

## Something to Tell

by Stuart Finegan

Returning with two mugs of steaming tea carefully gripped within her left hand, Jane smiled as her best friend looked up to greet her.

*Have you eaten?*

*This morning, I finished the kids' breakfast, Why did you get anything?*

*I was going to but their selection wasn't great the last time so I brought my own.*

Jane placed the cups on the table and carefully removed two pre-wrapped slices of cake from her pocket. For the next few minutes the old friends sat in silence enjoying the lunchtime winter sunshine. The café in Anderson's Park was full of workers from the surrounding offices. They took no notice of the two women in brightly coloured coats and matching hats. They had a lot to discuss, but for now they were content to enjoy the birds singing in the canopy of trees around them. Secretly Jane hoped the subject wouldn't be discussed, at least not today.

Despite being friends since childhood, her stomach felt sick. Louise broke the silence. Much to Jane's relief what followed was a typical conversation they would have. Kids, work, their parents dwindling health. Jane removed a cigarette from her bag to calm her nerves and tapped it several times on the table.

*I thought you were giving them up?*

*Last week, well the other month, but today I feel like one, don't you have them days when you crave one?*

*Twelve months, four days, since I last.*

*Wow, do you mind? I mean I'm not bothered if you do?*

*Do you remember when John found the packet in the car on holiday? Jesus I thought he was going to leave me, my mother was mortified, I don't know what your laughing at Jane.*

The lunchtime crowd came and went. Neither Jane nor Louise finished their tea. It wasn't the best. Flicking crumbs of cake onto the ground, they laughed aloud as swooping bluetits fought over the unexpected lunchtime treats. Without warning, Jane's heart sank as the words she didn't want to hear emerged.

*You're not telling me something, why is that?*

*Louise, Louise not today, I mean what are you expecting me to say?*

*Are you serious Jane?*

*Look the first I knew about it was after the event had happened.*

Jane suddenly stopped talking, stood up and announced she had to be somewhere else. Before Louise had a chance to say anything, her friend had grabbed her bag and was walking briskly across the park towards the bus stop. Louise suddenly realising what was happening called after her. In her rush to catch up she dropped her phone, bending down she cracked her head on the table, then screamed out loud and by the time she'd gathered herself together, Jane was stepping onto the number 57 bus. Louise looked on as Jane took her seat and raised her right hand to wave goodbye.

Across the road several taxis parked in a neat line, awaited their next customers. The driver wasn't expecting the rear door to suddenly open and a frantic woman to start bellowing orders. Spilling his coffee on his morning paper, his reply fell on deaf ears. Louise wasn't interested in the fact that she'd frightened him.

*Follow that bus...the bus, hurry up!*

*Lady, you've just scared the life out of me, came the reply in a broad south Welsh accent*

*I'll pay you double, now don't lose sight of it, look its turning into Gardner Street, hurry up!*

*Cash yea?*

*If you want yes, now drive.*

Wiping the spilled coffee from his lap, the young driver released the handbrake and accelerated out onto the main road. He had a million questions to ask, but his passenger looked like she had no answers. The Bus was half empty. Two spotty teenagers, with their feet on the seat in front of them couldn't take their eyes of the lady sat opposite. After a few minutes Jane looked up, stared directly at them and snapped. With each violent word directed at them, they sank deeper into their seats.

Too embarrassed to say anything, they stood up and moved upstairs. Jane smiled, mission accomplished. She had privacy to make her phone call. As her fingers tapped out his number, inside her stomach churned in pain. She hated herself for doing this to him, especially as her best friend knew nothing about it. After several seconds, he picked up the phone but didn't say anything. Jane spoke first. In short sharp sentences the receiver on the other end of the line knew everything.

I can't think about that right now. If I do, I'll go crazy. I'll think about that tomorrow. Understand, Jane do you?

Yes, but who's going to tell Louise, I mean I can't?

The phone went dead.

In the back of the taxi Louise opened her bag and removed her yellow notebook. Flipping off the lid of her blue pen she frantically started to write. "Things I should have said" was the headline. She was furious with herself. Jane was her best friend and she couldn't talk to her about what had happened. The taxi driver suddenly stopped talking and pointed at a bus several hundred yards away.

Is that the one lady?