

Lunch Break - Short Story

In the office lobby, there was a wet floor sign teetering towards the floor, behind the two colleagues chatting. They mumbled about what to get for lunch, eventually settling on an *itsu*. Not that they liked it, or wanted it for that matter. But there was a kind of inertia. The sort that drags you into the train, half asleep and quiet-burping the curry from the night before, pulls you up the lift, onto your floor, onto your desk, onto your keyboard, and out again after you've lost most of the day. Rinse and repeat till your knees are bad and bone density laughable.

The wet floor sign slapped to the ground. It sounded significant. One of those noises that makes everybody go quiet.

But the chatter resumed again. A yellow piece of folded plastic, lying there instead of propped up. To a passerby it might have seemed like that since time immemorial. I think there's a lot of things like that, out in our streets. Objects and people who - to us - appear permanent. Affixed to the place we see them in. Of course, that's not true. But it's a heck of a lot easier to settle with that than to conjure an image of how they all got there.

One of the colleagues had to send an email. So the other awkwardly waited. Double verification - "sorry, just a moment" - as she typed in the 6 digit code that had been SMS'ed to her.

They walked in unison, footsteps matching. Not intentional, but an artefact of repetition. They blabbered as they trundled, a little about the boss, a lot about the weekend. That's the thing with life. The *weekends* are great.

He had his eye on the women that passed by. Potential lovers. They were never really, of course. But in his mind if he could elicit a smile or a double-take, that was someone who could in theory be someone. He'd settle with a single-take to be honest. I would.

She didn't believe in love like her colleague did. True love was a farce. A fiction. Love - to her - was more conscious than a feeling. It was never true, or wrong, or bad, or good. Just decided upon. Chosen.

In a sense, he felt a loss. Any person he did hold a momentary connection with went off the other way. He reasoned this was how it was meant to be. These were just little whispers of the real thing. That elusive thing. That thing that would come. Eventually. Of course it would. Definitely. One day.

There was a girl in a linen white dress with a mauve ribbon in her hair. Brown hair and green eyes, her nose slightly red at the tip. Confident in her movements but considerate at the same time. She looked at him as he did her and smiled - perhaps for a moment longer than he was expecting.

Then she passed round the corner. They never saw each other again. He got miso soup and dragon rolls from itsu. She became a child counsellor in Uruguay. She died after complications from a fall at 94, surrounded by some friends and family, in the Hospital de Clínicas in Montevideo. He paid with card - contactless. She liked balconies and reading and the colour green and Balkan history. She had a habit of saying the right thing at the right moments. She wrote poetry and hated Thursdays. If he had stopped in the moment they locked eyes to say hello, to introduce himself, to invite her to this cute little cafe he knew just down the road (maybe this weekend?) they would have discovered that they were utterly and absolutely perfect for each other. And his colleague would have finally believed in true love.

He slapped the itsu onto his desk, chopsticks balanced against his mug. Predictably, they rolled off.