**If I’d Known You Were Coming…**

Jeremy Dixon

 If I’d known you were coming, I wouldn’t have been on my knees, on the kitchen floor, with the kickboards piled up in the hall. I wouldn’t have been wearing my old grey joggers with the paint splashes on, or the Spice Girls tee-shirt with Sporty’s face worn off. The one from the concert that you refused to go to. My hair wouldn’t have been tied in a ponytail, and I would at least have sprayed on some deodorant.

If I’d known you were coming, I wouldn’t have been scrambling about under the cabinets, scrabbling around in the dust, the flaking paint and decaying insect carcasses, spacing out the crumbly blue cakes. Cakes… Cakes? Really? I wonder who’s twisted little joke it was to call them that? But it serves the little freeloaders right for eating my Jammy Dodgers. I could forgive the muesli; that was an acceptable loss; that was expendable, but the Jammy Dodgers were a step too far. The Jammy Dodgers were my Archduke Ferdinand, my Poland—a declaration of war.

It annoys me that they never eat a whole one, just a tiny part of each. I suspect they know this and they’re doing it on purpose. The pint-sized sociopaths are laughing at me. And why do they leave the jam? Everyone knows that’s the best bit. Stupid little freeloaders.

If I’d known you were coming, I’d have ignored the bell, pretended to be out—if I’d known you were coming—but I didn’t. So, I peeled off my marigolds and I opened the door . . . and there you were.

“Christ,” I said, and like the thoughtless thug that you are, you made a stupid joke.

“Not quite,” you said, “but I’ll take it.”

And then you grinned at me. You grinned at my pain.

“Can we talk?” you asked, your grin evaporating into an awkward, gawkish smile.

“I have nothing to say to you.”

And then you started talking about how sorry you were, and mistakes, and second chances, and all I could think about was her fake breasts, fake lips—the fake, sordid, skanky, sodding, soul that you destroyed ‘us’ for.

I watched you then, your tongue slapping the inside of your mouth as the worthless words spewed out—watched but didn’t listen. It was just noise, white noise—tinnitus. You are tinnitus. I watched you realise, what you should have known all along—that she wasn’t worth it, that she wasn’t…me.

I waited for you to pause, to draw breath; I waited for a moment’s silence, a moment, just a moment to catch my thoughts, to organise my gridlocked mind, but you didn't pause, you just turned red and kept talking. I hoped you might run out of oxygen, faint, and fall over, bang your head on the concrete path and bleed out into the gutter. But you just carried on, like you’d overdosed on rom-coms or something.

I wondered then, if I slapped you, you might shut up, but when I tried to form my hand flat, it made a fist, clenched so tightly that my whole arm throbbed. And while you jabbered on, red-faced, false tears welling in your eyes, and spital spraying from your mouth, I wondered if I could punch you. I never have punched anyone, but I thought then, that maybe, I could punch you. But I didn’t. I stood back, and I slammed the door. And as you banged on the outside, I sobbed on the inside. And it all came back, all the fury, and I burned all over again.

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 But now you’re gone, and my anger is subsiding, and I’ve nearly stopped trembling and my chest doesn’t hurt and I can breathe again. I enter the kitchen, the scene of my God complex. A destroyer of tiny worlds. What was I thinking? Who the hell do I think I am? Some tin-pot dictator—judge, jury, and executioner? I pull on my marigolds and drop to my knees, scooping up all the horrible little cakes and dropping them back in the box. They can have the muesli; I’ll buy a tin for the Jammy Dodgers…or maybe I’ll leave them just one to see if they’ll eat the jam.

 If I’d known you were coming…I’m holding the last blue cake in my hand. It’s crumbly—I can rub it into a soft, pale blue dust—like flour. If I’d known you were coming…I have a thought, and I smile.