

# *For Ruby*

First published in the UK in 2016 by Nosy Crow Ltd  
The Crow's Nest, 10a Lant Street  
London, SE1 1QR, UK

Nosy Crow and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered  
trademarks of Nosy Crow Ltd

Text © Fleur Hitchcock, 2016  
Cover illustration © Robert Ball, 2016

The right of Fleur Hitchcock to be identified as the author of this work  
has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs  
and Patents Act, 1988

All rights reserved

I 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of  
trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated in any  
form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. No  
part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval  
system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission  
of Nosy Crow Ltd.

Printed and bound in the UK by Clays Ltd, St Ives Plc  
Typeset by Tiger Media

Papers used by Nosy Crow are made from wood grown in sustainable forests.

ISBN: 978 0 85763 638 6

[www.nosycrow.com](http://www.nosycrow.com)



## Chapter I

The bus stops for the millionth time and I look down at my phone for the millionth time.

A little envelope appears in the corner of the screen. I click on it.

It's my sister, Zahra.

*What you gonna wear to the party?*

Staring out of the window at the thousands of people stumbling along the pavement I imagine my wardrobe, mentally discarding clothes that I can't possibly wear to the end-of-term party: too cheap, too old, too "princessy".

My green dress? Just right. Not sure about shoes

though...

*Dunno. You?* I text back.

*Dunno*, she replies. The bus creeps forward. There's a long pause from Zahra.

My phone buzzes again.

*Can I borrow your black jacket ☺ ☺ ☺ ?*

We judder to a halt. There are even more shoppers now, in layers. The ones nearest the bus fall on and off the kerb, jamming along faster than those in the middle who struggle past each other, pulling their shopping close, their faces grey under the street lights.

☺ *In x change for purple platforms* ☺ I type.

I press send and a huge woman comes and lands her enormous bottom on the seat next to me. She's got a ton of shopping and she's too hot and I can see a bead of sweat trickling down her skin just in front of her ear. She's damp. Hot and damp.

She glances at me, and then looks away. Then looks back again.

"Unusual that," she says.

"What?"

"Mallen streak, it's called, isn't it?" She puts her hand up to her hair. "The white bit."

I nod. I know it's unusual, but I like it. It makes

us special, me and Zahra and Dad. Black hair, white streak. Hereditary. Like skunks, or Cruella de Vil.

The bus makes a dash over a set of lights and I find myself staring at a new set of shoppers. We head towards one of the huge Christmas window displays and I get my phone on to the camera setting so that I can take a picture for Zahra. It's difficult to get a decent shot, there are so many people in the way, but I hold it up ready to click. We judder to a halt and I start taking photos even though the windows are slightly further ahead.

*Click*

*Flash*

*Click*

*Flash*

*Click*

*Click*

What was that?

*Click*

Looking through the viewfinder, I see a man. He's in a gap in the crowd. He's tall, with curly hair. Ginger hair, I think. Everyone else seems to be rushing past him but I notice him because he's standing still. There's a woman there, she's still too. They're arguing. He disappears as the crowd swirls

around him. A couple with shopping bags swing across the view, some kids, a large family, but my eye goes back to the man the moment he reappears.

*Click*

*Click*

He's holding something.

*Click*

Is that a gun? He's drawn a gun on her?

I keep taking the photos, and the flash goes off half the time and then the man looks at me and so does she. I take another photo and he runs and the bus pulls away, stop-starting through the crowds all the way down to Piccadilly Circus.

I stare back up the pavement but I can't even see the lights of the department store now. The woman next to me gets off, and a bloke reading a book gets on. It's all really normal, but what have I just seen?

Was that a gun or not?

I flick through the photos.

There are quite a few where the flash just reflects on the window, one really good one of the window display, and then three blurry pics of the man and the woman. Two from the side, one straight on, looking right at me. I zoom in on his hand.

Definitely a gun. Or definitely the barrel of a gun.

A man holding a gun? In Regent Street, ten days before Christmas.

The time on the photo is 17.14. It's only 17.26.

I swallow, feel sick, excited then terrified. I doubt myself.

But he *did* have a gun. I've seen enough movies to know that's what he was holding.

The bus swings down towards Trafalgar Square. People pile on and off and I look at the pictures again. I text Zahra.

*I've just seen something really weird – scary.*

*What?*

*A man with a gun on the street.*

I look around on the bus to see if there's a policeman. Or should I jump off and look for one on the street?

*Whaaat? Are you OK?*

*Yes – I'm OK.* I type, but my hand shakes and the phone shakes with it.

*Come home,* says Zahra.

Waterloo Bridge whizzes by and I jump off at my stop and wait, shivering, for the next bus to take me home.