

## The Last Bus to Brickford Lane

By Bill Anderson

Susan Kyle had been trying unsuccessfully to catch the eye of Andy Davis for all of three months, and now unexpectedly due to overcrowding in the works canteen; he was sitting facing her, chatting away like an old friend.

He was everything she had ever wanted in a guy, standing six foot four or thereabouts, dark, and defiantly good-looking.

Therefore, when after half an hour or so of chatting he asked if she would like to go out for a meal that weekend, she jumped at the chance.

Saturday morning and the great day at last arrived, after breakfast she sat with a cup of coffee and a cigarette and started to plan her day.

The first order of the day would be a visit to the beauty salon, for a bit of pampering.

The talk in the office was that Andy Davis was on the way up, well she would make sure one-way or the other, he would not forget her in a hurry.

Getting off the single-decker bus in the centre of town, she made her way to the cash dispenser in the high street, and after drawing out some money made her way to the beauty salon.

The bad news, that when she got there was that they were running late, it would be at least hour before they could see to her.

Glancing at her watch, she did a quick calculation; it had just gone two o'clock.

Andy Davis was picking her up at her home around six thirty, she would be at least two hours in the beauty salon, the bus ride back home would take her at least forty minutes. She would be pushing it; but needs must.

She sighed... "Ok she said resignedly, I'll do my shopping and then call back".

A few days earlier she had seen a dress in one of the stores on the high street; and had remembered thinking at the time, that in a dress like that she would be irresistible to any man... Well to-night she would find out.

She did not know it then, but her day was about to go from bad to worse, halfway through her makeover there was a power failure in the shop's electrical system.

When she finally left the salon two hours later at four forty and she was in a foul mood, and far from

feeling like a million dollars, which had been her aim at the start of the day, she was uptight in extreme.

She glanced at her watch, less than two hours to get back home and make herself presentable. Out of the corner of her eye she caught sight of her bus, and with her coat tails flapping behind her, she pushed her way through the crowds of shoppers towards the bus stop forty yards away, she could not afford to miss it.

By the time she arrived home, she had just forty-five minutes to grab a shower, put on her make-up, and get dressed.

As she undressed, she stomped around the small flat cursing the events of the day, this was not supposed to happen, not to-day of all days.

Because of the shortage of time left to her, she decided that instead of showering, she would have a strip wash at the kitchen sink instead.

She could always cover up any odours that lingered, with a good lashing of perfume.

Thirty minutes later, saw her sitting on the window seat that overlooked the street, smoking, and drumming her fingers on the sill. It was now seven fifteen, and there was still no sign of her date.

The later it got the angrier she became; she had spent money that she could ill afford, on a makeover and new dress especially for the occasion.

Stubbing out the cigarette in the glass ashtray she stood up, "I might as well get into my pajamas" she muttered, he would not be coming now.

She was just about to turn away from the window when the headlights of a car appeared through a steadily thickening fog; she stood watching it as it came to a halt outside her flat.

Getting out of the car, Andy Davis hurried towards her front door.

She should have been elated, or at least happy that he had turned up, instead she was quietly seething at having had to wait so long.

"Well he's not going to get away with it," she muttered under her breath.

When she pulled opened the door to allow him in he hesitated briefly, he looked flustered and had smudges of what looked like oil or soot on the back of his hands.

"Look Susan he said apologetically, I'm sorry I'm late, but I"....

She cut him off abruptly before he could finish the sentence.

"Sorry, she said heatedly, is that all you have to say"?

"I've been sitting here since...she could feel her face redden, since five thirty, you could at least have

phoned, and let me know that you would be late getting here.”

He was slightly shocked by the verbal ferocity.

“I’ve already apologized he said stiffly, if you had given me a chance to finish what I was about to say, I would have told you the reason why I’m so late”.

“Look he said somewhat contritely a few moments later, we still have the most of the night ahead of us, I’ll wash my hands and then we can be on our way.”

On returning to the living room a few minutes later, he apologized once more.

“The reason I’m so late he said is that the car refused to start; I then had to get someone to come out and have a look at it, cost me a right few quid too it did.”

She listened to him without commenting, or apologizing.

Five minutes later they were sitting in the car heading for town; she was still miffed at having been kept waiting for so long, and instead of trying to break the ice she sat staring straight ahead of her without speaking, or even looking in his direction.

For ten minutes or so, he tried to engage her in conversation but to no avail, she was determined to make him suffer for being late.

“Look Susan he said tersely I’ve already apologized to you and told you what kept me late, if it’s going to be like this for the rest of the evening I might just as well turn the car around and take you back home”.

“No” she said quickly, you’re right she relented, it’s not you”.

“I’ve had a pig of a day and it’s not fair me taking it out on you”.

She placed her hand on his and smiled, “let’s enjoy the remainder of the evening”.

“By the way she said, matter-of-factly; where are you taking me for dinner”?

“Patience he said smiling, we’ll be there in a few minutes”.

Five minutes later, he pulled into the curbside and stopped the car.

“Well here we are,” he said smiling at her.

She looked out of the passenger window with a look of puzzlement on her face, and instead of a restaurant or club; all that she could see was what looked like a pub by the name of Dominoes.

Getting out, he hurried around to the passenger side and made to help her from the car.

“Tell me that you’re having a laugh she said scowling at him, when you said you were taking me out for dinner, I assumed that you meant to a restaurant”.

“I’m sorry Susan he said rather sheepishly, that was what I had intended, but as I told you earlier I

had to pay out a few quid to get the car fixed.

Anyway this is no ordinary pub he said in an effort to placate her, I've been here a few times and they do a really nice bar and grill, and there's a great karaoke".

The sound of a door banging hard against a wall caught her attention and she turned towards the noise, a girl of about eighteen or thereabouts, staggered through it and promptly vomited on the sidewalk.

"Right that's it Susan said, either you take me somewhere decent, or we just forget it.

"I didn't go to all the expense and bother that I did, to spend the entire evening in you're local."

"What the hell is wrong with you he said he said bristling with anger, you're face has been tripping you all night. "This is a great way to start the weekend and I don't think; he growled at her."

"What the hell do you expect she shrilled, you turn up over an hour late and then bring me to some knocking, shop dressed like this, and you expect me to be happy about it"?

"Right, that's it he yelled at her, I'm taking you back home."

"Oh no you're not she yelled back, I'll catch the bus".

"Stuff you and you're clapped out old banger"

Getting out of the car she brushed past him and headed towards a bus shelter thirty yards or so along the street.

He started after, but then stopped.

"Stuff you," he said under his breath, and then turning away, he headed across the street towards Dominoes.

She sat in the bus shelter fuming, "dammed cheap skate she muttered, all the money I spent making myself look good for him, and he has the cheek to bring me to a second rate pub".

With all that had gone on during the past twenty minutes she had not noticed the fog closing in, shivering she pulled the collar of her coat up around her ears before lighting a cigarette.

As she sat smoking she caught site of the bus timetable, if it was running on time, it should be here within the next few minutes.

Sitting alone in the shelter, she began to feel uneasy, the fog had really closed in now closing visibility to about ten yards, to make things worse the street was almost deserted.

Lighting another cigarette, she glanced at her watch, it was now eight forty two; the bus should have been here ten minutes ago.

"I'll give it five more minutes she said to herself, and if it has not arrived by then, I'll just have to bite

the bullet and ask Andy to run me home after all.

Finishing the cigarette, she was about to make her way back to Dominoes, when through the ever thickening fog she caught sight of slow moving headlights moving in her direction.

"I hope it's the bus," she muttered, shivering in the damp night air.

The headlights seemed to be taking forever to reach the bus stop, moments later she sighed with relief as the outline of a double-decker bus appeared through the fog.

As it stopped she checked the destination window, the last thing she needed was to get on the wrong bus on a night like this.

Boarding, she entered the lower deck and sat on the long seat next to the platform.

Looking around her she noticed that there were only three other passengers, a middle-aged man sitting on his own, and a couple nearer her own age sitting together.

The conductress, a woman who she imagined would be around forty something was sitting opposite, staring out of the window and completely ignoring her.

Taking her purse from her handbag, she took out enough loose change to pay the fare, and then returned the purse to her bag.

Despite the fact the heater on was on, the interior of the bus was freezing cold.

As yet the conductress had made no attempt to communicate or collect her fare, which she thought strange, and was still sitting in the same position staring out into the night.

She shrugged; perhaps she has had the same kind of day I have.

As the bus continued its journey, she became aware of something strange about the atmosphere, something that she could not quite put her finger on.

She had been watching the other passengers and not a single one had moved since she had boarded the bus, and the couple sitting next to each other holding hands had not spoken a single word to one another which she thought strange.

She shrugged her shoulders, perhaps they had fallen out.

Turning her attention back to the conductress, she could not fail to notice that the woman had not changed position, while continuing to stare out of the window.

She was dying for a cigarette and in two minds as whether or not to go upstairs and have one, she just wished that the woman sitting opposite her would show some kind of interest, and at least take her fare.

The four-mile journey seemed to her to be taking forever even allowing for the weather, a few

moment later, it was as if the driver had read her thoughts, and the bus started to pick up speed.

Minutes later it turned off the main road and onto the coastal road, she tightened her grip on the back of her seat as it continued to pick up speed on the narrow winding road.

"What the hell is he playing at she said under her breath, speeding on a night like this"?

Moments later, it slowed; and looking out of the window she recognized the sign at the crossroads and sighed with relief, she should reach home in about five minutes.

The conductress who had not moved an inch all during the journey suddenly got to her feet, but instead of asking for the fare, she ignored her completely, and climbed the stairs to the upper deck,

"Stuff her," she growled under her breath.

Moments later, the bus pulled into the neat little village where she lived, and getting quickly to her feet she pressed the bell to stop the bus.

As it came to a halt she suddenly felt guilty and left her fare lying on the seat, after disembarking, she watched as the bus pull away and glanced at her watch, it was nine thirty seven.

She stood for a moment and watched as it picked up speed again, "maniac", she muttered before turning and walking towards her flat.

When she opened her eyes sunlight was streaming through the slats of the venetian blinds, and turning on her side she squinted at the bedside clock, it showed the time at eight forty five.

It was Saturday morning; and after rising early during the week, she always enjoyed a lie-in.

Switching on the radio she laid on her lay on her back with her eyes closed, and planned how she would spend the rest of weekend, the disaster of her date the night before, already forgotten.

The music she had been enjoying ended abruptly, and a news announcer came on air.

At first she listened without much interest, and then suddenly sat bolt upright...

"The tragedy happened last evening the announcers voice said, the last bus to Brickford Lane, owing to bad weather conditions, had run off the coastal road in thick fog at round about seven fifteen, and had toppled thirty feet onto the rocks below.

The driver the conductress and at least five passengers on board were all killed".

She was wide-awake now and trying to make sense out of what the radio announcer was saying.

"That can't be right she said aloud, when I boarded the bus it was eight forty seven, and I arrived back here at nine thirty nine. The last bus through the village is normally around eleven thirty.

Dressing hurriedly, she rushed downstairs to the newsagents to buy a copy of the morning paper. The headlines in bold print staring back at her screamed, bus runs off the road, five feared dead. "It has to be a mistake," she told herself over and over, it just has to be.

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