For the Days When You Mistake a Dime for a 5P

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Cover Page Footnote
This piece is continued on the Inklings blog (http://web.colby.edu/inklingsmagazine)
For the Days When You Mistake a Dime for a 5P
by Laura Rosenthal

Write about the cold lost nights in London when the rain soaked through your leather boots and the light from the top of the Regent Street buildings made the whole city feel comfortable. Write about the couple sitting across from you in the Tube, arguing in broken English, insisting that the other is in the wrong because I just want to chill with my friends, baby, I thought that's what you wanted, too—no, why would you cancel our date to chill with everybody? He needed a haircut, but maybe she liked his hair that way. Maybe that was the only reason to stay with him. Or maybe that was the biggest reason to leave him, and the parties of his friends smoking in her house was just an excuse.

Write about the night you went to the bar, just the two of you, and you didn't drown in Guinness but you almost did, and by some chance they played every single song you had ever danced to.

Write about the barista at Costa who, when you ordered a medium hot chocolate and raspberry jam biscuit, asked if your father owned a gun.

Write about standing in the yard at Shakespeare's Globe and buying a tiny blue copy of Romeo and Juliet to give to Ellie, who'd bought you a tiny red copy of Romeo and Juliet for your 18th birthday because you both can still recite the line, “Tybalt, the reason I have to love thee doth much excuse the appertaining rage to such a greeting. Villain am I none. Therefore, farewell. I see thou knowest me not.”

Don't write about how when your plane landed, you were greeted with, “Happy New Year! Welcome to London! Good morning!” which made you seriously consider walking right back onto that plane and, when you got back to your mother, announcing that you could handle the new year and the new city, but the morning was simply too much for you. Write about how you stayed because a girl with the same name as you was your roommate, and you both agreed to nap and not to set an alarm.

Write about the day where you explored the city by yourself, how you walked in yesterday's clothes from Piccadilly Circus to Oxford Street to Hyde Park to Harrods—where you spent 20 minutes inside the store before you realized you were staring at £200 scarves when your jeans were fraying at the thighs—to the Natural History Museum to the cheapest Thai restaurant you could find in the city, where you ate subpar Pad Thai at a table alone and wondered whether the women at the next table were old friends or lovers and what could they be thinking about you?

Write about the photos you took of food. How you don't care if a picture is worth a thousand words or a thousand dollars (although you might care more if it were worth a thousand pounds) because the pictures don't taste like the Heavenly Halloumi Veggie Burger from Borough Market that you woke up early and traveled half-way across the city to eat. They don't taste like the monkfish you ordered at the top of the Shard, which you ordered because Charlie explained that monkfish were hideous, bottom-eating fish, but renowned as a delicacy, and you liked the culinary proof that what matters most is what’s on the inside. Still, you should write about the photos because you insisted on interrupting every meal, every meal you cooked yourself or with friends, every meal
you bought from a stand or restaurant or market, to take a photo of the food.

Don't write about 2:00am when your flatmate Polly banged on the walls, pounded on the doors, your door, and you opened it to find her screaming, “I'm going to die” as she collapsed on the floor. Don't write about her shaking, eyes popping, arms flailing. About frantically searching the halls for a British student because you couldn't remember the London equivalent of 9-1-1. About the calm voice at the other end of the line asking questions you didn't know the answers to, like “how long ago did she consume the drugs?” and “Is she on any medications?” Leave out the hour and a half it took for the ambulance to arrive, the EMTs who responded to her “I'm going to die” with “well, we're all going to die someday.” Although by that time she was lucid enough to insist that she doesn't do drugs when they argued that, apparently, she does.

Write about coming back drunk to Charlie's flat and him insisting on making you a snack. How you wondered what he could possibly pull together with the cheese, eggs, sour cream, and white bread he kept as regulars in his fridge. How he crowned himself Emperor Chef and concocted the fried-egg-grilled-cheese. You both fell asleep on the couch, and when you went home maybe the next day, maybe a few days later, you went out and bought yourself white bread and eggs.

Write about how every time you passed a Subway, you felt a strange sense of comfort and pride even though you never eat at Subway at home. You smiled at the familiar green awning with yellow font. Write about how Charlie got food poisoning from their sandwich and was sick for a week, and now Subway doesn't make you think of America; it makes you think of waking up at 6:00am and running to the 24-hour convenience store to buy orange juice and ginger ale and Gatorade and dehydrated noodles and a banana because you didn't know what to buy but you wanted to help.

Maybe don't write about London at all because Virginia Woolf wrote about London, and even though a Buzzfeed quiz told you that Virginia Woolf is your soulmate, you are absolutely positive she is not.

Write about the moment you almost gave up your vegetarianism at Portobello Market because you had never seen burgers that big before; and at the Shard because you saw venison on the menu and thought if you ordered it the waiter might believe you belonged at a restaurant with a view like that; and at Borough Market because you had never tried caribou or crocodile or snake meat and you were pretty sure eating one of those would be more rebellious than being vegetarian. Write about the soot-covered field mice in the Tube. Write about the Dixie Chicken where you all gathered at 3:00am to buy onion rings and combo deals. About paying eleven pounds for a five-minute cab ride and posing for pictures in a telephone booth and feeling 100% tourist. And your grandmother's friend Gill who took you to John Keats's house and showed you that some parts of the city are silent. And the café named Zieferblat where you grab a clock and pay by the minute to sit in a flat that is not your own and eat toast with jam. And the cookies the size of your face that you never bought for yourself but always snagged a piece from someone else. And trying to adjust to words like “take-away” instead of “to-go” and “top-up” instead of “add-more-money-to-your-account.” And the tipsy trip to Chinatown at 11:00pm for cheap noodles.

Write about it all because if you forget which pub has the raspberry cider you like, you might forget where you bought the sepia tone painting of people walking without umbrellas in the rain by Tower Bridge. And if you forget that, you might forget whether you turn left or right at Bond Street to get to the 25 bus route. And if you forget that, how will you ever get home? [IM]