



# Stories for the Train

Tales on the go

0:4:00

## Oddly Enough

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Bloody thing! Bruce rubbed his head. The bloody thing was watching him from its gloomy perch as he banged his head against the doorway of the cupboard under the stairs. The bloody thing was impassively staring at him with deep set eye sockets. Its brow was narrower than its jaw and its upper lip overhung its lower. It looked completely gormless.

He picked it up intending to throw it away. But, holding it, he was suddenly back to a market in sunlit Santiago all those years ago when she had found it in a gift stall. It was an Easter Island statuette with a slot for holding a pair of glasses.

‘We neither of us wear specs Ellie, and, when out in the sun, sunglasses are most effective when worn over the eyes.’

‘Oh Bruce, it’s *fun*’

It reminded him of her penchant for buying tacky souvenirs and taking far too many photographs. It was surprising that she hadn’t swept it up with all the other nick-nacks when she left. Why had she left him with this one?

He was just about to place it back into deserved obscurity when the phone rang. It was his lawyers.

‘Hello Mr Paxton, Michael Beasley of Finstones here. Just calling to say that Mrs Paxton’s lawyers are pressing to reach a settlement. They’re suggesting a meeting next week?’

‘Yes fine.’ He stifled his irritation.

‘Any suitable dates?’

‘Maybe Tuesday morning? Early if possible. I have a project milestone looming.’ Milestones, he thought, Easter Island stones, stony faces.

‘What about ten o’clock, their offices?’

Fine ... tell me the post code again....?’

He turned back to the thing; its reappearance seemed to be telling him something. What was it? Memories started to roll out, one by one, nested within each other. He smiled when he remembered her study. Impossible to go in there without knocking over some ornament or trinket.

‘I’ll get you another glass horse, don’t fret.’

‘But this one goes with her foal.’

In that moment, he realised that, for all her illogical and scatty ways, he wanted her back. She must be missing him, he was still a catch: double first, acknowledged wit, high flying career. OK, maybe he had routinely talked over her at dinner parties but the interruptions were only to prevent her making a fool of herself – and, by association, him.

Perhaps finding this was a sign that he should try and re-engage.

He phoned to consult his mother. ‘I think it’s some kind of oracle.’

‘Oracles are often misinterpreted,’ she said stiffly.

Alright it wasn’t an oracle; it was a portent. He would offer to take it over to her. He picked up the phone and punched in her number.

*“This is Ellie. Please leave a message.”* Beep.

Uncharacteristically brief and to the point. He remembered the days of the answerphone when her messages used to reach the status of instruction booklets:

*“Hello! You’ve reached the home of Ellie and Bruce Paxton. If it’s*

*about a delivery please try Mrs Langridge at Ivy Cottage two doors down, three if you count our side door. If you're a friend and can't make a get together please try my mobile which if you're a friend you will have. If it's for Bruce, try his secretary on 0207 565 324 ... erm sorry, 325. Anything else please leave a message - oh except on Wednesdays when I'm at Oxfam in town, best to try again on Thursdays.' If you've misdialled, please don't leave a message - sorry you've had to listen to this."*

As the afternoon passed, he realised they he couldn't make any progress with his work. He had alternative pitches for his client's product. Looking at all the aspects, he couldn't decide which one was right for the target demographic. That statuette had triggered some mental itch that he just had to scratch. He decided that he would drop it off at her new place. Should he take some wine or flowers? No: too presumptuous, he would just ask soberly for a chat; see how she was getting on.

Ellie had swapped life in the village for a flat on the outskirts of a town several miles away. It depressed Bruce to visit places like this. He made sure his car was locked and no valuables visible then walked up to map of the estate on a display board which seemed to have been used for target practise for assorted missiles. He located her flat and went up two flights of stairs and along a walkway. There were lights on, so he knocked.

After a while spent peering through frosted glass, he saw a door open and a figure approach. The door opened as far as its chain would allow and Ellie's face appeared.

'Bruce. What are you doing here?' she took off the chain. She was in a dressing gown of grey towelling and her hair was wet.

'I found this, Ellie. It's yours. I thought I'd bring it back and ... maybe we could ... talk?'

'We've talked Bruce or rather you've talked. I don't think there's anything more to say.'

Bruce steadied himself: he was in advertising; surely this was not a difficult pitch to make. 'Come on Ellie, a chat won't hurt. We're meant to explore all avenues for a reconciliation.'

As he spoke he was aware of another, larger figure coming out of the room whence Ellie had appeared. Suddenly there stood behind her a large man in a dressing gown of the same grey towelling as hers. Oddly enough, his neck was as wide as his jaw and his jaw was wider than his brow. His upper lip overlapped his lower. His face was looking at him with impassive eyes from within deep-set sockets.

'Bruce, this is Bradley,' said Ellie.

'Hello Bradley,' said Bruce. 'Here, take Bradley.' He handed over the statuette and walked away.