

THE TAXI DRIVER & THE TEACHER

I

“Oh, come on – come into the back with us. You know you want to.”

“Yeah, come on. We’ll give you a really good time.”

“Now, ladies, I’m still working, you know. And anyway, how old are you?”

“Oh, we’re well over sixteen.”

“Yeah, don’t worry about that.”

“Oh, please come on. I need you. We both do.”

“Oh, well, I suppose it is my quiet time,” says Billy Flagg, extinguishing his ‘For Hire’ sign and lazily climbing out of the driving seat.

Once in the back of the car, he sits between the two girls, stretching his arms out along the top of the seats, each hand taking hold of a bare shoulder-blade. To his right, the redhead in the green dress gives him a lingering kiss on his cheek and starts to undo his shirt buttons. On his left, the blonde in the blue T-shirt nuzzles his ear while her fingers knead his thigh.

Now caressing his chest, the redhead’s lips meet Billy’s and their tongues begin to get acquainted. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees the blonde straighten up and suddenly remove her T-shirt. Naked underneath, her breasts are full and firm.

All at once, the blond head disappears and Billy feels his flies bursting open.

“*Six-nine. Sixty-nine.*”

Billy reluctantly opened his eyes.

“*Six-nine? Where are you, mate?*”

Billy removed his hand from his trousers and reached over to turn off the remote voice of the taxi radio operator, filing for later completion the contemplations inspired by the two young ladies he had recently dropped off at the local club, *The Garden Of Earthly Delights*.

“That’s enough for tonight,” Billy said to himself, switching on his engine and pulling out from the riverside lay-by – his favourite resting-place. It was quiet there, and dark. Hardly anybody used it after the last dog-walker of the evening had scooped his last poop, and the council had long overlooked replacing the bulb in the streetlight serving it. The lamp-post had now become almost indistinguishable from the larches, lined up alongside in solidarity. A young cabby could comfortably hide out there late at night, reflecting on women he had

met or would like to meet, safe from the ranks of young men looking for a fight, or even younger drunks, looking for a place to throw up.

The old Volvo lumbered out into the sparse Friday night traffic and Billy headed for home. He detested working the late shift. Billy was content with the leaner pickings in the daytime, working the hospitals and the station, and taking little old ladies to do their shopping. Usually his father worked the nights. Percy Flagg enjoyed all the badinage, the constant busy-ness, and the big tips and generous cleavages which were available in the early hours. But Percy was convalescing just now, having had his piles harvested, as he had put it. Somebody had to take the cab out of an evening. Anyway, Billy did not like to be around the house when his father was home, if he could help it.

But Percy should be tucked up snugly in bed by now.

2

Not far up the road from Billy's riverside retreat stood the local comprehensive school – my apologies: High School. That very evening, the High School had put on its end-of-term concert.....I'm so sorry: its Eastertide Extravaganza. Eh? Oh, Eggstravaganza.

Anyway, schoolteachers run certain risks at end-of-term concerts and Miss Bell had encountered several tonight.

Despite being a history teacher and thus theoretically immune from involvement with the school's performing arts side (unless they ran an historical pageant, but that had not happened since the fifties when the retiring chemistry teacher had got just a touch carried away – poor Mr Boswell, standing in for Horatio Nelson on the day, still bore the scars), Miss Bell, still a relatively new teacher, was an inveterate volunteer. On this occasion, she had volunteered to act as master – or mistress – of ceremonies.

The evening had not started well.

“Can everyone hear me?” she had asked the multitude from the stage, microphone in hand.

Silence.

“I said, Can everyone hear me?”

“Switch the mike on, Ducks,” came a helpful suggestion from the wings. Mr Bucket, the caretaker, had a loud and carrying voice. Everyone heard him all right.

Then there were the little darlings who were not on the stage but who still had a yen to perform: perform with each other, that is. It was when she was trailing one resolute couple into the boys' toilets that Miss Bell came across an opium den that would have made

Sherlock Holmes feel at home. Resisting the impulse to join them, Miss Bell surged into their midst, offering amnesties in return for a peaceful evacuation.

At the backstage party after the final curtain had fallen (at the fourth attempt), Miss Bell plunged into the fraternisation with parents and governors. One governor was especially sociable.

“Ah, Miss Bell,” said the said governor, avidly examining the teacher’s name badge, “I was hoping for a word. About history, you know, the syllabus and so on. My name’s Trevor, by the way: Hilda Trevor. Your classroom’s just down the passage there, isn’t it? Could we step in there for a moment?”

They stepped.

“What do you think about Boudicca, Miss Bell?” Ms Trevor inquired, facing Miss Bell in such a forceful way that Miss Bell backed to the wall. Ms Trevor, a tall woman of perhaps fifty summers, leaned one arm against the wall beside her, almost pinning Miss Bell in place.

“Boudicca?”

“Yes. Boudicca, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Elizabeth, Catherine the Great, Margaret Thatcher – strong women. Do you like strong women, Miss Bell?”

“Well, I...”

“I like you, Miss Bell. I’ve been keeping my eye on you, and I’m very impressed. And I don’t just mean your body, by the way, although I have to say I do find your body very attractive. I admire your tits immensely and look forward to the time when you let me explore them with my tongue,” and Ms Trevor leaned in a little more closely so that her bosom made the slightest contact with Miss Bell’s, “But it’s the way you carry yourself generally that appeals to me most – your air of confidence and enthusiasm. A real example to professional women and young girls looking to make something of themselves. So – what do you say? Dinner? Perhaps the theatre?”

Having assured Ms Trevor that, although positively an admirer of strong women, her diary was currently pretty full and likely to remain so for the conceivable future, Miss Bell extricated herself and returned to the party, which was now breaking up. She was kept busy for a while reuniting the smallest cast members with the appropriate proud parents and was beginning to look forward to a quiet trip home when she was approached by the young games master, James Bates.

“Hello, Jim,” Miss Bell welcomed him, assuming a broad smile. She did not usually mix with Mr Bates but, spotting Ms Trevor still eyeing her, she took the opportunity of demonstrating her readiness to be in the company of muscular, tight-buttocked young men.

“Ah, Miss Bell – or may I call you Anna?”

“You can if you like, but my name’s Teresa,” said Miss Bell, concerned that he might be attempting to chat her up. Frying pans and fires were flickering before her mind’s eye.

“Look,” said Bates, his gaze drifting from her eyes to her bust and rapidly to the floor, “I’m terribly sorry about this, but, well, I think you need to come and have a look at your car.”

Two minutes later, Miss Bell, or let us call her Teresa, and Jim Bates were standing in the car park surveying Teresa’s car.

“You see, they must have mistaken yours for mine – both black Golfs, of course,” said Bates.

“Yes, I see,” said Teresa in a dull tone.

Her car, her beloved little over-powered, still under warranty motor car, had had all its tyres slashed and, scrawled across the bonnet in shockingly bright, white paint visible even in the dark car park, were the words: “MASTER BATES IS A WANKER”.

“A bit obvious, perhaps,” Jim commented, feeling the need to avoid absolute silence, “Anybody with the name Bates comes to expect that sort of wit. But you’ve got to admire their pluck, haven’t you? I mean, they had to be quick with all the people about.”

“Mmmm,” said Teresa.

“I would offer you a lift,” said Jim, breaking another uncomfortable pause, “But unfortunately – or fortunately for me, perhaps – I didn’t bring my car tonight. My partner’s taken it to visit his parents this weekend.”

“Mmmm,” said Teresa.

By the time she regained her composure and made to return to the party, the place had emptied all bar Mr Buckett, the caretaker, who lived next door to the school and had no car nor, as he consistently told anyone who would listen, did he have any inclination to own one.

So, somewhat numbed, Teresa Bell began to make her way home on foot.

3

And so it was that Billy’s and Teresa’s paths crossed.

Or rather, they did not quite cross because Billy, although mildly sleepy, was alert enough to brake in time when he saw Teresa in the middle of the road right in front of him.

“Are you all right?” asked Billy, cautiously winding down his window, tempted to bolt in case this turned out to be a nutcase.

“Oh, are you a taxi?” asked Teresa in turn, struggling to remember hailing a cab but dimly aware it was a good idea.

“Er, yes,” said Billy, “I was on my way home, but.....”

“Oh, super. Thanks,” said Teresa, getting in the front passenger seat and brightening a bit for the first time that evening. She gave Billy her address, which, in her state of subdued shock, she was slightly surprised to recall without hesitation, and they moved off.

Teresa was chatty en route to Lobelia Crescent. Billy was treated to a full account of the evening’s events. Billy was far from objecting to loquacity in a woman. It absolved him from having to take the initiative.

Billy concluded that Teresa was not bonkers; she had just had a rough night. Relaxing, he began a more studious appraisal, wondering whether she would find a way into his dreams later.

Teresa, meanwhile, was feeling oddly drawn to this laconic young man. He was certainly a good listener. And he was quite good-looking. And he had sort of rescued her.

“And the place was like a Turkish bath, there was so much smoke in there – although it would have been steam then, wouldn’t it? And there would have been towels and things. Well, anyway.....”

She is quite attractive, actually, Billy decided. He assembled a picture of Teresa from recollections of the full frontal view in his headlights and the occasional peek out of the corner of his eye. She was tall with fairly short fairish hair, a round face, blue eyes he thought, and generally quite big. Statuesque – that was the word. And, as he had spotted at the outset, aided by the tight-fitting, low-cut evening dress she was wearing, well supplied with busty substances. As to age, although he was quite indifferent to such matters, Billy guessed she was a few years older than him, probably in the mid to late twenties.

“And then, just to round it all off, the damned curtain got stuck, and the cast didn’t know whether to get off or stay there and the audience didn’t know whether to keep applauding or laugh.....”

Is it my imagination, Teresa wondered, or does he keep looking at me? I must say, he does have nice strong hands. And those eyes, so sympathetic and kind of deep and mysterious. ‘Bedroom eyes’, you might say. He looks quite young but he can’t be that young if he has his own taxi. Anyhow, he’s not a schoolboy.

“And then she started telling me what nice boobs I have and she sort of presses herself against me – I swear I could feel her undressing me with her eyes – can you imagine?”

Billy found he could imagine very easily; particularly the part about two substantial bosoms pressing against each other, nipples erect, seeking out their counterparts. He forced the idea to the back of his mind for now but made an appointment for a fuller examination later on.

“And my car was an absolute wreck. I don’t know what to do about it. I mean, will insurance cover that sort of thing? I’ll have to get on to them tomorrow, I suppose. But I’m sure the car will never be the same again....Oh, are we there?”

The Volvo had trundled to a halt. Teresa looked around and recognised Lobelia Crescent.

“Oh, yes, here we are. Lovely. Thank you so much.” She started rooting around in her handbag for her purse, spraying used tissues, scraps of paper and a tube of cough sweets over the floor of the car as she did so. “How much do I owe you?”

“Oh, no, there’s no charge,” Billy assured her. “Really, there’s no need.”

“Oh, but you must. I mean, you’ve had quite a long trip and you’ve had to listen to me mithering on about all my troubles.....”

“No, really, I enjoyed it. And this is on my way home, anyway.”

“Well,” Teresa breathed a big sigh, looking Billy straight in the eye, causing a warm glow to surge through his entire frame, “You truly are a verray, parfit gentil knyght. Thank you.” And she patted him lightly on the hand. Ignoring the tautological solecism, Billy’s glow suddenly heated up to dangerous levels. He needed fresh air. He watched Teresa indoors and then drove home with his window wide open, his feverish forehead fanned by the rushing nocturnal breeze.

Teresa, meanwhile, was reproaching herself for not inviting Billy in for a coffee or night-cap.

4

Billy woke the next morning still thinking about Teresa. He was still thinking about her during breakfast. Fortunately, his parents expected little in the way of conversation in the mornings – or at any other time. And thoughts of Teresa still dominated while he was cleaning out the car, getting ready for the day’s work.

As he tidied the area around the front passenger’s foot-well, he came across a collection of used tissues, scraps of paper and a tube of cough sweets. Treating this

miscellany with a reverence he did not normally apply to his passengers' detritus, he discovered one scrap of paper Teresa would surely want to have back. A pay slip.

This pay slip carried several items of interest for Billy. Confirmation of Teresa's name and address, for instance. He also noted her monthly salary which, even after deductions, comfortably exceeded his own income. And on the reverse was a little verse:

*I feel so alone
I pick up the phone
There's nobody home
I issue a groan
I feel so alone*

Of course, Billy had no way of knowing if the ditty was in Teresa's handwriting, but he was prepared to believe it was. Not because he was lost in admiration for its literary merit – Billy was not a critic – but because its contents touched him deeply. His fantasies about Teresa were already brimming over after a restless night. Now he had a piece of paper which gave him an excuse to see her again; indeed, he had a duty to return it. And he also now had every reason to suppose that she would welcome a visit. Both the poem and the way she was so plainly shaken up last night testified to a degree of lonely vulnerability which might render even Billy a romantic figure. It was rare for Billy to make the first, or any move with a member of the opposite sex but, this time, he was quite determined.

Even so, it was not until late afternoon that Billy pulled up in Lobelia Crescent, opposite Teresa's front door.

And it was another hour before Billy disembarked from the Volvo.

5

Billy crossed the road and was about to step on to the path leading to Teresa's door when the door opened. Billy's heart and feet stopped.

A man came out: a young man with a flushed face and a rucksack. Billy rapidly turned to walk down the street, but not so rapid that he could not keep a watch on developments. He soon reaped his reward, for Teresa's voice was following the young man.

"Yes, go on then, bugger off, you bastard," she was saying in a very different tone from that which had so appealed to Billy. "And don't think you can just worm your way back in when you feel like it, either."

Lobelia Crescent being crescent-shaped, Billy was shortly able to get a view back towards Teresa's without being conspicuous about it. To his alarm, the young man was standing by Billy's taxi, looking up and down the street for its driver. Billy turned his back and earnestly studied a bed of begonias – or they may have been bergenias – until he heard the young man's footsteps disappear and Teresa's front door slam after one last "Bastard!".

Billy did not return immediately to Teresa's or to his taxi. He sauntered around the block a couple of times, acclimatising to the new circumstances. Clearly, matters were not quite how he had imagined them. There was a bloke. Yes, the bloke had gone, but for how long? And obviously Teresa had a side to her which he had not bargained for. He needed to think.

Teresa, meanwhile, was doing her own thinking, and plenty of it.

Well, that's got rid of that bastard. Arsehole. Prick. And it wasn't even his car. And he never paid for his petrol, either. What a bloody awful twenty-four hours! Just two good things have come out of it. That nice young taxi driver coming to my rescue last night – and getting rid of that bastard. Roger – huh! He never did live up to his name. Prick. A nice cup of tea – that's what you need, my girl. You can't beat a nice cup of tea.

What's that? Roger?

Teresa had heard a sound at the front door. Had Roger forgotten his key? Was he coming back? She galloped to the front door and flung it open.

"Oh, you silly boy. Come on in. Oh," she said, seeing not Roger but Billy.

"Oh, ah," said Billy, dropping his eyes to the welcome mat.

"Oh, it's you," said Teresa.

"Yes – I..."

"Well, hi. Please, come on in," said Teresa.

"No, well, I was just....."

"Yes?"

"I found this, you see," said Billy, tentatively flapping Teresa's pay slip around his hip.

"Oh yes?"

"I was just putting it in your letter-box, you see."

"Oh? Well, you're here now, so come in anyway," said Teresa, not looking at the slip of paper but standing back to let Billy cross the threshold.

“Um – well, I’m not sure I should,” said Billy, staying put. “I only came to return this.....”

“Look, I’m getting cold and I need some company. Are you coming in or not?”

“Oh, right, well, OK then, thank you,” said Billy, eventually coaxing his legs into action.

6

Midnight had struck. Billy sat, stiff and strained, on Teresa’s sofa. Teresa was lying on the same sofa, her head on Billy’s lap.

They had been talking most of the evening. Or, to be strictly accurate, Teresa had been talking and Billy had been listening, tutting sympathetically from time to time. And when Billy was not listening, he had been thinking. His thoughts had ranged widely from the spiritual to the material, although they had not dwelt long in the spiritual, to be honest. Yes, Teresa’s renewed display of vulnerability had appealed to the Galahad in him, but it was her propinquity and the anticipation of what might be that was making the greater impression. On the other hand, another part of him entirely, one untouched by such sentimental considerations, was reckoning up how many juicy fares he might have missed.

Still, he could always put in some extra hours in the cab over the next few days. He could not afford to pass up a decent chance of rumpy-pumpy.

And then Teresa had been overcome by a migraine. At first, Billy was quite content that she should rest her head on his lap but now it was beginning to weigh a little heavily, especially in the bladder region.

But then, by about two o’clock, things began to look up.

First, Teresa looked up – not a lot, but enough to indicate she was stirring. Then she yawned and stretched. And then her hand landed on Billy’s knee – and stayed there long enough for her to take a firm grip and for Billy’s hopes to take wing.

“Thank you. I feel so much better now,” said Teresa, rising from her recumbent posture. “You must be so uncomfortable.”

“Oh, no. It’s not a problem. I was just.....”

Billy was interrupted by Teresa’s kiss.

It was not a long kiss. It was not especially passionate. But it was on the lips. And Billy was not used to women kissing him on the lips – not even his mother; but that’s another story.

Teresa led Billy to her bedroom. The trip was only up a single flight of stairs but by the time they had crossed the threshold, Billy's legs were as wobbly as if he had run a marathon.

Teresa turned and regarded Billy with her head slightly to one side, like a labrador wondering if walkies really were on the agenda. He doesn't look very keen, she thought; have I presumed too much? Surely, this is really why he came. Well, I'm not going to ask him. I wish he'd say something. Oh well, there's one sure way to find out.

And Teresa came up to Billy and slid her hands over his shoulders, squeezing her bust against his chest. She was gratified to feel his hands finding her hips. She kissed him again, but this time it was a long, lingering kiss and there was no mistaking the passion. Teresa began to rotate her hips, pressing her pelvis against Billy's. At length, the conclusive sign she was seeking presented itself.

They undressed quickly and silently, avoiding each other's eyes. Even in bed, hands, mouths, thighs and tongues made contact before Billy's gaze met Teresa's.

"By the way," said Teresa, lying back for a break, "I don't even know your name."

"It's Billy," puffed Billy.

"Hello, Billy. I'm Teresa, but my pupils call me Miss Bell. Would you like to be my pupil, Billy?"

"Cor! Would I?" Billy found his excitement reaching new peaks.

Teresa studied Billy silently for a few moments, caressing his chest and stomach while Billy squirmed with pleasure.

"This is your first time, isn't it?" she asked at length.

"Yes," Billy gasped.

"Yes, *Miss*," Teresa reminded him sharply, giving his chest the merest slap. Billy stiffened all over.

"Sorry, Miss. I mean, Yes, Miss."

"Hmmm, I see," said Teresa, feeling her own excitement rising within her. She clambered on top of Billy and enveloped him with her lips, her tongue, her hands and arms, her breasts, her thighs and her feet. Billy revelled in her embrace, delighted that she was taking the lead.

"My pupils call me Miss Bell," said Teresa between nibbles of Billy's nipples.

"Uh-huh?" Billy murmured, wondering why she felt such a need to chat.

"My nickname is 'Ding Dong Bell'," she breathed into his left ear, trying to fit it into her mouth.

“I don’t mind that,” she whispered, now working on Billy’s right ear. “That’s quite respectful, as nicknames go.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” Billy said, recalling a selection of sobriquets he had allocated to teachers, “....er, Miss.”

“It took a while for me to find out why they giggled when they knew I could overhear them,” Teresa continued, shifting to Billy’s neck, “But I got it in the end.”

“Mmmm?”

“Yes. Let me introduce you to Ding and Dong.”

And Teresa lifted herself on to her knees, straddling Billy. At the sudden move, he opened his eyes, and was instantly grateful that he had. Teresa was cupping a breast in each hand, pointing them provocatively towards Billy’s face.

“I think some of the boys named them,” she said. “As I understand it, this one’s Ding,” she indicated her right breast, “And this one’s Dong – but it might be the other way around. Would you like to meet them?”

Teresa lowered herself to meet Billy’s mouth rising to her full, round breasts. One by one he devoured them, sucking, licking, biting, exploring by mouth and hand until Teresa dropped right on to him and his face thrashed about desperately from one to the other.

“Oh, yes! Oh, yes!” Teresa was almost screaming. Even with her breasts crashing around his ears, Billy could hear her cries.

“Oh, my God, yes!” Teresa howled, her belly rubbing vigorously against Billy’s. “Go on! Go on! Oh, Roger, yes!”

Well, of course, that was it for Billy. His self-confidence was not high at the best of times. To be called by another man’s name the very first time he made love to a real woman – well, that took him to rock bottom.

As Teresa slid on to her back, panting and sighing, Billy took a moment to re-acquaint himself with stern reality. Looking around the room without the blinkers of sexual arousal, for that time had passed, he was amazed that he not noticed previously how stuffed it was with the evidence of the recently departed Roger. His clothes littered the room. Over there was a man’s hairbrush. Next to it, an electric razor. On the floor, a motley collection of male footwear. On the back of the door, a man’s dressing-gown.

Clearly Roger had left in a hurry. For all Billy knew, he would return just as quickly – especially if he wanted a shave.

Teresa lazily drew her fingertips up and down Billy's right flank, examining this young man with whom she just had an experience she had never enjoyed with Roger. He has a nice body; not as well-developed as Roger's perhaps, but then he is younger. Pale skin, dark hair, electric-blue eyes – oh, those eyes! And what a beautiful kisser! This is a man who knows how to make a girl happy.

Billy lifted his arm to allow Teresa to hitch up closer. Obviously she wants a cuddle. Fair enough. It's not her fault. The poor girl evidently needed comforting after that bastard walked out. She must want him back badly. Does she realise she called out his name?

Teresa hooked her thigh over Billy's right leg. Exploring with her knee, she was surprised to find Billy unresponsive. She brought her hand into play, gently at first, then more firmly.

"Is everything all right, Billy?" she whispered.

Billy kissed the crown of her head, gratified that she had remembered his name.

"Yes, fine," he whispered in his turn. "It's just.....well, it's a bit early, isn't it?"

"Early? What, it's nearly time for breakfast, you mean?"

"No. No, well, you know," Billy struggled to find the words. He did not want to offend her or sound as though he thought they had made a mistake; neither did he want to refer directly to the ghastly Roger. "I mean it's not that I don't find you attractive.....I do, very much so.....but, well, it's a bit early."

Billy knew it sounded lame but he had no previous experience of this situation, not from any point of view.

Teresa was at a loss for a few moments. This was not a problem Roger had had. He might be lacking in the subtleties but he had always been ruthlessly efficient in bed, once he got started. She was fully prepared to accept Billy's word that he found her attractive; he had already provided proofs of that. A bit early? Early for what? Early compared to what? Oh, was that it?

"Oh, you are sweet," said Teresa, and she lifted her head to kiss Billy on the cheek. "You mean it's too early for me – because of Roger. Come here."

Teresa locked Billy in a warm embrace. At last, she thought, a man who puts me first. Yes, of course he's quite right. It's far too early to have another man in my bed.

Wrapped up together, they both slept well for what remained of the night, and much of the following morning as well.

Billy and Teresa parted before noon. The atmosphere was such that Billy did not want to hang around so he said his parents would be wondering where he was. Then Teresa remembered she had a date for Sunday lunch with her parents as well. The idea of a further meeting did not come up. Billy did not even think to offer the carless Teresa a lift to her parents'.

Billy had very few fares to Lobelia Crescent or its environs but he kept on turning up there over the next days and weeks. He never knocked on Teresa's door or even got out of his car but he did pass her house very slowly or park up for a while just down the road looking for signs of Teresa – or Roger – or (gulp!) both together.

Nor did he have need to go frequently to the High School, but it was on a main road so he could hardly avoid it altogether. He rarely lingered there, however. He did not want to be spotted loitering around a school.

His work was suffering. He was missing meals. He hardly exchanged more than a few words with his parents – although that was nothing new. But he was determined about two points: first, he must see again the only woman whose flesh he had been permitted to roam; second, it was up to her to make the next move.

Nor had Teresa been still in the interim. Her mind was hectic with images of Billy and Roger and Roger and back to Billy again. For the first week after her night with Billy, she had tried to suppress any thoughts of him and concentrate on working out her true feelings for Roger – so, naturally, she found herself thinking about Billy most of the time. When she did, a tiny smirk often leapt unbidden to her lips. The following weekend, however, when Billy happened to be away on an airport run, Teresa had no option than to focus on Roger.

There was a knock on the front door. Teresa, who had been straightening out the bed-clothes, a picture of Billy's head on the pillow having jumped into her head, only just heard it. She trotted downstairs.

“Oh, it's you.” The note of disappointment in Teresa's voice on finding that Roger was her visitor was unmistakable.

“Yes, er, ah,” said Roger.

“Well, what do you want?” Teresa demanded, forestalling any further flow of brilliance from her ex-partner.

“Yes, well, the thing is.....I thought we ought to talk, you know, about us and stuff.” Roger's eyes wandered restlessly as he spoke but, when he finished, he was definitely casting them into Teresa's eyes. She recognised the ‘little boy lost’ face he had adopted.

“Yes, all right then,” said Teresa after a pause, her arms tightly folded across her chest. “Talking is good. I’ll start, shall I?”

“Yes, by all means,” said Roger, his anxious features relaxing into a slow smile.

“OK, then,” Teresa began, arms still firmly crossed, “What I want is this: I want you to get in here, get your stuff, and get the hell out of here – for good!”

“Er, eh?”

“Go on – get on with it,” said Teresa, holding the door open and gesturing him inside with a nod. “I’m going out. I’ll be back in an hour and I don’t want any trace of you left in this house.”

Teresa felt proud of herself as she marched down Lobelia Crescent, especially as she had thought to grab her key before slamming the front door behind her, thus saving considerable embarrassment. But as she walked, doubts started to collect, like the first scattered drops of a downpour. She had been with Roger a long time now; he was the only man with whom she had ever had a solid relationship. If he had proposed up to a week ago, she would have accepted. He was never violent and he generally gave in to her wishes – was she likely to find anyone more accommodating? And she had no idea where she was going and, inevitably, it was really starting to rain. Teresa stopped and looked around. Without intending to, she had been walking vaguely towards school. There was little cover available and school would be shut up. She recollected the last time she had been stranded on this road. Would there be a knight in shining armour to rescue her this time?

Apparently not. Teresa stood on the roadside for a minute or two, in case Billy turned up out of the blue again, but there was no sign of him. A taxi, though: that was a good idea. She could call for a taxi and ask if Billy was available.

But then she realised she was stymied. She did not know which taxi firm Billy worked for; or what their number was; or what Billy’s surname was. Come to that, she had left her mobile at home, anyway. Ah, but she had not left behind the keys to her newly restored car. Could she make it to her car before the heavens opened? She reckoned she could. As she accelerated back towards Lobelia Crescent she meditated on Billy. Had just thinking of him given her the strength to solve her problem? Did he possess that sort of power? Why not?

Roger certainly did not.

Roger – huh! Why on earth should she want him back?

And now, as the raindrops fell thick and fast around her, Teresa began to list all the reasons why Roger should be ditched.

Roger was a wimp – that summed him up; a whining wimp. He was always moaning about something or other. And he would never stand up for himself. He was incapable of disagreeing with her or offering up any kind of argument or discussion. He could have just carried a card around his neck saying ‘Yes, dear. Whatever you say, dear.’ Marry *him*? He would never have the gumption to ask. And he could not hold down a job. He was always borrowing from his parents – and she was pretty sure he sneaked cash from her purse.

No, what she needed was someone steady and reliable – yes, and just a little bit vulnerable – but only a bit. Someone like Billy. But how to gain this prize? He had not been near her for a week, and he knew where she lived. Had she put him off? She was confident that he was interested. He was giving her time, that was it. He knew she needed time but he would be there for her when she was ready. If she had any doubts on that score, she was absolutely prepared to banish them.

No, she was sure. Billy was her man. All she needed was a clue to track him down and let him know the time was ripe.

8

But it was not that easy.

A taxi driver named Billy is hard to find in even a moderate-sized town. Teresa asked a cabal of cabbies who were loafing around on the railway station taxi rank. One of them thought there might be a Willie with Hyer Cars but he’d never heard him called Billy. Then, said another, there’s Old Bill but he was in his early seventies so he didn’t quite match Teresa’s description.

Billy, meanwhile, continued to cruise Lobelia Crescent and the High School area. Once, he spotted a VW Golf emerging from the school entrance and followed it for a few miles. The driver had shortish blond hair but, awakening Billy’s worst fears, there was a passenger. He did not think it was Roger but it was certainly male, judging by the shaven head. It was only when the car stopped at a supermarket and the driver got out that Billy realised that this was not Teresa but her colleague, Jim Bates, the wanker.

Teresa took to driving very slowly by the taxi ranks in the town, looking for Billy’s friendly face. All she received in return were some odd looks and a couple of gratuitously obscene hand gestures. However, she did notice that many of the cabs displayed telephone numbers and the names of their firms. One logo in particular seemed familiar to her.

“Hattie’s Cabs,” said the gruff voice which answered Teresa’s call that evening.

“Oh, hello,” said Teresa, “I was wondering if you could help me.”

“That’s our aim, love. Where would you like to go?”

“No, it’s not that....it’s just that I’m trying to get hold of one of your drivers.”

“Join the club, dear. I’ve been trying to get hold of some of ‘em all evening. Which one are you after?”

“Well, it’s Billy.”

“Billy? Which Billy?”

“Oh, is there more than one?”

“Dunno, love. I dunno all their names, see. Do you know his number?”

“No, I’m afraid not.”

“His surname?”

“No. No, I’m sorry.”

“Oh, blimey! Well, what car does he drive?”

“Um, well, it’s quite big...oh, and it’s dark....”

“You’re not helping much are you, ducks?”

“You’re not related to Mr Buckett, are you?” asked Teresa, distracted.

“Eh?”

“Never mind. No, you see, I don’t know much about Billy but he found something I’d dropped in his car late one Saturday night and it was very important and...and...well, I just wanted to thank him, you see.”

“All right, love. It’s quiet at the moment. I’ll ask the boys. Hang on a minute.”

Teresa hung on, nibbling her nails nervously while the voice asked the boys. She could just about make out the sound of crackling radio conversations. She pictured messages being bounced around the town from cabby to cabby like the Twilight Barking in *101 Dalmatians*.

“Not much use, I’m afraid, dear. A few of the boys said they were prepared to change their name to Billy if there was much of a reward but, other than that, somebody suggested Billy Flagg, Percy’s son, but he never works nights so it couldn’t have been him. Sorry, love. Have you tried the other firms?”

“Yes. No. Thanks very much,” said Teresa in a faraway voice, and ended the call.

9

It is an oft repeated and frequently varied dictum that it is always darkest before the day dawneth. I just thought I would mention it. In the case of Billy and Teresa, it was not dawn but tea-time that next interests us.

A couple of days after Teresa's unsuccessful attempt at contacting Billy through Hattie's Cabs, following a staff meeting that had rendered Teresa's brain virtually moribund, she went to her car barely conscious of her surroundings.

Billy, unaware of the staff meeting, had been hanging around in Lobelia Crescent, but he had not waited long. Even a mule begins to acknowledge that stubbornness has its limitations. He drove off mechanically in the direction of the High School but his mind was elsewhere: he had just remembered a rather attractive nurse he had seen at the hospital earlier whilst collecting one of his regular old ladies from outpatients. She had large, deep brown eyes and a uniform that was just too tight, accentuating her big, firm thighs. But she also possessed pretty, delicate little hands.....

Thump!

For once, Billy had not slowed down to a crawl as he drew level with the High School. Fortunately, however, his ability to drive on auto-pilot meant he was alert enough to avoid a serious collision, even as he imagined those delicate little hands in action.

Teresa, herself usually a careful driver, or as careful as a woman driving a VW Golf could be expected to be, was not as alert as Billy on this occasion. Preoccupied, she had pulled out of the car park on to the main road without stopping to check the oncoming traffic adequately or at all. Consequently.....

Thump!

Or it may have been.....Crunch!

Both agreed later that neither was to blame. It was just Fate. Whether their respective insurance companies agreed is not a matter into which we need enquire.

While they waited for the tow truck each brought the other up to date with their efforts to meet. Teresa was impressed by Billy's dogged and devoted determination. Billy was bucked by hearing how Teresa had dispatched Roger.

Back at Teresa's, there was no recalcitrance this time. With the aid of a quick whisky and the merest smattering of basic tuition from Teresa, Billy's virginity had been smashed on the living-room carpet inside half an hour.

They moved to the bedroom for their second coupling which took rather longer and was a good deal more comfortable. Teresa delighted in teaching Billy how to get the best out of Ding and Dong for mutual satisfaction.

The third effort, which occurred in the middle of the night, was the quickest but also the calmest and, perhaps because they were by now utterly sure of their love for each other, the most deeply fulfilling.

10

Billy moved in the very next day.

Percy shook his hand and said something about 'lead' and 'pencil' which Billy tried to ignore.

Mrs Flagg cried.

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