

37/9 London

Edith & Billy

Serial #1

#PBC #London37/9

written by

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Edith Fowey decided to visit the vibrant grungy Ridley Road market, down Dalston way to buy two Columbian hand made patties. Sweet and spicy. A friend had told her about them and she thought that she'd been stoic enough lately to deserve a Saturday morning treat. She looked at her watch. For a reason only known to her, she would not leave the house on a Saturday before 9 a.m. and it was now 9:02 a.m. All was good. She would get a flat latte on the way and then soak up the caffeine with the patties. If she didn't bump into anyone, a read might be on the cards too. Even cleaning her teeth was smooth running. She thought to herself, *a perfect Saturday. As long as I don't bump into anyone that is. Then I'll be okay to meet up with Billy. Exciting news coming today. Billy's always got exciting news.*

To most people, Edith looked incredibly beautiful, classically, in a 1920s way, in a gaunt Parisian way. She had the demeanour of someone kind, calm, together, impressively cool with a liking for a Biba-Poncho-Bolero chic, she read hip books from the 60s and loved the night wolf sky. She was a great singer and had many friends.

From such a slender body she had powerful scarred voice. She seemed to have a wonderful life. Living in East London with an actress roomy (Gwendolyn), paying over the odds but able to afford. The royalties from the latest album were coming in nicely and new collaborations were on the cards in the Autumn. All good. Outwardly all was good. Inwardly, the clock was growing more a hindrance; an obsession. She had lists on her new iPhone and reminders on those lists and the reminders on the reminders were set for 1 minute. The second reminder was for 2 minutes and if she missed that one there would be hell to pay. There was also a steady checking of her networking sites, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and emails for more work related stuff. Oh boy! We're all close to this really but Edith felt overwhelmed by it all sometimes. Today, however, she felt close to calm. Everything was checked, thoroughly, and it was still 9:03 a.m. and some Columbian patties beckoned. She gave herself the task of only checking her phone once on the walk to the market. *If I don't bump into anyone, it'll all be cool!* Her phone reminder

tinkled like wind chimes. She closed her eyes and breathed in the air. In her mind's eye it was the air from a Tibetan Mountain, in reality she took in the dusty hallway and the fabric conditioner that filled the air from the clothes drying on the radiators. It was time to breath and remember the magic of life. A reminder that went off every few minutes. Edith smiled and made for the door. Hand on the amber plastic see-through door knob and a wobbly twist and a squeak and the door opened onto the street. She smiled to herself feeling proud that she had left the confines of her house by 9:04 a.m. Her phone began to ring. *My phone is ringing. Who fucking calls anyone? I don't need this. I don't need this.* She looked to her watch it was 9.04 a.m. "Argh!" Edith looked at the phone. "No fucking way," it was Edward. Edward was her brother. He never called, ever. She breathed deeply and answered the phone determined to keep walking so that when she came off the phone she would still be on the way to Ridley Road Market. And actually it meant that if anyone did bump into her she could gesture to the phone and not be delayed, in any way.

And so she answered the phone feeling better for the practicalities of actually talking on the phone as she walked. “Ed? How’s things?” she sighed internally.

Edward was Edith’s elder brother, 27 years old, unremarkable in his looks, shy, sometimes tedious, sometimes funny in his own way, was made redundant from his long standing job as a librarian and he had used his pay off sum to do something extraordinary. He was just about to explain a little bit of it to his sister. Not since his mid teens had Edward had an extraordinary thought, but his being fired jolted him, quite severely. Maybe for the better, maybe for the worse, I suppose. It all depends on your own perspective on these things. Let’s hear Edward on the matter, see if he can explain to his sister; on the phone she is using as a shield.

“Edith?”

“Of course it’s Edith, who do you think you just called?”

“I didn’t know who to call.”

“Obviously... Okay, anyway, yes,... er ... What’s the matter?”

“Nothing really, something’s happened though. Have you got a moment?”

Edith could not have rolled her eyes any wider or sighed anymore like a growl. Did Edward not understand exactly how *much of a moment* he had to speak and what he was doing to her perfect Saturday morning. She looked at her watch knowing that the reminder would be going off sooner rather than later: “You have four minutes Edward before erm ... yes four minutes.” Edith actually felt like she was being incredibly generous. Two list reminders and a breath-in-the-Tibetan-Mountain-moment reminder. Edward realised why he seldom called any of his family, right there and then.

“And counting, I suppose?”

“Of course, I’m heading to the market and meeting Billy. So yes tell me, I’m intrigued.”

“This may take more than four minutes... When you hear what I’ve got to say and all. But we can meet up

instead. Let me get the bones of it out there. Okay, yep here goes: firstly, I lost my job.”

“Oh! I’m....”

“Don’t interrupt I have less than four minutes, yes?”

Edith was taken aback by his assertiveness.

“Do you remember when I was doing my a-levels... I had an idea about changing my day. The time of my day?”

“Are you asking for an answer?” Pause... “Yes, I remember something to do with more hours in the day.”

“Good,” Edward continued on. Edith’s eyebrows screwed up tighter and tighter as she felt her perfect Saturday morning ebbing away. However, there was something here, something strange in Edward’s tone. Such a meek man. Such a weak brother. Something was going on. “Good, good. Right,” Edward stopped as if he was demonstrating something to someone.

“What?” Edith was genuinely intrigued.

“Sorry, yep, What it was, was changing the day to 37 hours and having a 9 day week. The idea was to be out of the house for 25 hours and in bed or the bedroom for 12

hours. This would mean I was out, in the world, living for over a normal day and in bed for ages to recover, sleep. I wanted to see what happened. Document it. Now I tweet it. Blog it and I checked google about the hour thing and do you know the damnedest thing happened.”

Edith stopped walking: “You’re doing it?”

“I’ve been doing it for a week. I mean one of my weeks. 9 of these 37 hour monster days.”

“I’m gobsmacked Eddie.” The phone reminder went off. “Fuck..”

“What was that?”

“Nothing, nothing... Right, so you’ve done 9 of these days. Wow, how, how is it? I’m very impressed. We did something similar at drama school. But never, we were never that committed to it. How are you? What’s happened? You sound different.”

“I googled 37 hour day and do you know what clever old Google said?”

“No.”

“Google said: ‘Did you mean 35 hour day?’”

“What?”

Edward waited for the penny to drop.

Edith understood pretty quickly: “There’s someone else doing it but with a 35 hour day?”

“You’ve always been a sharp little button sis. Yep, there is. She’s called Marie Coute, she’s from Paris originally and she’s introduced me to a whole new world. It’s amazing sis. But, yeah,... I didn’t just call you because you’re my sister. I think you may have like a thing, a bent for all this. There are people doing some amazing things. Feats you wouldn’t believe. Although, I remember as a child, you used to do some of the things they do.”

Edith let her arm go loose and she stood silent with the phone hanging by her thigh.

“Is that my four minutes? Hello hello???”

Edith slowly brought her arm back to her ear: “Listen Edward, we should meet up. We should meet up soon. Where are you?”

“I’m in Southwark?”

“You’re in London? Why the fuck are you in London? You didn’t think to see me? And you say Suth-urk not South-walk. Don’t say south walk or you’ll get shot.”

“I’m out of the house 25 hours a day, I thought London would be best equipped to keeping me occupied. And I knew you had your things to do, so I kept away.”

“Fair enough but you should come and stay with me or at least near me. Come up East, it’s fun. I’d like to do this. I’d like to do this. Come meet me today. Are you free?”

“I’ve just left the house so I’m free for 25 hours. Edith you wouldn’t believe how free you become with such huge days. Where shall we meet?”

“Good good good ... Shoreditch grind, 3pm, google it!”

“It’s a date.”

Edith had a determination and glint in her eye that only comes when you are in on one of the Universe’s secrets.

Or at least somewhere close to one. You may know the feeling?

Edith was by the canal at Orsman Road before she realised that she hadn't checked her phone or heard a reminder. She was a few minutes later than the city mapper scheduled, because of the phone call slowing her pace a little. A walk to Ridley Road was 39 minutes without bumping into anyone and quite a direct route. Edith sometimes wondered why she felt good about walking 39 minutes and yet, she could have a panic attack if she had to talk with someone for an unscheduled 5 minutes. She was in a part of East London that was being updated and renovated for the influx of newcomers to the area. A hotbed of creatives, students and those native to the area who would find the new prices nigh on impossible to move in anew. But on a sunny day like this, amongst a cool vibe –alongside the real people who lived and worked here– Edith felt good. Add to this a little adventure might be coming her way. Edith allowed her fantasies to bend her

surroundings, quite considerably. The canal felt a little Venetian with the twisting roads full of hidden inner sanctums. Not knowing if a villain or a lover or a masked prostitute was around the next corner. What did she see out of the corner of her eye? *Probably someone taking a cigarette break.* Granted these are run down factories and terraces as opposed to run down thousand year old moorish five story flesh coloured palaces or hotels. But the mystery was the same to Edith, this moment. All manner of history roamed these streets and the canal here and she felt that feeling, where she was a step to the side of everyone she saw. This was an *old* feeling. When people walked by, somehow the air felt thick around them, as though it meant something, it felt almost sentient and moving. *How can the air be sentient?*

Edith arrived at the Columbian Patti stall. The perfect little morsel brought her back to the world again. Firstly with a feeling of: *Wow that's tasty,* to: *Uhgh!, That's heavy, in the belly.* But both feelings went towards bringing her back down to earth ready to meet her friend Billy.

Billy was a 23 year old woman full of stories, laughter and a dressing up box to die for. She acted, sang, wrote for magazines and some zines and danced a lot. As often as she could, sometimes to the music in her head, on a bus, in a queue at Pret. Today she wore her hair up and wild, bright red lipstick and large pointy green glasses that looked a little like those Dame Edna Everage wears or wore. She wore a fake fur coat and 14 hole dock martins, graffitti-ed to within an inch of their lives. She had a tubular bandage over her knee. She's strained it fencing. She was a near olympic standard foilist.

Edith saw Billy strolling through the crowds. She was a symbol of the difference. A difference the air had around people living a normal life and those on a trip. (Trip here can mean experiencing life through chemical enhanced senses, but that isn't all a trip can be.)

Edith and Billy sat on a pavement missing only a camp fire and a bottle of tequila. They ate the last of the patties and a Burmese curry. Billy had brought a can of Guinness just

to finish Edith's sensitive innards off, and an apple turnover. There would be an unholy churning going on down inside the caverns of her stomach, but somehow it felt good. Billy sniggered and squinted in the sun.

“Yep,” Billy said.

Edith just nodded.

“What we need is a camper van. I have competitions down from Switzerland to Napoli. I've never fenced on acid. I'd like to try. I'd like to see the swirl of what they're thinking before they think it. It's worth a ban even. Don't you think?”

“That would be amazing,” Edith said incredibly seriously.

“You really think so? You do don't you? I think it would be amazing. In fact we should have a school where we all did that fucking shit. We'd be invincible.”

“Acid Wars.”

“This curry is amazing.” Billy mopped up the sauce with a naan bread. Then she swigged from her can of dry Irish stout and began the apple turnover, without pause.

Billy and Edith waited for Edward outside the Shoreditch Grind. They had tequila shots alongside their espressos and a jug of water. They were both feeling a bit phased by the meals they’d just eaten but it was the curdling cream and the Guinness that hurt. It would go though. The tequila was surprisingly smooth. The espresso was a little too fruity for espresso but it tasted tasty. As they poured a water they saw the awkward ginger haired figure looking at a notebook map of London and checking the street names around him. Edith and Billy did not tell him that they were there, as watching him struggle was really quite good fun. He was an innocent bumbler and sweet as they come. When he saw them watching him, he laughed at himself. He looked around to see if anyone else was laughing at him and then he came over to hug his sister, if she’d let him still.

Edith hugged him quickly and Billy gave him a heart felt embrace of at least 6 seconds. She knew that that's when the chemicals in the brain were supposed to kick in. She sighed and kissed him on the cheeks and then they sat.

Edward had a cup of tea with no milk and a slice of lime. They had no lemons. The guy who made the tea, sneered a little Ketamine sneer and probably cursed the tea that went out. He was all right on the guitar though. His manager looked over at him and thought he might need to go. Edith and Billy were all ears. Billy leaned forward and squinted her eyes as though what he was telling them was like a fast wind with bits of sand in it. Every now and then they got hit by a random shard of shell. The first ten minutes he told them of his rules, of his first night out, a strange shift at work, which began him just pitching in for a helpless manager who'd had to deal with a staff walk out. He told of his first fling with that same manager and the catching of his first S.T.D. He seemed proud, and although shocked, Edith kind-of seemed impressed too. Billy looked at them both a little aghast at their welcoming of the

disease. All Edith said was: “You don’t know Edward, he didn’t lose his virginity till he was 25.” At which Edward thanked her for passing on that bit of info. “It’s true, just that Eddie caught something is a bloody miracle.” Edward thanked her again. “Anyhoo,” Edward continued to Billy’s soft smile at his embarrassment and terminology, “Anyhoo, hold onto your honchos ....” The story went on to his first dreams of being a warrior in some strange land and that he was enormous and muscular, and he told of this warrior woman called Marigold who was just astonishing and looked so beautiful it kind of hurt. Her speed and elegance was supreme and she could fight anyone and in the dreams there was more than humans to fight and she beat them too. Edward told them of a gang of cool young guys he’d gotten in with, who were being sponsored by an old distinguished guy called Carmine to help promote awareness amongst humans, through some free festivals. He told them about Marie who was also doing the 35 hour thing and he then got on to the more recent days, where all these crazy people came together around this bashful saint

called Vernon. A saint in a suit, with incredible eyes and as handsome as Marigold was beautiful. So much was going on behind his eyes and he could see into your soul. So easily. He had no idea of his charisma, of the shining fucking existence he threw out at the world. Vernon didn't know it but he was their leader. Marigold *was real*, the old guy Carmine was like the daddy to this gang. Nope he was like the son to a woman called Greta. Greta was ancient and tattooed blue all over and could disappear at will. They were fighting other ancients who were wanting chaos and pain to reign over all here and in the other realms. There was a war going on at all levels of reality and his doing this 37 hour day was a shining beacon of a human's possibilities and they wanted him in with them. They fought alongside each other anyway, in other realms, because of his push for awareness. And he was mighty. Edward was non-linear in his account, possibly because of his weird sleeping patterns; he was possibly hallucinating and he was obviously going crazy, but right there and then Edith and Billy decided to go for it. 37/9 London was

about to happen for them too. Just then a reminder went off on Edith's phone. They looked up and more than one stranger was listening to Edward's breathless account.

to be continued.

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