

## Interlude – From the Journal of Sarah Jones - July 21<sup>st</sup> 2020

### Ol' Blue Eyes

Only just made it. Phew. Honestly why am I always in such rush? Is this my seat? Panic. No, yes, that's right. Thank God Steve got a permit to drop me off at the station...I made it. 'Special Dispensation' for heavily pregnant women. Coach F. Seat 71. Here I am. Right place. Phew.

That's it. Nice and slow; no sudden moves...I feel like a whale this morning, and I'm starving. Put the bag of goodies there...I can't wait to have some of that coffee. Feeling guilty. Shouldn't really be consuming coffee (very expensive now) and croissants like a locust. It's official - I am the size of a bus. And that caffeine...the sprog will come out like a speeding chihuahua. Who cares? I need the sugar. What a world...

Oh now. He looks nice...bit squidgy round the edges. But nice eyes. Blue. Don't know why I ended up marrying a man with brown eyes. I've always preferred blue.

- Does that seat ticket say...Kings Cross – ah great!

Blue Eyes speaks!

- Why? Is that your seat?
- No. No. It means they're not getting on. I can put my bag there.

He lifts his great big black computer bag into the spare seat next to me.

- You don't mind do you? You can put your bag there if you like? He smiles.
- No. No, not at all – Yes, I'll put mine there too.

Nice smile. Oh God what am I thinking? Eight months pregnant and I'm flirting with a man on a train. How completely naff. That's the trouble with being up the duff: everything's haywire. And it has made me so...horny? No, that's not quite right. Just interested. As if my body's always on the lookout for something...is it some kind of primal defence mechanism...are my genes looking out for some kind of protection? 'Single pregnant female. Vulnerable. Looking for safety. Biologically predisposed to seek male approval and protection'.

- Only just made it. My wife couldn't drop me off at the station. No permit. Had to run.

He speaks again – His wife. Wonder what she's like? Is she a whale?

- Oh. I had to drag my husband out of bed but he had permission. Whales get a permit!

He laughs. There. The signal is exchanged, the status established. Although mine has already been established by my whale-like condition, of course, deluded cow! Smile again. Flash of blue eyes. Oh stop it. Time to work. Got the laptop out...Now concentrate. I need to sound at least half coherent at the seminar...ho hum.

Peterborough arrives. Good, no-one's getting on. Me and Blue Eyes have the table to ourselves. I can spread out a bit. Have my coffee. Yum.

It seems so odd to be still working, with what the world is going through. I'm very keen to get on with it. It's my first proper gig since I got my PhD. I don't want to be cheated out of it by anything as trivial as a global catastrophe. It is so strange how some things just seem to go on, even though so much has suddenly changed. I called and they said the University is still open and the woman on the phone sounded really surprised, like it was odd of me to wonder if their Gender Studies Programme was still going ahead, what with half the world's major cities underwater! It reminds me of what people used to say about the War. So many people's lives changed utterly whilst others just 'kept calm and carried on'.

What is it about strangers, like Ol' Blue Eyes? They can be so...alluring, anything you want them to be. I wonder if he's caught on that I'm writing this and not working on my lecture about the 'social construction of sex'? Maybe I am working on my paper about the social construction of sex! Here I am, pregnant, feeling low, as you do, no more than what you feel when everyone around you is a size 10 and you have to buy your clothes from the tent shop, you just need the affirmation...and just a flash from Blue Eyes there and my day is made! Is that shallow? Where's the feminist in me gone? But maybe that's it. Maybe it's not shallow. Maybe it's quite deep actually. I mean, that feeling I felt. It was not submissive, it was...it felt, so...predatory. Like I'm a...praying mantis or something. Like a deep physical sensation of 'come here I want you'...  
Woah! Let's just leave that there shall we? I mean I might have to go for a pee soon, and I just can't imagine what Ol' Blue Eyes there would think if he sneaked a peek at this?! Oh the headlines:

"Gender Studies Lecturer writes explicit seduction letter to stranger on train..."

Anyway it's not about Ol' Blue Eyes is it? It's about me. It's about how all sorts of things seem to conspire all the time, to knock the stuffing out of my feminist sensibilities...

Why is it that when you are pregnant, it's the women who are the worst? In public places they just seem to emanate a sort of ...malice. Not all of them. Older women can sometimes be nice. But younger ones, especially those who look like mothers themselves. It is so seductive to look to some kind of superficial biological explanation. Like the female dogs that have a maternal pecking order...but I 'know', at some level that that is just some kind of trap – the internalised spectre of a social derived construct – I end up feeling the feelings in my waters that I'm meant to feel in order to support the dominant conversation about how I should be as a woman, and then AFTERWARDS look for some kind of paradigm, pseudo-scientific, biological or otherwise, to support the hypothesis. It starts with the feelings. Being pregnant is all about your body sensations. Everything feels so...heightened. Hyper-aware. It isn't just the baby kicking or that stuff. It is like everything...my organs, my skin, have been bathed in some kind of special balm and I feel so...sensitive, sensual, sexual yes, but not just...more hyper-aware. On guard but also...so interested in everything.

Not all the time obviously. Sometimes, actually most of the time, I just feel knackered. It's only in the mornings. It started in the vomiting phase. I would puke my guts out and then afterwards, I'd feel like 'Wow! I've really woken up now!'

Of course, you could equally argue that these women aren't behaving like dogs, but like women conditioned into that hostility by human hierarchies, which they've internalised, including that of the dominance of the 'scientific' and the belief in their 'natural, biological difference'. And maybe my generalisation about them is my own conditioning. The mote in my own eye...

I've got to pee! Can't bear the idea that Blue Eyes might read it when I've gone. Save it. Ol' Blue Eyes – July 21<sup>st</sup> 2020.doc. Now: to pee...

Back at my seat and the trolley's here and Ol' Blue Eyes is buying himself a drink. I feel a bit naughty writing like this. It seems voyeuristic. It IS voyeuristic. But aren't I just doing what we all do? Watching. Making up stories about strangers? Only difference is I'm writing it down. As autoethnographic research. Yeah right. But it IS research. It is so interesting, spotting things - catching yourself in your seeing of them.

Blue Eyes has just taken out a wallet. I say wallet but it looks more like a purse. Quite sort of ponsy and feminine. And what I notice is my whole idea about him has changed. That one act – that one performance with that one artefact, and...well, the truth is I've gone off him. Just like that. Like a switch has turned. He still seems nice, but, it's less...in a fancy-able way. Surely we're not programmed to like Armani wallets and be less attracted by some kind of ...what is it exactly? A grubby hippy purse? It's such a construction, such an artificially derived set of meanings. So devoid of inherent quality, so totally bound up with the meaning of *this* thing in *this* time...you could argue it is all wired up to some kind of mainframe underneath... a biological drive to watch out for the most 'fitting mate', the best protector of my unborn child from the woolly mammoths etc. etc. but why would a silly little purse have such a strong attachment?

I can't help thinking it's much more to do with the fact that I used to be bit of a hippy. It's about those idiot boys I used to hang out with; those dope smoking dolts who pretended to be so right-on but actually just wanted to get their leg over like the men they pretended they weren't. That's what that stupid purse reminds me of! It's that idiot Alan, who I went to Biarritz with, and he surfed all day, I got bored and all he ever wanted to do at night was shag, the jerk.

So the jury's still out of course. There must be some kind of deep link between the biological, hormonal stuff and the social meaning. No doubt. I can't sit here, feeling seethingly morning-pregnant and say that the body doesn't come into it. I do feel deep physical drives. But thereafter? It is all so bound up with the way we see things, the way we are supposed to see things, according to own ghosts of gender conditioning. The way our performances are tied up, internally as much as externally...perhaps more internally than externally, with the cultural meanings. Being pregnant, everyone notices and treats you in a different way. They expect you to behave in a different way. I can feel it: that internal click that registers if I do something someone disapproves of, which for some people is just to be there, in their world, being a pregnant women. Sometimes people can just feel hateful and I feel their gaze as a pressure to just go away and hide in a cave somewhere and stop facing them with their own primal origins.

Isn't it what Foucault said about the 'cop in the head'? That internal disciplining that ensures each individual acquires the appropriate inner language; conditioning them to perform the required external performances, like being a woman, the 'right kind' of a pregnant woman, on a train? And definitely not to be the kind of pregnant woman who wants to take 'Ol Blue Eyes off into some dark corner. Thank God for his naff purse. I suspect that Foucault was never morning-pregnant. But did he *ever* understand what it felt like!?

Ol' Blue Eyes has put his purse away but somehow the spell is broken.

At least I know now what I want to talk about at this seminar.