. I guess not, but nothing very much happened down the 21st Avenue! Graham's father was a West Indian and his mother was English. My mother said that people should marry their own kind. I didn't see why not. Later, I acknowledged that my mother was being racist. Funny how a comment like that sticks in one's mind. Graham was pale skinned, milky coffee coloured. I wouldn't have minded if he was darker. It never crossed my mind that there was anything wrong in being a different race. I remembered reading a story in class. It was about someone who had stolen something. The story was set in Africa. The white teacher said, "Look the thief has grown horns."

One child put his hands on his head to feel for the horns and disclosed his guilt.

I thought, "He wouldn't have been so stupid."

Later, I thought it was a racist text. I obviously didn't fall for it.

Yet again I was on my tricycle peddling and puncturing more holes in my front tyre.

My name means: The Tender, Honest Rebel, though not in that order but I phrase it like that to make it sound right. Somehow, I have tried to live my life to meet the meaning of my names I was Christened with.

Then there was the time when Mrs. Baron shouted across our garden at Mrs. Sewel that she was barren, which was cruel, very cruel. I was around thirteen. I felt sorry for Mrs. Sewell but what could I do. Mrs. Baron certainly wasn't barren, she was also fierce, very fierce! One of her daughters, Maureen was so afraid of her that she told her that one of the daughters of a more respectable family that happened to live next to Graham was in the C stream whilst she was in the A stream. Mrs. Baron confronted the stuck up child's mother with a degree of surprise. Fancy your daughter being in the C stream! Of course it was a lie and she was humiliated to find out in that way that it was the other way around. Of course Maureen got a beating. And of course that didn't make things any better, her children just became more terrified of her.

I had another go on my bike. and rode Pell Mell onto the post again. Another hole in my front wheel. I don't know why I was obsessed about the tyre's destruction. I stopped, for no other reason than I was getting bored.

As for Mrs. Sewell, she started to suffer from thyroid problems, how I knew this I can't remember, perhaps my mother mentioned it.

We moved away from the 21st Avenue when I was fifteen. Within months I learned that Mrs. Sewell had put her head in the oven and gassed herself. Her husband had come home from work and found her dead in the kitchen. He was a quiet man. I felt sorry for him but what could I do, I wasn't equipped with the bereavement skills needed for such an occasion.

Years later, when I was living in London I learned that the council had built more council houses on the field. What a pity, I thought. There were so few places that were wild even if somewhat unsightly where kids could play.

The End

Spiders' Webs. 2309

Tim was speaking on the telephone with David. It was the morning call that meant that both of them were still alive.

"Morning, Tim."

"Morning David, how are you today?"

"Same as yesterday. I'll feel better when I'm on my way to the Y. I need to do some exercises. How are you, Tim?"

"I went into the garden at 6.30 and thought I'd like to change the air as it was quite cool outside but I had to close the door, because it was still quite dark and my neighbour said he had seen a rat running along the top of the fence. I almost asked him if it had a bushy tail or not. There are plenty of mice running in and out of the mortar gaps in the brickwork and I've had to top up the mouse poison traps. Not that the mice are trapped inside them, they're not. Once I was putting on a slipper and a dead mouse was right inside it. It made me jump a bit as my toes came

into contact with its cold, furry body. I guess it was trying to snuggle up somewhere warm and cozy whilst it was dying. I have some of the old fashioned traps too. I've caught 59 mice in my time here. That's the only one I've found that's died due to it eating the bait. God knows where the other poisoned, dead mice are! I warned my female neighbours to check their shoes before they put them on. Guys can use their empirical knowledge, you know."

"I don't like going into the garden because of the spiders and their webs," David responded, "and the spiders are big."

"Oh! I go around my garden with my feather duster, only it isn't a feather one but a woolly one. I have to be careful not to get anything in my eye due to the operation to remove the cataract. Just a week ago it was now. Walking into a spider's web, or a strand of silk, with the spider at the end of it is no fun at the best of times. Have to rinse the eye lid with distilled water, I have. Afterwards, I have to drop a drop of Novartis into it, four times a day too, until the end of the month."

"How long did it take before you noticed?"

"Sorry, I didn't catch that."

"Oh, my new plate's just dropped out."

There was a pause whilst David put his plate back in again."

"Take your time," Tim said sympathetically.

"Difference, when did you notice a difference?"

Vision was a little clearer after twenty-four hours," Tim explained.

"Did you feel anything during the operation, Tim?"

"I wanted to ask for something to calm me down but there wasn't the time, I was already on the operating table. I'm a bit of a coward, you know. I haven't been conscious during an operation before! Didn't hurt at all during the op."

“And afterwards, Tim?”

“No. However, I met an elderly guy on a bus just two days before the op. I started talking to him as I do. He told me, his eye was bandaged up because he had just had the operation. He also told me that it didn’t hurt. I had to wear a plastic eye cover with a piece of bandage under it for twenty-four hours, too. All I wanted to do was sit in my garden for a few days.”

“How’s your garden, Tim?”

“Very tidy.”

“So, you’ve hoovered it recently?”

“Yes, the two sycamore trees next door are shedding their seeds. And I don’t want to use a brush and dustpan in case some dust blows in my eyes. So I did that yesterday too. It isn’t the whole garden, just the patio and the lawn I paved over in 2012. There I was in November trying to see the bubble in a five foot, long, spirit level. The only visual aid I had was my jeweler’s loupe. Oh! I have a garden light, too. My neighbour lent me the spirit level as he had just paved his garden. He has two sycamore trees in his garden. Giant weeds they are! It was 11pm. in November and it was snowing. It was one of those, once in 11 years, sun cycle events. Triggers a severe winter it does. Lost all my pelargoniums that were planted in the garden. The potted ones, I brought in during the severe weather. I got the paving slabs at a reasonable level, due to all the checking I’d done Not to mention, waiting for the bubble to settle. Looks so much tidier after I’ve hoovered it. You couldn’t believe how many sycamore seeds are shed by the trees each year.”

“I have to go back inside whenever I walk into a web,” David said.

“It’s that time of year, the spiders have to get their supply of food for the winter. They catch their little flies in their webs and wrap them up in their strands of silk.”

“I have to go and inject myself, now,” David announced.

“Haven’t you given yourself your morning dose of rat poison yet. You’re supposed to do it before you, phone me!”

“The doctors said I couldn’t take Warfarin due to a pre-existing condition. I’m taking Enoxaparin or Clexane, call it what you will,” David explained.

“How’s the blood clot bubble?” Tim asked.

“It’s gone down a bit. Doesn’t hurt as much as it did, either.”

“Just be careful when you inject yourself.”

“Of course! I check for bruises. It can be a sign, you know! I had to check for blood in my stools and my glasses fell off, right into the pan, yesterday. Fished them out I did and checked them. They were O.K. no sign of blood at all. Thanks, speak to you later.” David said before he hung up.

The End

Short, short Story, 2023.10.12.

Good news from Terry.

He can smell his armpits, again.

He’s getting over Covid.

The End