

The Stop

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Highly Commended in the 12-17 Age Category

Centuries, decades, hours and minutes, all pass in a muddled haze of shape and noise.

Now, one fact must be made abundantly clear before this story unfolds. I, the narrator, am an inanimate object. Yes, a discarded pair of sunglasses that were lost to the dusty abysses of a tube many, many years ago. While this may sound ridiculous, indeed even unbelievable, I assure you, as a being who has been stuck on a London tube for far, far too long, far more ridiculous things are happening right under your noses.

Here I have sat for decades, the tantalising rush of wind when the tube arrives at a stop has become my only glimpse out of this strange microcosm of the world, before the train moves on.

On and on and on.

So, surely you can understand the thick veneer of indifference that the years have built on me that sometimes feels impenetrable. And yet, one day is captured in my memory; caught like a shining star, shedding light onto all other grey and watery thought.

A little girl and a frazzled looking woman practically jumped into the packed tube just before the doors snapped shut with a resounding 'ping!'. The girl's incessant chatter melded into the stifling murmur of noise.

Suddenly, a screech of pure devastation pierced through the omnipresent sound.

"MY DINOSAUR!"

And sure enough, the dinosaur figurine the girl had come in clutching was now missing. The woman's already frantic eyes widened with the realisation that the whole cabin's attention was rested on her.

"It's ok! We'll find it, let's just stay calm!"

The woman's desperate attempts at placation were no match for the girl's rising hysteria, her voice steadily increasing in pitch and volume until it pulled grimaces from even the furthest passenger.

The woman's voice broke with the threat of tears.

She looked around, "I-I I'm sorry, it was my late husband's last gift to her. She doesn't go anywhere without it. I don't know what we're going to do. Not that it's important, sorry for the disturbance... It was my husband's last gift to her..."

Around her, the previous sound had settled into a poignant silence.

A stop. Amidst the on and on and on.

Without a word, a man; a regular who I had watched read the newspaper every morning in careful silence for years, stooped onto the floor of the dusty tube.

"We'll find it.", he informed the sobbing girl.

He reached under the derelict seats in search of the dinosaur, his pinstripe suit, once made of angles and edges now adorned in dust and softer lines.

As if something had flipped a switch, the cabin returned to bustling action, but this time in a flurry of warm words and comforting smiles, and eventually, the dinosaur was indeed found.

Men and women, who I had seen pass through this enclosed space preoccupied with fast-moving thought, and locked away smiles, now gave the tube an air of light.

Because there is a certain vulnerability to humanity that makes it beautiful.

In every crevice of the world, stories flutter around, waiting to be caught in the hustle and bustle of life that people inevitably bring. Stories have the power to connect people through real emotion, empathy perhaps the most powerful of them all.