

Stories for Lipreading



UNSCHEDULED by Kath Whiting.

[This text is read aloud at the beginning of this video:]

Welcome to Stories for Lipreading. If you haven't used our website before, we suggest you look at our 'How to Use' page before you begin. We hope you enjoy this story, which is called 'Unscheduled' by Kath Whiting. It has been filmed in three episodes. Here is Episode 1.

Unscheduled by Kath Whiting. Episode One.

I have a coffee and a table to myself. I'm feeling relaxed for the first time in quite a while. We pull into a station. Only one person gets on, so I think I'm safe. I carry on reading my novel.

'Excuse me, is it ok if I sit here?'

I nod.

He sits opposite me. I know everyone wants a window seat, but it's good manners to take the diagonal one. I move my drink closer. Our feet inevitably hit each other's and I have to shuffle out of the way.

'Oops, sorry,' he says.

I force a smile and look at him properly for the first time; irritatingly handsome. He gets his phone and train pass out. I read the pass upside down: Navinder Singh. I think of Trevor, my ex-boyfriend, and what a nightmare it's been. No men for me. I read the same paragraph of my book three times but nothing goes in. I wonder if he's noticed I haven't turned a page. I look out the window at the countryside scudding past, then see his reflection in the glass. Great cheekbones, strong nose, a few laughter lines around his eyes. Then he is looking back at me. I immediately return to my book and notice he quickly picks up his phone. I remind myself there can be no repeats of Trevor.

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I'm consoling myself that at least I'm getting off at the next stop when the train jerks to an abrupt halt. My coffee slides right across the table. Luckily Navinder Singh catches it just before it lands in his lap.

'Near miss, he says and passes the cup back to me. Our hands touch.

'Thank you.' I take a sip.

'You almost got me. I'd have looked like I'd wet myself.'

'Worse than that, it's still hot.'

'Lucky escape!'

The tannoy crackles into life and announces an extended delay due to signal failure.

'Always happens just before you get off,' I say, rolling my eyes.

'Do you live in Winchester too?' he asks.

'Yeah.'

'I can practically see my place from here,' he says, pointing out the window. 'What about you?'

I remind myself not to be specific. 'A couple of miles out.'

'Have you been here long?'

'Just moved down,' I tell him.

'Work? A man?' he asks and I know he's interested.

'I had to get away. Needed a fresh start.'

'I can relate to that!' he says. 'It's a hard place to make friends though, don't you think?'

'I haven't made any yet.' I close my book.

He looks at the cover. 'Oh wow, she is my favourite author.'

I laugh, I can't help myself. 'Mine too.'

The time we are together goes quickly. For a blissful hour, the ghost of Trevor leaves my mind. We have the same taste in books and films. We have an interesting discussion about the portrayal of violence in fiction. I'm disappointed when the train lurches into life. Within a minute we are pulling into Winchester and reality. I grab my things and stand up.

'I really enjoyed meeting you,' he says. 'Hope to see you around. Maybe we could-'

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He's interrupted by the bleeping of the doors opening. We hurry to get out.

'Bye then!' I try and sound cheery, then turn and walk away. I don't look back. I force myself to think of Trevor, but in my mind he morphs into Navinder Singh.

Unscheduled by Kath Whiting. Episode Two.

It's another deathly quiet shift in the café. The grandfather clock is ticking out endless seconds.

Jeanie, the other waitress is glued to her phone but I need to be busy, otherwise my mind will fill itself with painful memories. I concentrate on folding napkins into origami swans. The bell on the door goes, finally a customer. He sits at a table facing the window. I grab a menu and rush over. Jeanie doesn't even look up.

'Good morning, Sir. Can I get you a drink while you look at the menu?'

He turns around. It is Navinder Singh. My heart starts thumping in my chest.

'Oh my goodness! Train Girl, from yesterday!' He starts laughing. 'What are the chances?'

'Quite a coincidence.' I wrack my brains, trying to remember if I'd mentioned where I worked.

'Maybe the Gods are trying to tell us something.' He winks at me. His eyes are dark, hypnotic.

Jeanie is looking over, interested.

'I, um, need to get you something.' I hand him the menu.

'Like your number?'

I feel myself blushing. I glance again at Jeanie who is still staring. I don't know if she can hear. 'Tea, coffee, juice?'

'I'm sorry, you're at work. I'll have coffee please, but not in my lap. And can I get a cheese and tomato sandwich?'

'Coming right up.' I take back his unopened menu.

When I'm making the coffee, Jeanie nudges me. 'He's a looker.'

'What? Oh, I hadn't noticed.'

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‘Well, he likes you. He hasn’t taken his eyes off you.’

The flowery china rattles in my hand as I carry the coffee.

‘Very pretty,’ he says, as I set the cup and saucer down. ‘The china,’ he adds quickly.

I put down a napkin and he grabs my hand. Navinder Singh has a strong grip. ‘I’m sorry if I’ve embarrassed you; it’s just that I was kicking myself yesterday when I didn’t do anything and here you are today. It’s like a second chance.’

His eyes are wide, imploring. Do I get a second chance at happiness; do I let myself go again?

Everything that happened with Trevor comes back to me. And how did Navinder Singh know I’d be here. He seems genuine, but it’s easy to pretend. A shiver runs through me.

‘So, a drink?’ he asks. He smiles. His teeth are very straight and white.

I pull my hand away and take a step back, knocking over a chair behind me. I hear Jeanie laughing. I right the chair and run out to the kitchen. I make his sandwich, but force Jeanie to take it out to him. I stay out the back.

[Unscheduled by Kath Whiting. Episode Three.](#)

I look at the text message on my phone. I can’t believe Jeanie has cancelled on me again. I really don’t have any friends in this city. I’ve just paid seven pounds for a large glass of red and I’m not going to leave it, so now I’ve got to sit at the bar on my own.

‘Not again,’ says a voice behind me.

I’m not even surprised when I turn and see it’s Navinder Singh. It’s like my subconscious has summoned him to taunt me. He is wearing a red shirt, it looks good on him.

‘Are you following me?’ I ask.

‘No. I can honestly see how you might think that, but I’m really not.’

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I put my phone away and pick up my coat.

‘No, don’t go. I’m just getting a pint. I’ll leave you alone. You’ve already run away from me twice. I can take a hint. I just thought we got on when we were on the train; we seemed to connect, and that doesn’t happen to me very often.’

‘Sorry.’

‘No apology necessary, and for the record, I’m not a stalker.’

The bartender comes over and Navinder Singh orders a Guinness. We wait in silence. He looks everywhere except at me. Finally his drink comes and he pays. As he turns to go I grab his arm.

‘I felt like we connected too,’ I tell him, ‘and that doesn’t happen to me very often either. To be honest, it frightens me.’

He frowns and his expression reminds me of Trevor but I take a deep breath and carry on. ‘My last relationship was tricky, it went very wrong.’

His face relaxes. ‘I understand, I’ve been burnt before. I’ve got some crazy exes.’

‘You’re lovely, but I wouldn’t be good for you, Navinder.’

‘How did you know my name?’ There is an edge in his voice.

I feel a slight unravelling. I can’t let memories of Trevor stop me doing what I want to do. This man’s been throwing himself at me. ‘You told me, on the train.’

‘Really?’ He squints at me. ‘I’ve been thinking of you as “Train Girl” all this time.’

‘So,’ I lean closer, ‘you’ve been thinking of me, *all this time?*’

‘Maybe a little bit, or a big bit,’ he smiles. ‘So what is your name then?’

I look at the bar, along the pumps. ‘Stella. My name’s Stella. And to your next question, yes, you can buy me a drink.’

* * *

It really was the perfect first date, unscheduled though it was. There was no pressure at the end of the night, just a chaste kiss. He was fun, silly and trusting. And easy to follow. Just like Trevor.

From the darkness of his back garden, I look up at the yellow window and watch Navinder Singh undress.