



Misplaced Missing

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“Do you want me to move?”

“Yes.”

As he shuffled begrudgingly along on his seat, she stared. By fixing her eyes on one spot she hoped it would make the spinning in her head stop. It didn't. Looking at him made the whirling worse, and she collapsed clumsily into the space next to him that he'd made for her, just her, awkwardly knocking her knees against his and bumping her elbow on his shoulder.

“Sorry” was all she could manage.

“S'okay,” and he smiled insincerely at her - this strange staring girl who sat fidgeting beside him, analysing each hair on his arm, and each follicle from which they sprang. He tried to distract himself from her attention by reading, but could see her profile grazing his line of vision, and felt her reading the same words as him. Putting his headphones in, he turned the volume up, but quickly right back down after he noticed a smile emerge in time with the familiar baselines. He closed his eyes, and was sure he could sense her studying his dark eyelashes. Why didn't he just get up and move? There weren't any other seats for one thing. And besides, that would be rude.

So rude. And so upsetting. To be so close and yet completely separate.

She wondered why he didn't know that straight away, like she did... “But this is new to him, remember.” And she ached for that - to be new to him.

Last year, there'd been sunshine and kissing. He'd kissed her cheek as she'd kissed his, skimming eyelashes against dimples as lips met skin. And their eyes had closed around them so that all that remained was each other.

As she looked at the beautiful boy beside her, she longed to melt into him. She edged her naked knee closer to his. Maybe once their skin touched it would move something in him, and things would begin again...

Her memory floated to a sunny park, and her arm draped carelessly across his hard, dark torso - a time when she was as comfortable touching his body as her own. He'd carefully plaited daisies into her hair as she read to him, and the childish squeals and sounds of friends making confessions around them faded, enveloping them in quietude and peace.

The silence was making her feel awkward, and she could sense it was doing the same to him too. He kept looking up from his book, changing the songs he was listening to and shifting in his seat. After their knees had finally made contact a sudden stop on the route had jostled them apart again, and she waited for him to return his skin to her, but perhaps he wasn't ready to yet. You can't rush these things after all. If only he'd turn to her and talk...

He was getting really uncomfortable now. What did she want from him? Surely it's a fairly universal language that if someone completely ignores you they're not interested? But she wasn't that easy to shake off.

Time was all that was needed. He couldn't keep this silence up forever. Sometime. Sometime soon. He'd have to speak. There hadn't even been an argument, a disagreement, an anything. It just started to fall to pieces - perfectly formed heart-shaped pieces of beautiful moments suspended like the confetti in a snowglobe - nothing jagged or ugly. But that almost didn't matter - bits of themselves were still scattered and separate...

When it had first begun to happen they didn't even notice. The parasitic presence was so subtle, and came disguised as an everyday occurrence that made it easy to take hold of their naïve affair. And as each held the other's happiness above their own, they forgot themselves too easily. Hypnotising the pair, the parasite tore

assumptions into trust and scraped lies into generosity... Unable to harm one another they continued in silence, gazing upon one another with longing, and themselves with misplaced guilt. So that one day, the parasite's silent assassination was complete, and speech was ripped from them, like a dark spell in a fairytale.

Although in time's past, with other people, the different ones, the mistaken ones and the bad, she would have shouted by now. Begged attention, cried and made a scene. He'd have stormed off the bus, embarrassed and angry, and passers-by would stare and be relieved they didn't know them. Instead she sat in the seat beside him, and waited.

And then he turned to her.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Excuse me?" At last, he was talking to her, and she thought she might pass out. Breathing hard she gathered her thoughts and tried to focus on each word he was saying.

"You're making me really uncomfortable."

"I know. I'm sorry." She bowed her head and her eyes filled with tears. "Can't we just go somewhere and talk?"

"No!"

"Please - I just miss you." She turned full towards him and raised her dewy blue eyes to look into his deep brown chocolate ones, only to find that his were grey.

"Miss me? But - "

Embarrassment fell on her like a boulder. Was it possible to faint whilst sitting down?
"It's not you."

The skin was the same - smooth and taut, his silken straight hair was the same too, but now she could see it was cut differently to his. His eyelashes were like his -

longer than her own and black. The music he likes and the book he is reading. But no. It's not him. Just another of the doubles sent to torment her and remind her of the one she lost, whose name hangs like a "Closed" sign on her heart.

"I'm sorry" he said, looking down at her with pity, before collecting his bag, shuffling past the other bodies and off the bus, leaving her to sit alone with her shame. Curious passengers regarded her with amusement, and she turned into "The Thing I Saw on the Way to Work This Morning". Loneliness cloaked her and she bowed her head into its chest.

Another body came and sat next to her, and she shuffled to make room. Then a hand touched her knee. A hand she knew, owned by a voice she recognised.

And he said, "Is it really you?"