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## Now Everyone Knows

by Ivor John

He had felt so contented, walking with Julie through the park. Happy even. Unable to remember when he had last enjoyed a day as much. It was late afternoon and they were enjoying the last of the autumnal sunshine. Sitting low on the horizon, the oblique light had a clarity about it, and it threw the trees lining the muddy bridle path into stark contrast against the nearby buildings. It gave the fall trees exotic look. He felt he should make some comment.

‘Beautiful trees’

‘The overhanging ones are figs, its a thing, they’re quite famous, the big ones are planes, London Planes. They’re a kind of Sycamore’

They walked in silence for a while, embarrassed at his demonstrated ignorance of the arboriculture of Hyde Park. He lived in London, meeting here had been his suggestion, but now he felt foolish. They stepped aside as a two horse riders cantered past them. Young women perhaps in their twenties. Both fit, beige jodhpurs long blond hair in a ponytail. Remembering he was with Julie, he resisted the urge to turn his head for a view of them from as they rode past them.

He hoped he had not already shown too much interest. If he had Julie didn't say so. He thought about the women, spending their time riding horses in Hyde Park. He imagined how wealthy their parents or perhaps husbands must be. Bankers perhaps, politicians, actors perhaps.

'You look distracted'

Ignoring her remark, he walked away from the bridlepath and towards the Serpentine. It was a lovely afternoon for the time of year. He could see small families, happy couples with young children in the little grey rowing boats or giggling as they played in the blue fibreglass pedalos. She caught up, he was relieved and they walked together toward the cafe. Although sunny, it was early October and quite chilly, Julie had her hands in the pockets of her plaid woollen duffle-coat, looking like an extra from one of those 80s films. A kooky looking girl in central park.

He moved to take her hand, but thought it would be precocious. He took out his wallet instead to give reason to his sudden movement. Suggesting they get a coffee in the cafe which was in the corner of the lake. A pontoon of decking providing seating and a place to sit and watch the people in their little boats. Each had a large number, stencilled on the side in white paint. He was trying to work out the system, how they knew when to start their navigation towards the jetty, located beside the cafe.

He ordered drinks, a Chicken Cesar Salad and smashed avocado on sourdough toast. Trying to look nonchalant as he paid the £27.35.

'You know Peter, I enjoy being with you, it has been a lovely day, but you always seem distracted. Particularly by girls on the ponies I notice'

Embarrassed she had spotted his thoughts. They sat, silently eating their meals. The atmosphere between them seemed to be emphasised by the happiness around them. Children, excited from their boat rides, drinking milk shakes and eating bowls of chips covered in ketchup. They discussed where to go for the last couple of hours, before she could use her off peak ticket to catch the train from Victoria at seven fifteen. They decided on the big stores in Oxford Street. Then they would walk down New Bond Street, to Piccadilly, through Green Park and the along Buckingham Palace Road to Victoria. He liked showing off his knowledge of London.

As they walked through Hyde Park toward Marble Arch, he remembered how he had done this with Cathy. How they used to enjoy being together, at least he had thought so. Their life together had not been the same for several months before.

As they were walking into Selfridges, he felt his phone vibrate with a message. He always kept his phone on silent rather than try to explain why he kept receiving messages. While Julie was looking at a colourful display of Converse Trainers, he looked to see he had a text. The body of the message was a single sentence: 'now everyone knows who you really are'. He didn't recognise the number. He joined Julie, enthusiastically looking at clothes.

'So Peter, shall we do this again?' she asked him with a neutral tone, suggesting she had no strong feelings about his choice.

The counsellor interjected. 'Tell me Peter, are you overthinking this? You said that she suggested meeting you again. Why would you try to interpret he motives for saying that'.