



Stories for the Train

Tales on the go

0:9:00

Love you to Death

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Icy blackness closes over my head, blinding me. Something pulls my feet downwards, arms forced up in an involuntary gesture of surrender. Deeper and deeper, the filthy water drags me down. Every cell screams in terror, heart thunders, blood roars. I am possessed by a desperate need to breathe. Knowing the urge to live will bring death, I gasp, and wake, choking. Lunging forwards, I struggle for air, my throat tight. Tiny clutches at breath become deeper and my heartbeat steadies.

Sitting up in bed, T shirt soaked in cold sweat, I look at the clock glowing quietly. 3.40 a.m. So tired. I'll get up and make tea, I think, as I rest my head back down across the bed. I drift back into oblivion.

When I wake again, it's 7.00 a.m. and the radio's babbling. My head is thumping and my throat is raw. I feel weak. Can't face work today. Too sick. I'll call, leave a message with reception.

I spend the day in limbo, either sleeping or half awake, aching and shivering. I cannot get warm. Keep the answer machine on but no-one rings. I try to shake off the uneasiness. My dream sits about my shoulders like a shroud. It haunts me all day, hiding in the shadows, not quite out of sight.

I'm walking along the towpath. It's dark, the occasional streetlamp reflected in the water. Just enough light to see my way, just enough light to make monsters of the shadows. The river's running fast and high tonight. There's a cold wind, I'm walking quickly, I'm angry. Why am I angry? Then I'm in the water, under the water, being pulled down, fighting for life, fighting for breath. At that first gasp I wake again, terrified and shaking. It's 3.40 a.m.

I ought to see a doctor. If I'm not better tomorrow, I'll go. I'll take on the witch who guards the surgery and get an emergency appointment. Tomorrow. But now I must sleep. So tired. My mind is numb, confused, can't think, can only feel. Pain.

Leave another message at work, spend the morning and some of the afternoon staring dully at daytime TV. Odd to watch the misery of real people contrasted with the self-satisfied smugness of presenters. The rest of the time I wander about the flat, trying to put distance between me and the horror of the dream. The faint whispering of something unspeakable. I feel low, restless and listless. I cannot get rid of the foul taste in my mouth. I cannot get warm.

The phone must have rung when I was asleep. A message from Louise at work.

"Lesley, it's Lou. Are you OK? Got your message. You must be really sick, not like you to take time off, you poor thing. Don't worry about things here, we're coping. Derek's in a funny mood, we're all avoiding him. Look after yourself. Call if there's anything I can do. Bye."

I don't feel like talking to anyone, not even Derek. God I must be ill.

Derek and I are in a pub. On our own. We're holding hands, sitting close, heads bent towards each other. I tremble when I look at him and my heart chokes me. He's whispering. I've never been this happy. I feel a gut-wrenching swell of emotion. A passion without limits, without morals, without reason. I am more alive at this moment than anyone has ever been.

But then I'm drowning again, suddenly, shockingly. The water pulls roughly and has the strength of demons. I see flashes of light and colour exploding, hear the pounding, pounding of malevolent waves.

I wake to the sound of screaming.

It's me.

3.40 a.m.

I scramble to the bathroom, retching. But nothing comes, just a vile taste in my mouth, stale, filthy. A pale, gaunt face stares back from the mirror, glistening with sweat and grease, lank hair hangs down like river weeds. And the eyes, red-rimmed, glittering with fear and sickness.

I cannot stop shaking. Take a blanket to the sofa and turn on the TV.

The sun is shining when I wake. It's late, gone 8.30. Can't even work up the energy to ring the office. The shaking has stopped. Might be on the mend. I'll give it another day before I waste the doctor's time.

Waste my own time instead. Do everything I can think of to keep myself awake.

Listen to Lou's message when she rings.

"Lesley? Are you there? Pick up if you are. We're worried about you. Give us a call. Got some news for you. About Derek. You'll never guess. Hope you're OK. Bye."

By 10.30 p.m. I'm fighting sleep. That's the way, try to sleep through. Take a pill, wash it down with whisky.

"You can't do this to me" I'm cold with terror.

"Lesley, I'm really sorry it had to turn out like this, believe me, it's the last thing I wanted," Derek reaches out a hand to touch my arm.

I pull away, shrink back into the car seat.

"But you said you loved me, you said you'd leave her.."

"Yes, I know, but that was before this happened"

"Happened, happened? You say it as if it had nothing to do with you"

"It's not that simple, you must understand, I...."

"No I don't fucking well understand. You lied to me, you made me believe you, how could you do it?" I'm sobbing now, with fear, with unbearable grief, "I can't live without you."

"Lesley, please calm down, of course I love you, but I can't leave her now, can I? It wouldn't be right, not now. Just a couple of years, that's all I'm asking, you love me enough for that, don't you?"

He reaches out again.

"Don't touch me."

My rage turns cold.

“You’re a coward. You just can’t face telling her about us, can you? Well, I tell you what, I’ll do it for you. I’ll tell her, I’ll tell everyone at the office, I’ll tell the whole fucking world.”

I open the car door and get out, leaning in to spit my final words at him.

“I’ll walk from here, thanks. You’d better go home to your little wife. It’s the last night of peace you’ll have with her.”

All my fury is in the slam of that car door.

The tears don’t come as I walk towards the towpath. My anger has dried up every last drop of tenderness I ever had.

And then I’m drowning in tears. A river of tears. A black torrent of tears that pull me down and force the life from me. I cannot escape its embrace. The final flicker of light dies.

“No!”

A violent rejection. I wake sobbing again. 3.40 a.m. I’m feverish, hot, dripping with sweat and tears. And then fall into a restless fever that lasts all day.

When sleep comes, I’m ready.

I’m walking down the towpath, consumed with my anger, blinded by rage, deafened by my silent screams.

Something comes at me from the shadows. Someone pushes me roughly down and covers my mouth. Something binds my ankles and someone shoves me brutally into the rushing water. My last sight of his face before the icy blackness closes over my head.

I wake cruelly ripped from sleep, shocked and drained of warmth. But my mind is sharp and clear, floodlit with the realisation of what I must do if I am ever to escape this nightmare.

“I’d like to leave a message for Derek Rendall, please.”

“Who’s calling?”

“Just say it’s an old friend. Someone he used to work with. Tell him that there’s something really interesting in the river waiting for him. I’ll meet him at 3.40.”

“3.40? OK, got that. And where should he meet you?”

“He’ll know.”

The day passes quickly, my mind fixed on its ending. I have no need of sleep, nor of anything.

Louise rings. I listen to her message.

“Lesley, it’s Lou. Look I’m really worried about you now. I’m going to come round to the flat tonight after work and see if you’re there. Why haven’t you called? It’s like a morgue here at the moment. Derek’s shut himself in his office and isn’t talking to anyone. He looks awful. I wonder if there’s something going around? Call me, please.”

Louise turns up at 6.30. I don’t answer the bell. I watch her walk away from the flats, glancing up at my window. She can’t see me.

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It’s dark on the towpath. The occasional streetlamp breaks the blackness. I can hear his footsteps approaching. He’s bundled into his overcoat, hands thrust deep in pockets, shoulders hunched and tense as he peers ahead.

He stops and glances about him, checks his watch. I can see his hands are shaking.

He looks up as I appear from the shadows. His face becomes a mask of horror.

“My God, Lesley, no!”

He cannot resist my kisses. I hunger for his mouth and hold him close. A final struggle in the black watery grave until I find peace.

3.40 a.m.

I wonder what the police will make of it. Two bodies dragged from the river. The woman’s flesh badly decomposed, her arms tight around the much fresher body of the man. His face a rictus of terror, what’s left of hers appears to be smiling.

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