

Jackie Kay

I Try My Absolute Best

- I give my kids pure apple juice
(no sugar less acid than orange)
buy my baby soya milk formula
now she's off the breast
(non-dairy, no cholesterol, good
for their little hearts – apparently
their arteries can harden before five
even). Water from the purifier.
- 10 Perrier if I'm feeling flush
(they can always pretend it's lemonade).
Carob-coated date bars. Cherry or banana.
And there's a shop down the street
that is selling organic vegetables
(no sprays, no chemicals).
Only to find the bloody English apples
are being sprayed with alar and are
carcinogenic; the soya beans are cooked
in aluminium pots which give off deposits
- 20 in the brain; the cartridge in the purifier
collects things (like knickers if they're not changed).
Perrier's got benzene in it, which gives rats
cancer. Though I personally don't know any rat
that drinks Perrier, do you? And them
so called Health Food Bars contain more sugar
than the average Mars Bar. What's the use
in calling anything organic when
the bloody soil's chock-a-block with lead?
- 30 I try my absolute best
drink decaff coffee to pipe me down
instead of hype me up only to find
out from my eldest daughter
that what they put the beans through
is worse for you than an ordinary
Nescafé.
- I'm back on Valium.
My kids are stuffing Monster Munch
and Mars Bars down them.
- 40 My youngest son even ate a hamburger yesterday.
It's driving me crazy.
I says it's your pocket money,
do what you want with it.



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Dusting The Phone

I am spending my time imagining the worst that could happen.
I know this is not a good idea, and that being in love, I could be
spending my time going over the best that has been happening.

The phone rings heralding some disaster. Sirens.
Or it doesn't ring which also means disaster. Sirens.
In which case, who would ring me to tell? Nobody knows.

The future is a long gloved hand. An empty cup.
A marriage. A full house. One night per week
in stranger's white sheets. Forget tomorrow,

You say, don't mention love. I try. It doesn't work.
I assault the postman for a letter. I look for flowers.
I go over and over our times together, re-read them.

This very second I am waiting on the phone.
Silver service. I polish it. I dress for it.
I'll give it extra in return for your call.

Infuriatingly, it sends me hoaxes, wrong numbers;
or worse, calls from boring people. Your voice
disappears into my lonely cotton sheets.

I am trapped in it. I can't move. I want you.
All the time. This is awful – only a photo.
Come on, damn you, ring me. Or else. What?

I don't know what.

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Attention Seeking

I'm needing attention.
I know I'm needing attention
because I hear people say it.
People that know these things.
I'm needing attention,
so what I'll do is steal something.
I know I'll steal something
10 because that is what I do
when I'm needing attention.
Or else I'll mess up my sister's room,
throw all her clothes onto the floor,
put her gerbil under her pillow
and lay a trap above the door
a big heavy dictionary to drop on her
when she comes through. (Swot.)
This is the kind of thing I do
when I'm needing attention.
20 But I'm never boring.
I always think up new things.
Attention has lots of colours
and tunes. And lots of punishments.
For attention you can get detention.
Extra homework. Extra housework.
All sorts of things. Although
yesterday I heard the woman say
that I was just needing
someone to listen. My dad went mad.
30 'Listen to him!' he said. 'Listen!
You've got to be joking.'
Mind you that was right after
I stole his car keys and drove
his car straight into the wall.
I wasn't hurt, but I'm still
needing quite a lot of attention.

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Sassenachs

Me and my best pal (well, she was
till a minute ago) are off to London.
First trip on an InterCity alone.
When we got on we were the same
kind of excited – jigging on our seats,
staring at everyone. But then,
I remembered I was to be sophisticated
10 So when Jenny starts shouting,
'Look at that, the land's flat already,'
when we are just outside Glasgow
(Motherwell actually) I feel myself flush.
Or even worse, 'Sassenach country.
Wey Hey Hey.' The tartan tammy
sitting proudly on top of her pony;
the tartan scarf swinging like a tail.
The nose pressed to the window.
'England's not so beautiful, is it?'
20 And we haven't even crossed the border.
And the train's jazzy beat joins her:
Sassenachs sassenachs here we come.
Sassenachs sassenachs Rum Tum Tum.
Sassenachs sassenachs how do you do.
Sassenachs sassenachs we'll get you.
Then she loses momentum, so out come
the egg mayonnaise sandwiches and
the big bottle of bru. 'Ma ma's done us proud,'
says Jenny, digging in, munching loud.
30 The whole train is an egg and I'm inside it.
I try and remain calm; Jenny starts it again,
Sassenachs sassenachs Rum Tum Tum.

Finally, we get there: London, Euston;
and the very first person on the platform
gets asked – 'Are you a genuine sassenach?'
I want to die, but instead I say, Jenny.
He replies in that English way –
'I beg your pardon,' and Jenny screams
40 'Did you hear that Voice?'
And we both die laughing, clutching
our stomachs at Euston station.

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