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Diary of an Ageing Art Slut from London, the Montmartre of the Millennium

Late September - late

Well this month was a turn up for the books!!! After the summer and all the excitement with the family and the added excitement of reconnecting with the ex., I had a few more bits of adventure. While over in the ol' home town ensconced at the ex's due to my refusal to stay with aged parents I was invited to be his guest at his rich Chicago cousin's wedding in a Scottish castle - all expenses paid for mind you! Getting married in a Scottish castle seems to be the done thing among the rich and famous! The deal, and there always is a deal, being he gets to stay at my house while in London for a week seeing all the latest wonderful things in London. He doesn't get to show up once again without a partner at a family function. So we booked a B&B in Edinburgh over the internet..... with twin beds! When I finally did leave the home town (it took two attempts due to aeroplanes getting lost???) we parted all sort of excited with more than a hint of romance in the air.

Well, five weeks later he turns up while the ongoing saga of nearest and dearest going to hospital for ear operation in is full swing... which is to say, the hospital cancels out at last moment and reschedules for the following week!!! Twice !! So ex-boyfriend and I enjoy London, seeing the sights, looking at exhibitions and generally having a good time.

The night before we leave Bet has got us tickets to the Private View bash being held after the Whitechapel's new show Protest and Survive at a place called Stepney City. It was a school in a rather grand Victorian building until it became a multimedia centre!!! But it was the food that really made it. Three serving centres of Mediterranean, far Eastern and American plus a sweet trolley to die for filled with

great ice cream and gorgeous toppings AND all the lime green vodka coolers you could imagine or want to have. G's newest and future sperm donor was there charming us all with stories of his time in Australia. Em was floating around with her now steady partner and Bet was just glowing from latest holiday romance. A fine rain was misting down and evaporating as soon as it hit the several huge gas balloon heaters. We all got right royally tipsy. The happiness was infectious making everyone in the gang and their nearest and dearest's smile and laugh the night away. Bet broke the spell momentarily by whispering in my ear:

'I invited the living dead, but he refused to come saying he was too worried about his operation. I ask you once again can't you divorce him and have a relationship with some one nice like the Ex over there?'

Ex and I walk home to my house later in the rain and stop to look at a city fox making his way home as well. Ex is dead impressed with my glamorous social life. I say nothing and let him keep his illusions as long as he can. He informs me that he has applied for a job here as London seems to be bereft of his type of skills. The air is definitely heating up.

The next day we head off to Scotland at six am. Wonderful trip on the train to Edinburgh but once there, we book in and go out for a good look at the town and sights. Big meal at posh hotel that night by groom to be for all wedding guests. Really looking forward to it. We get back to B&B later, dress, order cab and go only to find when we get there no one is about. No relatives, no obvious loud American Guests. We think that we could be very early. We ask at desk for the dinner party. They give us blank look and check bookings. That party was last night. Ex looks dumb founded. We doublecheck. Great puzzlement. Decide to go to cousin's hotel down the road and see if they are there. After all the wedding isn't until tomorrow. Brief saunter down the Golden Mile stopping to buy the third black bow tie (The other two mysteriously disappeared) Dead casually we enquire at reception desk and are told "They all left this morning by bus for the wedding in the country." Major panic sets in very quickly. Quick look at watch. "If we really try we could still get there for the reception." says Ex, weakly. Cab is ordered in nano seconds. We hope in and race back to B&B. Book room for next night as well and pack formal attire and jeans v.v. quickly and rush back out to waiting cab.

Time to spare but.... there is a petrol strike on and everyone is taking the train. Ex begins to really panic but I tell him to give me his credit card and he can go look for right platform. While in truth I am thinking that if worse comes to worse I will barge to front of queue and pretend I am frazzled American tourist who is about to miss the last train to cousin's wedding or something like that and go completely hysterical. However good luck was on my side and the line went down extremely quick and Ex came back in the nick of time to pay for tickets. Off we rushed, only to then have to wait for late train. Once on the said train, we began to work out how we would change so that we could arrive in grand style. There is no chance of that

happening in train as loos are awash with unmentionable fluids. So we decide it's the back of the cab...as one does.

The cabby, once we had found one, was instructed to drive to castle and I would change in back of cab into full evening gear. Once accomplished he would stop and I would change positions with Ex and he would do the same. We then raced through the pitch black country side at a break neck speed with all the pleasure of changing in the back of a cab into full evening gear and arriving at the castle just as they were about to toast the happy couple. It really was a great party and we staggered into bed at 3 am. having made our way down the hill to a wee cottage. The next morning I got out of bed and realised it was bloody cold. I also realised that the Ex snores and I could hear him through the walls all night. But I forgave him when the landlady brought in a breakfast of scrambled eggs and smoked salmon to die for. The next night at the B&B as I was curled up with a Sunday paper on my bed and the TV blathered quietly in the background, the image of my cousin came on the screen with tears running down his face. Paula Yates had topped herself and as her lawyer he was issuing a statement to the press. Ex was dead impressed once again. All in all it was a good trip. But finding out that the Ex is inflicted with the same lack of passion or desire even as the nearest and dearest left me wondering if it is epidemic in men over 45. The last night Ex was in London, I had to put nearest and dearest in hospital for his operation. I got him all settled in and he hissed at me

'Make sure that one-balled wonder is gone when I get out.'

The Ex left the next morning and I saw him to the airport. He had talked of sending a ticket for me to join his family in Canada for Xmas and I was, despite the warning bells going off in the back of my brain, all glowy and smitten.....

October 23

What a month!! N & D operation went okay but did he make a palaver out of it. They get changing him around from one ward to the next until finally they stuck him in a private ward and there he stayed!! I had to go visit him after he came out of op, but not until the evening. However I had picked up my God son from school and was supposed to take him home before I went but his mother did not get home when she said she would be and it presented a decision of whether to take the little nipper with me or wait. So we went.

'Are we lost?' he asked. Now in the dark things look different and I made a slight error of judgement in taking the right street when we came out of the underground so suddenly we found ourselves rather lost. The little nipper pointedly said "Looks like it" There were no streets lights working and it was very dark. I spied a sign 'Londonium High Street'

'Did we travel in time?' he queried.

'No such luck. Just a sign for the Museum of London. Let's sing, I suggested ..' because he seemed to be on the verge of tears. So there we were belting out Jerusalem

at the top of our voices and wandering around the back of St Barts hospital. We did find our way and we nipped up as quick as we could to the right ward. It turned out we weren't really that lost. I just didn't recognise the right road. We walked into the right room finally and there was nearest and dearest with his head swathed in bandages and looking like Van Gogh.

'Did you have brain surgery?' the little voice asked.

Dearest of course couldn't hear so I hissed at the child.

'It's only his ear drum that was fixed.'

It was a nasty sight. Poor fellow was out of it even more than usual and really looked like he had been through the wars. We gave him all his things that he had requested and I fluffed up his pillows and said soothing things. But after the little nipper had explored the private bathroom and fiddled with all the knobs on the bed; he even managed to send the poor man almost out of it and moving backwards I suggested we go. The look on dearest's face along with his twitching fingers as he fumbled for something to either throw or bean the boy with made it clear it was time. I did not look forward to the next few weeks and his recovery. It was not going to be easy for either of us. But I did make a few openings and Bet, Em and G rallied around by sending him cards and dropping in to see if I had strangled him yet. In fact Bet commented on how well I was managing not to murder him. She is in fine fettle this days having met once again the man of her life on a "different" holiday. This holiday involved learning "courses" on psychology and yoga on a Greek island. Her new love seemed all right but then they all do in the beginning. When I told Em she just rolled her eyes and said

'Again!' I told her not to be so cruel. It only happens once and then.

'Once a year you mean.'

'Well, it's good entertainment'

'Almost as good as your escapade this summer. Do you think anything will come out of it. It's breaking the cardinal rule. You know the one. Never date ex boyfriends. They are never better the second time around unless they have have a personality transplant or heavy therapy and then they are even more boring.'

I was about to say 'But this is different' when I remembered it was G.'s and Bet's standard phrase and shut up. I just smugly smiled to myself and thought:

'She will smile on the back of her face when he sends me a plane ticket for Xmas!!!'

However I have had one paltry communications since the ex left and I have emailed him weekly and left a message on his ansaphone. Très worrying!!!

I have a confession to make - I enrolled at the Royal College of Art as a student, trying to get a PhD. It's been on the books for over 18 months but I just kept trying to tell myself I wasn't going to do it. However this summer when my grade school principle asked me what I was doing, I blurted out that I was registering for my PhD. Not completely true. I have to get the MPhil first, then get accepted onto the Phd program. But it seemed to put me in good stead with him which was a lot more than

I ever was when I was twelve and frequently being hauled up to his office for one misdemeanour or another which was never my fault. He beamed glowingly at me and said he always knew I was always special. When I told my older brother, he said he knew I was always a special sad case. As usual all his friends laughed. Some things never change do they. I have never been so scared in my life. Everyone but me seems to know what they are doing and everyone but me looks like they are just out of their first degree... that is until I went the methodology group for MPhil and Phd students and found all the other mature students who felt exactly like me.

ONE big problem is computer literacy. 'Please God can I have an eight year old to show me, instead of the sanctimonious prat who wears a crystal to ward off "the bad vibes, man.' In this, I am not alone. I haven't learnt to speak the right words so that when somebody now says menu I do not start salivating and having visions of chocolate cake and cappuccinos come instantaneously into my mind. For example, one day the other mature student in my department and I went to a special computer literacy course for beginners. Well, let's say some beginners are more beginning than others. Life is not equal. Everyone there was at least 15 years younger than us and with various parts of the bodies pierced and filled with metal. You could hear them coming. They sat there fiddling with their machines while we tried to get it working so we could get our E-mail. A feat that up to now had studiously not been happening. The instructor didn't seem too pleased when he finally realised how much of beginners we both were. So he set us going with some simple instructions but alas even those went awry and when I turned around to gain his attention once again he was not there. In fact the whole class had changed. I nudged the other mature student. He looked at me in disbelief but turned around to humour me. A frown came upon his face.

'They aren't the same ones are they?'

Somehow the group had gone off to do something else and never bothered to tell us. We wandered around in and out of various rooms asking after them. But we were met with blank looks. So we left and cornered a nice German student from graphics to help us in exchange for helping her write a nasty letter to her landlord.

There have been days where I have come home and gone instantly to bed, and only crawled out to get a stiff G & T, a cup to tea, put them on a tray along with the cat and gone back to bed. N & D loves to cook which is one of his few graces. But he is deeply into an Italian phase and we have eaten some sort of pasta dish every night which is not surprisingly putting on the pounds. I asked Bet about this and she said I was far too neurotic to gain weight and I should complain to the chef. I gave her a stern look because if anyone is neurotic it's my closest friends, especially her. AND she is a bit overweight.

One of the other problems is that the gallery space at the RCA is rented out a lot for art functions and I keep finding myself wandering in to look and land up having some scrumptious nibbles and a few glasses of vino before going home. The OTHER

problem is that I go to High Street Kensington tube stop which means I have to pass all these wonderful shops filled with great clothes. It's all more than I can cope with because as usual money is very scarce and becoming even more so with this course.

It's all more than a woman get take at times. ESPECIALLY with the sales!!!

November 15

Still no e-mails or any communications from the ex?????

G meanwhile has gone off with the current candidate for the sperm bank to his house in the country for a cosy week. Em is retraining in computer design and driving everyone mad except N & D who is equally gaga over the medium since he went out and bought a IMAC to help wile away the hours convalescing. Especially since I slammed the door and walked out one day before I smothered him with his own pillow with all his moaning and the general boredom from enforced home encampment. Bet is spending any and all her spare time with new man. She has that glow about her of some one who has a better sex life than you. Which in this stage of my life is not very hard to do at all. Meanwhile I have been trying to work with a curator over a one person show I am trying to have in a small gallery. But the curator keeps having these mini breakdowns and crying because all and sundry has gone wrong in her life. I hold the telephone out at arms distance like I do with Mother and every now and then put receiver to my mouth and say "Oh dear!" or "Of course" and just get on with reading some papers. I am not looking forward to this show which is supposed to open v.v. soon. Been asked to speak and give slide lecture at country curator's gallery near Xmas. Debate whether to accept or not as I might not be here. When I asked Bet she just grunted that she was too busy to go. I got really angry at her:

'It's me they want, not you. Not everything evolves around YOU. I have a love life too you know' and started to cry.

There was a long and very silent pause at the other end before a very little voice said.

'He still hasn't replied or sent any emails yet.'

'No.'

'Well don't lose any money over him. Take the booking. You have been so off key that you have missed some big Openings recently.'

Before she ended the conversation she said. 'I think you better talk to G.' and hung up, I groaned. It meant only one thing. G. had bombed out once again and it was probably very spectacular.

November 30

Been seeing more of the God son than before. For some reason I have had the little nipper several times due to his Mum having a series of late dental appointments for some bridge work. Decided to take him to Tate Modern and combine it with

meeting ex-mature student and his girlfriend for wander around exhibitions. Told them meet us at base of ramp leading into the building. Just before we got to the building we looked up at the sign on the side of the building and noticed a letter was missing so it read ATE MODERN. How appropriate I thought. It gave the little nipper great mirth at the idea of eating the building. We got there on time and he sat down on his knapsack and stared to read. Half an hour later and much fidgeting on both our parts, we left. The little fellow had been so good about the long and fruitless wait that I took him to the cafe and we splurged out on a burger and chips. Just as we seated ourselves who walks in but the two people we had been waiting for a half hour. They glared at us and we at them. They had been waiting at the base of the elevator. I refused to get into a slanging match of who was more right or wrong than the other.

So after our meal we all trooped off to look at Art.

The three large Louise Bourgeois sculptures were still up and the nipper wanted to go up them so he slide down the railings, unlike us who took the stairs gracefully and raced to the shortest queue. After 10 minutes he gauged that the wait would be a more than another 10 minutes and walked off. He had had enough waiting for tonight. The evening was lots of fun and the walk home over the Blackfriars Bridge looking at London at night was thrill for us both. The little fellow turned out to be one of the best dates I had had in a very long time.

Early December

I didn't need to phone G. in the end because I bumped into her at some nondescript opening.

'Boring stuff huh?'

'Spoken to Bet recently?'

'Ummmm....'

'Okay so he was a bit of a dick head like the others. There must be a man out there who is waiting and wanting to be a father to my baby.'

'Not until you ask them first.'

So the story goes like this. The happy week at his country house turned out to be the week from hell with him going completely bonkers driving out of the place in the car before they even spent one night there. She stayed the first night, then knocked on the nearest cottage door which turned out to be the home of two gay women who just looked at each other and said with one accord.

'Again!'

'But', she said. 'She then had a really nice time and spent the rest of the week there. It turned out they knew some people that she knew and one thing led to another and they are going to visit her before Xmas when they need to come to London for Xmas shopping. So what happened to Mr Sperm bank?'

'Oh he... funny how that night of the opening of the Whitechapel show seemed so

perfect and we were all so happy and all our partners were so’

‘You mean everything seemed perfect and they seemed like there was going to be some sort of possibility?’

‘Yea, something like that. Doesn’t seem like anything is going to happen does it with your Ex?’

‘Well it looks less and less likely I am going to Canada for Xmas’

‘Good thing you never said anything to the living dead. Do you think he suspected?’

‘No! He was too busy being a demanding patient.’

So we went home a bit early and stopped into a nice wine bar and had a silent glass or two before going home.

Late December around the 26..... I think

Had four weeks of teaching Conceptual Studies to degree students. What a bunch of ignorant prats. This modular system doesn’t give anyone enough time to actually have an art history!! It’s sort of join the dots and you have a degree. A paint by number scenario!!! Funny thing happened in the staff room though. I wander over to some mates and have a bit of a chinwag when one of the group who I vaguely recognise introduces herself and the visiting lecture from Canada. We blather on and she keeps giving me the beady eye. Of course she should recognise my name. I wrote a not too favorable review of her latest book in a magazine last spring.

‘I am sure I know you’ she scrunches up her face as repeats it again.

‘Don’t I?’

‘No!’ says I emphatically ‘All North Americans look and sound the same.’

This went on every few minutes until I decided enough was enough and left with her still puzzling after me and saying to the rest of the group still saying ‘How do I know her?’

How did I ever get through this last three months. I have had three exhibitions. One with the curator from the loony bin. One where the catalogue never came out and one where I actually never got to see my own show. All did was ship it there and get it back. The Absolute Vodka party for the Artists was a wash out. Sponsored by David Bowie and there was only cheap wine to drink. Everyone left early and complained... I actually managed to read a book and make notes and get some other reading done as well. Nearest & Dearest’s hearing is actually much better unfortunately because now he can hear all I mutter under my breath. I have managed also to have two tutorials that have left me reeling. What have I let myself in for???

Time in studio wasn’t much good either but that has been corrected as I have locked myself in there and told everyone I have gone out of town. Presents this year ranged from the conceptual to the mediocre not the best of years!!! But positively I managed for the first time in years to get all Xmas parcels off to North America before Valentine’s Day. No cards this year mind you. I did not DO cards this year.

There's only so much one can do with one's spare time.

Had a lovely boozy week end up North with country curator. He's a bit in the glums as newest girl friend is not as keen as he is about making babies and starting a family. If he wasn't so far away I would introduce him to G. Funny how they have never met??? Bet is still madly infatuated but lover boy has gone to Australia for 6 weeks. G has sworn off the hunt for sperm donor or is just not telling me. Me, I have heard from ex in the form of a mass produced letter that only North Americans are so great at. They all are boring and they all can not resist bragging. His reads like an 8 year old who is standing up in front of the class and bragging about his holidays. He even managed to eliminate me out of any of the narrative that happened with the wedding fiasco. So in a fit of pique I sent the card and a real stinking mean letter back telling him to get some therapeutic help.

Next year I start going to some decent openings if I can find them and harassing some dealers to take me on.... if I can. It can't get any worse than this year can it????

Diary of an Ageing Art Slut was published anonymously 1997-2004

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