

Vanished

Monday, Clapham Junction station. 11am.

Janet anxiously looked at her watch. Ken had been in the loo for what seemed ages. What was keeping him so long? Another few minutes and they would miss their train.

“Excuse me,” she spoke to a man coming out of the men’s toilet. “Can you please tell my husband in there to hurry up.”

“There’s no one else in there,” he answered.

“Where can he have disappeared to? We have a train to catch!” Janet berated herself for turning her back on Ken even for a moment. She had thought that telling him to wait for her to come out of the ladies loo would have been enough.

Janet walked up and down the platform calling out Ken’s name. He was nowhere in sight.

No one at the ticket office had seen him. What’s more they weren’t at all sympathetic or helpful when she told them about Ken’s dementia. Janet felt close to tears. She and Ken had been waiting months for this hospital appointment. There was nothing for it but to go back to Watford. And wait. Other than informing the police that Ken had gone missing, what else could she do?

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30 miles away in Stratford, East London, Carol Richardson was busily going through her Tuesday morning cleaning routine. This sunny weather was all very well but it didn’t half show up the dust on her windows! Looking out she saw a man wandering down the road, behaving oddly. He would walk down a path, turn around, walk back and then walk down a path again. “Hello!” She called out of the window. “Can I help you? Are you looking for someone?”

The man appeared not to have heard her but continued to wander up and down people’s front gardens. He seemed lost and confused. “He doesn’t look like a burglar,” Carol said to herself, “but I’ll give the police a call, just in case.”

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Back in Watford Janet, who hadn’t slept all night for worrying, leapt to the phone when it rang. It was the police. A man meeting Ken’s description had been found wandering on an estate in Stratford. “Stratford!” exclaimed Janet, “that’s where we lived when we were first married. I wonder if he could have been looking for our old house?”

It turned out that Ken had come out of the men’s loo and, not seeing Janet, had wandered onto another platform and got onto a train going in the opposite direction. Janet sobbed with relief when the nice policeman on the phone said they were bringing Ken home. Where had he spent the past night? No one knew. Least of all Ken.

“Mum!” Her daughter berated her later that morning, “I know it’s hard for you but it’s time you did something! You have to accept that it’s not just dad who disappeared but that his mind is disappearing too.”