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Something Missing

by Candida Lloyd

Miles glanced up at the digital announcement board above the platform of the station. “*I have everything I need but there is something missing*” it read. These were words Miles thought to himself daily on his commute home. He loved his wife and had a well-paid job in a prestigious London art school nevertheless his dissatisfaction was growing.

His train’s arrival time flashed up a moment later and Miles texted home to say he would be back in a couple of hours. He felt cheered by the thought of dinner and a nice cold beer with his wife.

Miles was part of another couple – a professional one. He and Jaqui had run the fine art department for nearly 20 years and the students saw them as parental figures. There was a time when he was close in age to the students but now he was old enough to be their father.

Successful former students were often invited back to inspire the current cohort. There was one coming in the following day to view the students’ Degree Show. You could never really predict who would make it in the fickle world of contemporary art, Jaqui had remarked earlier. She had remembered this person as unremarkable and not especially talented. On several occasions she had showed up in the office in tears and Jaqui had resented staying late at work to counsel her.

In preparation Miles tapped the visitor’s name into his phone and was surprised to see the familiar words come up on the screen “*I have everything I need but there is something missing*”.

This line had ‘*captured the zeitgeist and general malaise of contemporary consumer society*’ according to the gallery that represented her.

The words he'd seen on the platform of the station hadn't been a figment of his imagination but part of a site-specific installation piece which was currently appearing all around the country. The artist was reaching people by placing slogans in everyday places and it was working. It was all over social media. One twitter follower wrote: "How does this artist express my thoughts before I've even had them!"

The next day Miles put more thought than usual into his wardrobe choice and felt aroused in a way he hadn't for a long time. As he showed their guest around the Degree Show, he was aware of a buzz of excitement. People hovered nearby and filmed them on their phones. When his colleague approached, Miles introduced the former student as 'his protégé' to which Jaqui raised an eyebrow. She also noticed how he stood close to the young woman and preened himself by running his fingers through his hair. Taking him to one side she warned him not to be deceived by appearances. "You, of all people should realise we are in the business of image and illusion," she said.

"Thanks Jaqui," said Miles smiling, "but I have everything I need."