

VOTEZ 'OUI'  
AUX  
IMPÔTS

LE CANARD

# ALMOST NOTHING HAPPENED

BONJOUR

HELLO

GARE DU NORD

BILLET DE TRAIN

MEG ROSOFF

BLOOMSBURY



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**ALMOST**  
**NOTHING**  
**HAPPENED**

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The Bride's Farewell  
There Is No Dog  
Picture Me Gone

**ALMOST  
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HAPPENED**

**MEG  
ROSOFF**

BLOOMSBURY

LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY YA  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK  
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain in 2024 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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

ISBN: HB: 978-1-5266-4618-7; TPB: 978-1-5266-4619-4;  
eBook: 978-1-5266-4615-6; ePDF: 978-1-5266-4614-9

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY



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# 1

Eurostar was showing a twenty-minute delay, which was perfect because if I didn't get something to eat before I boarded the train I'd have to eat my own liver.

I joined the queue for a sandwich with my mate, Moe, and texted home that we were running late. They were picking me up at St Pancras and might want to leave later.

Immediately the text went through, my phone rang.

Dad.

Moe clocked my expression and raised an eyebrow. It was incredibly noisy in the terminal, but he could see something was up.



I let it go to voicemail. Whatever it was, I didn't want to hear.

My dad knows I can't stand talking on the phone, so a phone call must be something completely urgent, like MI6 just got in touch to say there's a bomb on your train. If that were the case, I figured he'd follow up with a text.

Maybe I was overreacting. I stared at the phone, wishing technology had advanced enough to send a precis of whatever topic the person on the other end was planning to raise. It would be good for avoiding break-up calls, or rejections of any sort. Moe once told me that all bad news comes by text, so maybe I shouldn't have worried.

We squeezed on to a low table between seats to eat our sandwiches in peace, an impossibility given Moe is six-foot-two and we were surrounded by the whole European Adventures Abroad team all muttering into headsets like they were running security for Taylor Swift. Just now, they were distributing UK

passports to the younger kids, threatening that if anyone lost theirs, they'd have to stay in France forever. Some of the kids seemed to consider this a good thing. I guess you never know what's going on in someone else's family.

My phone rang again. I ignored it with mounting dread. What was so important that he had to talk to me before I got on the train?

I was prepared for bad news thanks to extensive life experience. And although I made light of my depressing summer because what else can you do when kids your own age are risking death crossing the Channel on inflatable bath toys, still, it was dispiriting. Not that I felt sorry for myself in the wider scheme of things, I'd just hoped it might have gone better.

My phone rang again. Oh God. No way!

Three calls in ten minutes? Someone had definitely died. Or maybe my parents were getting divorced and he wanted to break it to me slowly – he'd tell me in

France that they weren't getting along too well, and by the time I got to London, Dad would be running off with a girl my age or Mum wanted an open marriage. Or maybe he'd taken that job in Dubai (what job in Dubai?), where the temperature made life impossible and drinking was punishable by flogging. Or wait. Could Mum be pregnant? At fifty-six? Please God, no.

I knew this sort of thing would happen if I let them out of my sight for a whole summer, but honestly, I cannot keep watch over the elderly twenty-four hours a day. Do you have any idea how depressing it is not to trust your parents to act normal for one short month?

Shit. Shit. Shit. I switched the phone off and dropped it in my pocket.

Moe looked at me. 'Do not seek misfortune,' he intoned, quoting his Tai Chi master. 'It will find you in its time.' And then he smiled beatifically.

'So, if my Dad's planning to take a job in Dubai and sign us up for an international school famous for

the execution of homosexuals, I should just chill because I'll get the news eventually?'

'Live, laugh, love.'

'I can't live-laugh-love if I'm being stoned to death.'

Moe frowned. 'You're not gay, are you?'

'Not at the moment.'

Moe was off again. 'Knowledge speaks. Wisdom listens.'

'And anyway, you are. What if you want to come visit me?'

'Not happening. Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened.'

'How have I lived without your crappy wisdom all summer? Let's go to Duty Free.'

'For what?'

'Distraction.'

I took the last bite of my sandwich and tried to reckon with the weird feeling in my head. Suddenly I couldn't chew because I couldn't catch my breath

and my jaw ached and I was pretty sure I was having a heart attack. Oh Lord, breathe, breathe. I was going to suffocate any second. Shit. A panic attack. Why now, particularly? Though panic attacks often hit me in airports and train stations. Maybe it was the word ‘terminal’ that set them off.

Moe stared at his phone, oblivious. Was there a bag I could breathe into? Was there a friend I could depend on?

We got to Duty Free, me sweating, swaying, unable to catch my breath.

Moe drifted over to perfume to douse himself in Chanel No. 5.

Would they let me buy a bottle of vodka if I claimed a medical emergency?

*Bonjour mesdames et messieurs, l’Eurostar numéro neuf zero trente-et-un, départ à 13:12 à destination de Londres St Pancras, est prêt pour l’embarquement, voie six.*

Across the waiting area, EAA camp counsellors

with CIA headsets had started to corral everyone on to the train. Checking for bags left behind.

‘You OK, man?’ Moe looked concerned at last. He smelled like Marilyn Monroe.

I told him I needed the toilet and he said he’d meet me on board.

What a car-crash of a summer. And how appropriate for it to end in a full-blown outbreak of existential distress.

I moved like a zombie towards the toilets, locked myself in a cubicle and dropped my head between my knees. My heart clanged in my ears. Oh God oh God oh God. Make it stop.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

Time passed. The waves of nausea began to subside. I heard another announcement.

*Attention please, Eurostar number 9031 to London will depart from platform six in ten minutes. If you are in possession of a ticket, please board the train immediately.*

Ten minutes? Oh Christ. I lurched to my feet and ran back to the gate, where the last few stragglers were hurrying down the ramp. I arrived just as the bored train attendant reached to clip a rope firmly across the entrance.

‘*Allez vite. Dépêchez-vous.*’ She imbued the words with the same urgency she might have used to say, ‘Nice hat, Grandma.’

I stopped. Stared. At her. At the rope. At the train below on the platform. At all the happy returning language students exchanging stories of brilliant achievements and memories that would last a lifetime.

And then I hitched my backpack over my shoulder and reversed my trajectory. At the bottom of the ramp, I could just about see Moe gesticulating wildly, saw him drop his arms in astonishment as I turned away from the ramp, away from the train, away from the boarding gate, away from the waiting area, away from customs, away from my miserable summer,

away from whatever new challenge my parents had planned for my welcome home ceremony, away from everything I couldn't stand about my life and myself, down the stairs, away from Gare du Nord and out on to the streets of Paris.

Behind me, the train pulled out of the station.

Ping. A text from Moe.

'What the hell, man? What happened?'

Almost nothing happened. That was the point.