A Long Way from Home

**Dormouse**

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When Jane awoke, she noticed three things: she was cold, her back hurt, and it was as if something had died in her mouth.  
  
The reason for the first was that she was naked, and the reason for the second was that she had been sleeping wedged between two boxes on a corrugated metal floor. As her memories of the previous night started flooding back, she remembered both what had led to her current situation and why her mouth felt the way it did.  
  
She was lying in a large van between two boxes of what looked like plumbing supplies. She pried open the back door to the van and looked out on to the street. It was just getting light, which at that time of the year meant it was still very early in the morning. She looked around the van for something to wear, but there were no sheets of canvas or rolls of plastic sheeting. She dismissed the idea of trying to fashion a costume out of pipes and bolts.  
  
Gingerly, she stepped onto the cold pavement. There was nobody about this early in the morning. Maybe she could slip home without anyone seeing her. First she had to get her bearings.  
  
She looked around. She didn’t recognise the street. She looked for a street name and realised in her horror that not only didn’t she recognise the name of the street she was standing on, but the name plate was not in the familiar format for street names in London. Where was she?  
  
She walked along the side street she had found herself in and came to a road that looked as if it went somewhere. But where? And as she was trying to decide what to do, which way to go, a solitary car came along the road. Before she could react, it had pulled up beside her.  
  
“You look like you could do with a lift,” a voice said. A middle-aged woman leant out of the driver’s seat and opened the door on the passenger side.  
  
Any port in a storm, Jane thought. At least she would be less exposed (literally) inside a car.  
  
“Sleepwalking or a dare gone wrong?” asked the woman. “Or was it a row with a boyfriend and he kicked you out?”  
  
“A dare, I suppose,” Jane replied. “Tell me, this isn’t London, is it?”  
  
“Wow, you are a long way from home. This is Birmingham. Care to tell me how you got here?”  
  
“Well,” Jane started, “it started with going out clubbing with a couple of friends last night. It was the sort of club where things start to get a bit wild late at night. People doing silly things up on stage, etc. The host offered me some prize money if I’d take my clothes off on stage, so I did. Then he said he’d double it if I ran outside the club. So I did. However, I thought it would be funny to hide when I got outside, and I saw this van parked there with the back door open so I jumped in. I was very, very drunk, and I must have fallen asleep. Whilst I was asleep, I guess the driver came back and drove off without waking me. Had an early morning job in Birmingham, I suppose. When I woke up, here I was. I don’t know what you must thing of me.”  
  
“Don’t worry about it,” said the woman. “It wasn’t unusual for me to do silly things when I got drunk when I was your age. Then I got married, had a family, got divorced, and I’m grateful for a bit of excitement these days. I’m Barbara, by the way.”  
  
“Jane,” said Jane. “Where’re you heading?”  
  
“You’re in luck. “I’m heading for London. Going to see me daughter. So, do you want me to drop you off at a convenient tube station?”  
  
Jane suddenly had a vision of herself trying to ride the tube naked.  
  
“Er, you don’t happen to have something I could wear?” Jane asked.  
  
“Where’s your sense of adventure?” Barbara asked with a grin. Then she relented. “Don’t worry, I can lend you something. The bad news is, since we started talking, we’ve got onto the motorway. All my spare clothes are in the boot, and we can’t stop until we get to a service station to get anything out. You’re stuck like that for a while yet.”  
  
Jane had been so engrossed in the conversation that she hadn’t been aware of her surroundings but looking out the window showed that the grey suburban streets had been replaced by motorway.  
  
“It’s been a fantasy of mine to ride down the motorway stark naked,” Jane said with a hint of sarcasm. “Just wish I wasn’t so hung-over so I could enjoy it. And that reminds me, you haven’t got a phone I could borrow. Once my friends have got over their hangovers, they’re going to worrying about where I’ve got to.”  
  
Barbara pointed towards the glove compartment. Jane opened it and nestling in with the usual guff you find in such places was a mobile. She took it out and started punching in a number. The phone at the other end rang a couple of times and then a woman answered.  
  
“Hello, mum,” said the voice.  
  
“Anne, this is Jane,” she said with a hint of confusion. “What’s with this ‘mum’ business?”  
  
“Jane, where did you get to? And why does my caller ID say you’re phoning from my mother’s mobile?”  
  
Jane looked towards Barbara. “This daughter you’re visiting, her name doesn’t happen to be Anne Siddell, does it?”  
  
Barbara grinned. “You know her? So this is company my daughter keeps. Well, I hope she’s as daring as you are.”  
  
Jane returned to the mobile and explained what had happened. Anne and their friend Sinita had made an effort to look for her after her disappearance from the club, but had assumed she’d gone home. They had collected her belongings, along with the prize money for completing the dare and Anne had just woken up and had been planning to give Jane a call to see that she was all right.  
  
Once this had all been sorted out, Barbara said, “Well this means you won’t have to be travelling home on the tube in the nude. I’ll take you right to the door. But first…”  
  
There was a service area ahead on the motorway and she had turned the car into the slip road.  
  
“I could do with a pee,” Barbara explained. “And I’m sure you must be bursting after a night’s drinking.”  
  
They pulled into the car park. Barbara grabbed her bag and got out.  
  
“Come on,” she said.  
  
“Aren’t you going to get me something to wear first?” Jane asked.  
  
“I dare you to walk over to the toilets naked,” she replied. “If you do, there’s a surprise for you.”  
  
“There’ll be a surprise for everyone who sees me,” Jane said apprehensively, though there weren’t actually that many people about yet. Her sense of adventure got the better of her, and she stepped out of the car.  
  
The two women walked towards the main building where a few people stared open mouthed at the spectacle. They had to walk past the entrance to the café to get to the toilets.  
  
When Jane had finished and left her cubicle and freshened up at the wash basins, she was still waiting for Barbara to come out of her cubicle and was wondering what she could be doing that took so long. Finally the door opened and Barbara stepped out – naked. She was carrying her clothes in her bag. Jane stared.  
  
“Not in too bad a shape for an old lady, eh” said Barbara. “I thought you could do with some company, and I can shock my daughter at the same time.”  
  
Jane was sure there were now more people hanging around the entrance to the toilets than when they went in. The word had gone around that there was a naked woman in there. The on-lookers were doubly shocked to see two naked women now come out. Now they saw two. Several cameras and mobile phones were pointed in there direction, recording there progress back to the car.  
  
So it was that an hour or so later, the car pulled up in a street in south London. Anne heard her doorbell ring and went and opened the door. She looked at the sight that presented itself.  
  
“Jane! Mother! What are you doing? This is terrible. Get inside before my neighbours see you.”  
  
“That’s no way to greet your mother,” said Barbara, waving at man staring at her from across the street. Finally, she gave in to her daughter’s protests and went inside.