

# Primeminiisterial

Usually two words, here presented as one to title the exhibition.

Footballers salute, watched by a crowd of literally thousands.

A political fashion artefact, positioned to look like like a visitor to the exhibition, who is looking at the drawing of footballers.

Pot pourri.

On a break from his studio work, the artist goes into town and makes a new friend.



James Whittingham | 14.12. – 30.12.2018

# Town

On a break from his studio work, the artist goes into town and makes a new friend

Trains pull into Central Station, arriving from other parts of the forest and we all disembark, all of us, Mrs Montgomery, me and the remaining passengers from our train, and the many other passengers disembarking from the many other trains. We merge into one. Now we are one crowd and excited to be a part of it: the hustle and bustle of town.

I can see it upon their faces and they can see it on mine, what a wonderful town. We are all looking forward to Christmas. No wonder, the Christmas decorations are always wonderful here. The decorations were nice last year and are nice every year in fact. Local people from all over the forest design the Christmas decorations and send their designs to a place that turns their ideas into reality, and at Christmastime we go to see our decorations hanging over Main Street. During the rest of the year, evenings in town are lit by neon signs and advertisements on the buildings. Town is only small but it dazzles all who come here, and all who come here are all the inhabitants of the forest. This is our town.

Upon leaving Central Station I part ways with most of the crowd but not all; some people go one way, some another, some go yet another and the rest go in one of a number of possible different ways, all in all the crowd breaks apart and nothing of it remains where it once was. The great hall of Central Station is quiet once more, and only some cleaners are there cleaning, and trains-workers, the workers who work the trains, swap batteries between the engines and a machine where they recharge, and fully charged batteries between machine and engines. The trains-workers give the trains a final once over and off they go, ferrying people back to the most distant parts of the forest again.

I'm glad I live out in the forest. There are a few who live here in town, townspeople they're called. When do they get to use the trains or see the forest? I guess some of the people I see on the trains are townspeople going for a day out, a trip into the forest, just a ride on the train, but I get talking to a man named Baz at the café where we are both queueing for a cocoa and he sets me straight. Baz invites me to sit with him. Baz tells me he lives in town and walked here this morning from his cottage.

'You needn't get the train when you live in town,' I said.

'Oh, you can,' he assured me.

'Why though,' I asked intrigued, 'when you could just walk it?'

'There are trains that go the width of town,' he said, 'And although it isn't a big town, from one side to the other, walking takes too long,' but this morning he said he had walked.

'Lovely fresh air,' I said.

'Yes,' he said, 'very lovely.'

I mention how townspeople get to live in town but never get to see the forest by train, and that's a shame. He says that's a common misconception. 'How so?' I say. He says he knows that's what people say about [us] but they're wrong as he himself is a worker and uses the trains to travel out into the forest to fix the trains and do forestry work, like cutting down trees and so on.

'Living proof,' I said.

'Indeed,' he answered.

'Well I am sorry. You learn something new every day don't you.'

'You sure do,' Baz replied.

Baz and I slowly finish our cocoa. It's Baz's day off from work. He has cocoa all round his mouth. I tell him and he looks

embarrassed and wipes it off. His hands are very much worker's hands, I tell him. All the workers round here have the same hands.

'Thank you,' he said, 'I am what I am.'

'By the way...,' he went on.

'What is it, Baz?'

'Oh, nothing.'

When we leave the café the wind knocks us back in. Leaves whirl in the air and bob in puddles leftover from the rainfall earlier on. We're out on the street. Baz says he needs to buy some cat food. 'Oh, do you have a cat?' I ask. 'No,' he says and I'm confused. We go into a small supermarket and he selects a nice one for Tinkerbelle. We stroll back to his cottage.

What is Baz short for? I ask. 'Bazzzzzzzzzz,' he jokes. 'Oh Baz you are hilarious,' I say. We arrive at his cottage and we go in. A cat runs to us.

'Is this Tinkerbelle?' I ask.

'Yes.'

'Hello Tinkerbelle,' I say and Tinkerbelle meows back. So you do have cat?'

'No,' he repeats.

'Tell me about your work, do you like it,' I ask.

'Yes, it's ok.'

'What goes on out there?'

He laughs loud and tensely, 'You live in the forest, you know what goes on out there.'

'Well I'm just at home mainly, I don't know what you workers do for example, where you go. Do you have a little workers' hut or something?'

'Oh. Yes there are tool stores, various buildings, places with beds you can nap in if you're sleepy, bunk beds. There are also kitchens.'

'See, I never knew that. I thought there was nothing in the woods except trees and houses.'

'Yes they're dotted all over.'

He asks if I would like to see his uniform. I say yes I would really like to and follow him to his bedroom down a creaky corridor. Tinkerbelle follows behind, overtaking as we enter the room. Tinkerbelle jumps onto the bed which is positioned next to the window. 'I like to see outside when I'm sleeping,' says Baz. Outside I see trees and a small garden, the colourful trains going up and down Main Street, and people walking on the pavements. An elderly couple stooped to look at the display in a shop window then stood up and laughed with each other kindly before continuing their promenade, arm in arm along Main Street.

'Do you have a significant other?' I asked Baz.

'Tinkerbelle,' he replied.

'Oh yes,' I said, 'Of course.'

A gap in the weather. Out came the sunshine from behind rainy clouds, and light reflecting off all the wet surfaces of Main Street illuminated puffs of steam rising from the trains, and entered the bedroom. This change in light conditions inspired me to take a photograph. I pointed my camera at the window and pressed the button. At the click, Baz turned to me from his wardrobe.

'You don't mind do you?'

'Bit late now,' he said.

'So are you a pro photographer?'

'It's my job, yes,' I said, 'And my passion.'

'It's good to have a passion. I'm just a simple worker. I don't see things the way you do.'

'Baz that's not true, look at your beautiful cottage. Look at this display and all these nice flowers. And the way you dress. I could tell as soon as I saw you, there's a man with an eye.'

'You really think so?'

'Yes. You have an eye.'

'I have two eyes,' he joked.

'Do you have any others?'

'I might...'

We kissed. He pulled away almost immediately and looked at Tinkerbell. Tinkerbell looked back, like cats do.

'Listen, thank you. But we can't do this.'

What, because of Tinkerbell?

Tinkerbell jumped off the bed and ran down the corridor.

'Fuck,' said Baz.

'Forget Tinkerbell,' I told him.

'What?' he shouted.

'Don't shout at me Baz.'

'Look. I'm sorry.'

'I think I should leave.'

'OK. I understand,' he said sadly.

'But Baz, what were you going to tell me earlier?'

'I don't remember.'

'Outside the café.'

Baz shrugged, 'I don't remember.'

'OK I suppose I'll be off then. Well, it was nice to have met you. Goodbye.'

'It was nice to have met you too,' he said and held my hand.

I shook his hand, in a kind of decisive way, 'Bye bye Baz.'

Out on the street I crossed the road to look through the shop window where the elderly couple had stood. Mrs Montgomery was walking down the street, talking with another old lady I often see with Mrs Montgomery in town. She keeps an eye on me while saying goodbye to her old lady friend then comes towards where I was standing.

'Do you know that you have chocolate all round your mouth?' Mrs Montgomery said.

'Mrs Montgomery, that's the first thing you've ever said to me.'

'And it won't be the last.'

'What do you mean?' I said.

But she didn't say anything more.

'Look Mrs Montgomery, do you want to come for dinner tonight?'

Mrs Montgomery looked surprised at first. She thought for a second. Then lowered her head very slightly, almost like a nod.

'OK, 8?'

She nodded the same way again.

'Well. See you at eight!'

Mrs Montgomery continued down the street and left me with the shop window display, which contained miniature scenes from about the town.

**James Whittingham**