

THE GIFT

It was mid October, and Brian and his housemate Fred were playing video games in their student house in Portsmouth. Brian wasn't playing his best, his mind miles away, pondering on why he had not heard back from Melissa. After a few hours of play, he had to call it quits, unable to concentrate, as well as having the munchies. To Fred's frustration, he passed back the spliff and controller, walking into the joint kitchen to grab a sausage roll, before leaning on the back door and gazing out the window. He looked out onto the wet and rainy day. In times like these, he thought, it's a shame all my friends just to manly to understand my sorrow.

Fred had little interest in fraternizing with women, after being dumped 3 years prior by his ex-girlfriend, Emma. After realizing he would probably never do better, he now concentrated on the simple pleasures in life, a doobie and the first season of David Attenboroughs *Life* documentaries on Netflix, would surely be sufficient. Brian was undoubtedly more emotional, and there were times when Fred would see him suffer, about to offer a helping hand or a shoulder to cry on, before snapping back his gentle hand and replacing it with a beer, because, god forbid, he didn't want Brian to think he was gay.

Brian took his phone from his pocket, with wishful thinking that for some reason his phone had received a message without the urgent vibration, but alas, just like the last 8 times, this was not the case. He had not seen Melissa since the summer, and, now back at university, he feared the long distance relationship was not working. Apart from his 2 very drunken phone calls and a text questioning the level of embarrassment they were at his expense, they had hardly spoken in weeks, her only input being a short, sharp message that conveyed feelings of doubt and uncertainty, 'I'll get back to you on that,' she had replied. Was this display of affection enough to scare her off? Surely not, he thought to himself.

The last few nights had been restless. He'd lay awake, tears welling in his eyes, tossing and turning beneath his duck and down duvet, watching back saved snapchat of the summer evening filled with cheap drinks and karaoke at Canavans peckham pool club, before heading back to her house for the last engagement in coitus. Visions of Melissa, her beautiful blonde hair and curious brow, cursed his thoughts.

He knew that that following Saturday The South London Soul Train hit Bussey Building in Peckham, a night he knew she would be attending, as everyone who's anyone goes there. He was sure if he didn't act quickly, he risked loosing her to another wondering hand at a party or social occasion. It was more then the human mind could bare.

His problem was his lack of income, as his student loan only left him with just enough for his weekly lidl shop, and after setting aside his necessary £50 for his daily 10 bit, and the new box set of game of thrones, Brian simply did not have enough to visit her in London. Besides, he hated changing stations at Clapham Junction, it was just to busy. Racking his brain whilst scrolling through instagram pictures of her and her friends enjoying the roof top bars that London had to offer, he contemplated ways in

which he could grasp her attention. Suddenly, Brian had a spectacular idea. ‘Of course!’ he cried out, ‘I’ll send myself to her in a parcel! After all, women love surprises!’ It was absurdly simple. Smiling, he ran to Fred, asking for his help regarding the collection of the parcel and for him to package Brian inside. Fred, a little spaced out, didn’t really understand what it was he was agreeing to, but the boys shook hands under the circumstances that whatever it was, Brian would sub his weed for the week and restocked the kitchen cupboards with pop tarts. Seeming like a fabulous deal, Brian went looking for a box. He found one, which had contained the television they had just brought to complete their home cinema, fit with video games and surround sound. He placed himself inside, deciding it was a comfortable fit. ‘It’s full proof,’ he laughed, ‘this is going to be so bloody romantic she can’t possibly say no!’ the boys decided with a few air holes and snacks for the journey, he would be all set, probably even better than traveling by train! Shocked with his mature and quick thinking, Brian forced a reluctant Fred out the house, heading to the post office to acquire the necessary items.

Across London, that following Saturday, Melissa and her dear friend and flat mate Phoebe entered their flat in Peckham, having just enjoyed a spectacular day shopping and looking round galleries. Melissa threw her buys on the floor and lounged on the bed. ‘Oh god,’ she said, ‘I’m absolutely exhausted.’

‘Tell me about it,’ Phoebe took the loo rolls from her bag she had stolen from the last café they went to, putting them in the bathroom before heading straight to the kitchen, returning with the ingredients to make two G+T’s with pomegranate and grapefruit, a drink she had been obsessed with after reading the recipe in the guardian. She thought it was well deserved considering how far they had walked down from the planet organic in Soho to the Tate Modern member’s room, enjoying a glass of pinot and not really having had any lunch, so they were already a bit drunk.

Melissa was looking through pictures on her phone whilst picking at the dry skin on her elbow that hadn’t been moisturized since the summer. The waiter had taken of the two with their glasses of wine on the rooftop bar, deciding which one to put on instagram. She laughed as Phoebe passed her her G+T, showing her the photo. Phoebe was chuckling at the picture, ‘you can’t put that on facebook I look positively awful!’

Melissa giggled cheekily as she picked a more suitable photo whilst nipping to her bedroom to slip into something a bit more comfortable. Phoebe went to her desk to put on her playlist, turning on that fabulous Drake and Big Sean song that had been circling her mind all afternoon.

‘Are you going to wear that new top,’ called Phoebe, looking through her bargains she had picked up from the east end thrift store and American apparel. ‘Probably,’ called back Melissa, ‘although I wanted to wear vagabonds and my hair up, so that just won’t do. Besides, it’s rather exciting and tonight I kinda just feel like blending in, if you know what I mean?’

‘I know what you mean,’ agreed Phoebe, ‘you know when you wear something and then the constant looks just make you want to die. Especially then if they start dancing with you. I can’t stand unwanted attention!’

Phoebe picked one of the tops she had brought that day, trying it on in front of the mirror. After getting it over her shoulders, it got stuck, and called out for Melissa's help. Melissa came running back in, wearing her velour pink tracksuit.

Melissa was rolling back her eyes in disapproval 'I told you to get the larger size!' she said, struggling to pull the top past phoebe's head.

'This was the only one left, and for £20 it's too good to miss!' phoebe argued as it tightly slipped on. The girls decided that apart from looking slightly stiff, it was a good enough fit. Phoebe chuckled as she put her hand on her bum 'I tell you, good bargains are going to be the death of me!' The girls laughed and Melissa went back to sitting on the bed, pulling out her laptop, and phoebe started deciding which ones she'll be returning. Melissa started searching through her emails for Groupon deals and prospective buyers of her underwear, a new thing she was trying out to earn some extra cash.

Her and phoebe had lived in the flat now for almost 3 years, and shared it with another best friend, grace, who would be home shortly from her 2 week holiday in Valencia with her new boyfriend. Phoebe had taken the living room as the bedroom to save money on rent, and her twin sister would be moving in to share the room at the end of the month.

'I can't believe you made yoga this morning,' Melissa said as she continued browsing her computer, 'I just don't know how you do it,'

'Determination,' said phoebe turning round and looking at Melissa with a strong brow, 'and tomorrow if we go for that run that should be sufficient for the weekend, after all had almost 3 packets of beetroot today and a whole bag of kale.'

As Melissa nodded in agreement of the necessary exercise, her phone started to beep. Looking at the message she smiled to herself in a flirtatious manner, a glance phoebe caught in the mirror and turned around,

'Who's it from,'

'Tom!' Melissa threw her phone on the side of the bed, 'I really didn't think he would message me again! He said he's going to Bussey building tonight. I'll reply to him later.'

'Well better make sure Louis isn't coming,' phoebe warned, 'that'll only make the whole evening tremendously awkward and bizarre. And I'm sorry but I simply cannot deal with any more drama on nights out.'

'Oh god you're right, I didn't really think about it,' sighed Melissa, 'I'll figure something out.' She waved her hands behind her signaling she'll sort it later.

As Melissa put down her laptop and clinked drinks with phoebe in congratulations to Melissa's potential date, Grace arrived home. She unlocked the door, bringing with her suitcase bags of presents she had brought back from the markets on her holiday.

As she entered the house, the girls cheered, and leaving the bags on the side of the door, grace kissed them both on the cheek before joining Melissa on the bed. Phoebe went to make her a drink.

'My god your brown,' gasped Melissa, 'if I don't get some sun soon I think I'm going to go mad.' She pulled her tracksuit over her pale crossed knee, and sipped her drink. 'Tell me about it,' agreed phoebe, passing grace her drink, 'tell us about your holiday then! How was it?'

'Special,' sighed grace, gazing at the ceiling, 'was lovely for my parents to come out for one of the weeks, considering they paid for it. Daddy is rather stressed though from all the party election meetings he's been having, as well as flying around Spain looking for our new holiday home, which just isn't helping,'

‘I can imagine,’ said Melissa, leaning back and sipping her drink, ‘there’s nothing worse than to much traveling. Your time schedule is ruined, not to mention the effect it has on your skin.’ she stroked her cheeks and looked in dismay.
‘Oh don’t get me started!’ said grace, ‘I’ve been on such a strong beauty regime whilst I was there, not wearing any sun cream to ensure I burn just so it’ll clear up. I’m constantly cleansing but the airports just make me break out like nothing else.’
Phoebe looked at the girls through the mirror, ‘Sun beads ladies,’ she insisted, ‘there the way to go.’

Grace and Melissa nodded their heads in agreement, and whilst sipping their drinks, grace continued talking about her holiday,
‘Anyway, the quality time was important and I think its helped us become a much more mature and healthy couple. But during the trip, he surprise me with a gift.’ she looked down her nose as her face dropped, remembering the present.
‘Ahhh!’ interrupted phoebe enthusiastically, turning round whilst trying on a cute skirt. ‘What did he get you?’

Grace was quiet for a second and looked a little sheepish.

‘A moonstone necklace.’

(3 seconds)

All three girls sat quietly for a few seconds, taking in the information. Grace put her head in her hands, abruptly passing her drink to Melissa as she did so.

‘I mean its like he doesn’t even know me!’

‘It could be worse,’ phoebe sat by graces knee, reassuringly, ‘I mean, its not the best present, but it’s the thought that counts, no?’ she gave it a tight squeeze. Suddenly, she felt a strange feeling in her stomach. She claimed she needed something from the kitchen, and quickly making her leave for the toilet.

Melissa waited till phoebe had left the room, turning to grace sharply.

‘End it,’ she said, spilling both drinks over phoebes new clothes, which was scattered on the floor. After a hesitation, both silently agreed they would not mention the spill.

‘Moonstones are just not acceptable.’

Grace sighed, taking back her drink, ‘Maybe your right.’ She pulled a cigarette from her bag, offering one to Melissa. ‘You don’t think I’m being stupid?’

‘Absolutely not!’ cried Melissa, now quiet drunk. ‘Never let a man feel like he doesn’t have to get to know you, or that your inferior. As young females, we have an obligation for the generations before us, to stand up for ourselves, and prove that we are equals!’

Grace lit Melissa’s cigarette and then her own. As she took a drag, she exhaled with a justified satisfaction that her girlfriends understood her. She knew she could count on them to encourage and support her reasonable un-satisfaction with men. Just then phoebe came bounding back into the room, arms flung in the air.

‘I’ve just come on my period!’ she exclaimed, ‘that would explain the bad skin and the fact I was so hungry yesterday!’

The girls cheered and phoebe went back to choosing her outfit. After confident that phoebe was blissfully unaware of the spill because of the good news, Melissa continued the conversation.

‘Are you going to end it then?’ she asked, taking both their drinks and filling them up. ‘I’m not sure,’ said grace, leaning both arms on her crossed knees, ‘I mean I know, he is awful. But I just can’t endure the task of finding someone else. And I’m not going to do anything with him now Saturday and Sunday, so I sought of owe it to him, you know what I mean?’

‘I know what you mean,’ said phoebe, ‘if its convenient, why the hell not?’

‘Ladies!’ Melissa cried, standing up from the bed. ‘You don't need a boyfriend! In fact, the other day I saw a girl on the underground, and we were defiantly making eyes at each other.’ She took a sip from her drink, ‘so maybe I’m turning lesbian! Keep your options open, that's all I’d say.’

‘I swear everyone is turning gay now,’ said phoebe, ‘its turning into a phase.’ ‘I’ve kissed three girls before,’ Melissa, sat back looking pleased with herself and winking at grace, ‘and apart from Tom and Louis that I’m messaging right now, I always said my next relationship would be with a girl. Especially after Brian, I feel like swearing of men forever.’

‘Remind me what happened there again?’ asked grace, getting up and refilling all the drinks.

‘He cancelled and left her in planet organic alone for 30 minuets,’ began phoebe, turning round as she spoke to face grace, given the importance of the conversation. ‘I finally agreed to go on an actual date with him after we slept together last summer, and he had the nerve to messaged me to say he wouldn't be able to make it.’ Melissa, extremely unimpressed, took a sip from her drink.

‘Why didn't he show?’ Grace took another drag from her cigarette, ‘He made an excuse about missing his train, something about the wrong card for the ticket machine, or loosing his wallet, I honestly can’t remember. Classic complaining about not having any money to buy another ticket blah blah blah,’ Melissa signaled with her hands it was all in the past.

‘That schmuck’ agreed Grace. ‘How dare he humiliate you like that. Good riddance is all I can say. Has he tried to contact you since?’

‘Of course, he rang me drunk a few times which is awfully off putting. Whatever forever,’ Melissa leant back, taking a drag from her cigarette.

‘did you at least get good sex out of it?’ Grace asked,

‘Let’s just say I’m still waiting for that, and ill let you know when it comes.’

The girls throw back their heads in laughter.

‘He did ask me if I was going tonight, but by then I’d already had a couple offers,’ Melissa said with a cheeky grin. Phoebe placed her hand again on her hip, and turned around, ‘you slut!’ The girls laughed loudly, Melissa flinching from graces slap on the thigh. She finished her cigarette and got up to pour another drink.

Meanwhile, Brian was travelling across London in his box, passing through victoria and almost arriving in Peckham. He had been picked up that morning by the courier.

Apart from experiencing little withdrawal symptoms, the journey had been a surprisingly smooth success, with the exception of a small bump to the bottom when roughly handled by the postman in Waterloo. He was finishing his snacks and actually rather enjoying the time alone to dream about what the next few months would bring. Would he introduce Melissa to his parents straight away? Maybe they would go and see a movie. After this adoring sign of affection, he was confident that the gesture would ensure more then a summer romance. He sat, smiling, eating the last of his delicious mini scotch eggs and watching *Home Alone 4* on his iPad.

The girls had decided what to wear, and were up dancing to the compilation phoebe had made. It was a perfect mix of classic tunes and smash hits. Melissa went to sit at the dressing table, attempting to apply her make up.

‘What time are we leaving ladies?’ asked Grace as she danced to Fleetwood mac.

‘Lets say 11.30,’ phoebe, suggested, a little out of breath from the dancing, walking to the window. ‘I don’t know about you but I’m getting an uber, ludicrous to get public transport in this rain,’

‘I completely agree,’ grace peered outside on the full shower in the evening sun.

‘I suppose if were drinking we shouldn’t have any food past 6 o’clock, right?’ Melissa called from the mirror, ‘to ensure we get drunk enough not to have to buy drinks inside.’ She looked at her watch, ‘its almost 7 now, and I’ve had wasabi sushi, naked bars and pick and mix from Holland and Barrette. So I’m really not hungry.’

‘There’s nothing worse then turning up sober and having to endure the smell of that place,’ phoebe agreed, ‘and the drink prices are just abysmal,’ she screwed up her face in disgust as if she could smell it right now.

‘On the subject of drinks,’ grace held up her glass, ‘this is absolutely delicious!’

‘Pomegranate seeds, grapefruit and tonic over gin,’ said phoebe, ‘its my absolute favorite, simply divine.’

‘Gin!’ said grace, ‘why that’s baffling, I normally cant stand the stuff.’

‘Here,’ phoebe passed her the bottle, ‘have a sniff, see what you think.’

Grace took a whiff of the bottle, and made a face. ‘I can’t tell if that’s meant to be expensive,’ she said, ‘but that smell makes me feel like throwing up.’

‘Just imagine your drinking water,’ suggested Melissa, taking another sip, deciding her make up was sufficient and getting up to dance, ‘it goes down a treat I can tell you,’

The girls laughed and clinked their glasses. It was this very moment, the local courier, made his way to the front door and rang the bell. All three looked slightly puzzled.

‘Is anyone else coming?’ asked grace, as phoebe counted the bodies in the room.

‘I thought they’re all meeting us there?’ said phoebe.

‘Oooh!’ Melissa jumped, heading to the door, ‘perhaps its that slow cooker we ordered yesterday!’

‘My goodness that’s quick!’ said phoebe. She was sure that would have taken at least 5 days, especially as it’s now the weekend, but couldn’t possibly think what else it could be.

Melissa opened the door, she saw a tall man holding a clipboard. ‘I have a parcel for a Ms Van der Ree?’ said the man.

‘Yes that’s me!’ she clapped her hands together in excitement, peering out into the corridor to examine the box.

Melissa signed for it and the man wheeled it in to the middle of the bedroom. Simon saluted the girls and they curtsayed as he walked out the room, shutting the door behind him as he left.

Brian sat inside, quivering with excitement. He listening to the muffled voices outside, making sure he didn’t make a sound. Preparing himself for the unexpected grin that would be forming on Melissa’s face in a matter of minuets, he waited with anticipation. It was also fabulously good luck that grace and phoebe were home.

Winning over the friends is desperately important.

‘I have to say, that’s the largest slow cooker that I’ve ever seen,’ said grace, circling the box and stopping on the right hand side, sipping her drink. ‘Are you sure that’s what it is?’

‘Yes it does look suspiciously big,’ agreed Phoebe, ‘but the again, they do over pack things nowadays, like the air inside a packet of crisps. Absolutely ridiculous.’

‘I must say over packing really does undo my buttons,’ Melissa said, angrily, ‘they have almost no recycling bins on our road; I’m going to have to drive this thing all the way to Peckham! Its simply madness!’

‘Why don't you look at the return address,’ suggested phoebe, ‘that should give you some indication of who it’s from.’

Melissa knelt down and looked at the label, ‘Portsmouth?’ she said, confused, ‘how strange, I thought the slow cookers were made in china?’

‘Well, we might as well open it,’ said grace as she headed to the kitchen to get a sharp pair of scissors. While she took her leave, the girls decided to make another concoction. Brian sat inside, pure delight sparking from both cheeks. It would be soon...

‘Damn it I can’t do it!’ she exclaimed with a heavy sigh, after trying to open it for 5 minuets, ‘it’s just to damn taped up.’

‘Here let me try,’ phoebe passed Grace her drink in exchange for the scissors, looking at her in disapproval at her poor attempt.

She stabbed the top of the parcel, attempting to pull the blade through with ease. It was getting caught behind the many layers of packaging, and the scissors just wouldn’t budge. She made another incision, this time in the center of the parcel, but the blade was only making a tiny hole at best. Pulling as hard as she could was only making a cut big enough to fit her finger. Looking a little embarrassed but managing to hide the disappointment well, she gave up.

‘I don't know what’s wrong, maybe its because I didn't have my spinach smoothie this morning?’

‘Hold on,’ Melissa said, now fed up, and went to find something more suitable. (4 seconds)

She came back from the kitchen with her large Japanese Santoku knife that she had been given for Christmas by her parents.

She stabbed the edge of the box, this time sliding it right through, like she was cutting into a cake. Melissa pulled the knife through the cardboard, through the making tape, through the middle of the package, and right through the middle of Brian’s head, which, when the boxes flaps fell open, spurted out great gushes of red which splattering the girls clothes as they stood, staring into the box. Grace dropped her glass, phoebe fainted, and Melissa stood staring in the box with the knife held high, horror pulsing through her face, soaked in Brain Walters blood.

The End