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A Great Day

by Candida Lloyd

“How’s your day going so far?” asked the young woman at the entrance to the clothing store. “Great!” replied Lisa, who had learned that this was the correct answer to the question. It was one of several stock phrases she heard whenever she encountered another person in this country – like pulling a string out of the back of a talking doll.

Lisa grabbed a shopping kart to wheel through the giant store and pile things into. There were jeans and sweaters and pyjamas, in all different colours piled up to the ceiling and apparently no other customers. The trolley quickly filled up – clothes were so cheap, she could buy them without trying them on, and then send them to her sister, if they weren’t right. A dress with a bold print caught her eye, the kind she would never usually wear, and she held it up in front of a mirror. But when she saw herself reflected, an uneasy, sickening feeling came over her and she hung the dress back on the rail. The abundance and choice suddenly overwhelmed her and so she rejected it all. Abandoning the trolley full of stuff she didn’t need, Lisa fled the store. “Have a great day!” the assistant called behind her.

To console herself she scanned the shopping “village” for a cafe. There was one across the vast parking lot where cars glinted in the unrelenting sunshine. Rather than risk getting burnt Lisa drove the distance in her oversized vehicle and parked outside. “Hi, how are you?” asked the server when she ordered a cup of tea. Presenting her with a giant paper cup half filled with lukewarm water and a teabag on the side, the server said, “the cream’s right over there. Have a great day!”

The coffee shop was a silent hub of activity as people peered into their laptops. Lisa found a seat and then took a photograph of her drink to whatsapp her sister back home along with a sad face emoji.

A few seconds later her phone lit up - there was an image of a cup of builder's tea in a china mug along with a thumbs-up emoji - and was that a custard cream she could see? Her spirits lifted at the instant connection and the sharing one of life's small pleasures.

To hold on to her sister for a bit longer, she took a picture of the cloudless, blue sky out of the window and tapped send.

Lisa laughed when she saw the image she received in return. It was of rain hitting a window and blurry figures, umbrellas up, faces down in the colourless English street outside. Underneath her sister had written the words 'another lovely day.'

In that moment, Lisa yearned for the unpredictable weather of home, her sister's sarcasm and a decent cup of tea. All so much more enjoyable from the vantage point of a glorious sunny day somewhere far away.