

The Un-drunk glass of water

Transistor radio performs a slam-dunk in Clapham

It was one of innumerable terrace houses, part of the suburban sprawl that accompanied the extension of various tube lines. Number 36 served as the Jones' family home from the mid-1960s to late in the second decade of the twentieth century. With the family now grown up, its five bedrooms on four levels (if you count the basement) now housed only one permanent resident.

Yet the house was always full: as well as occasional lodgers and visiting grandchildren, it served as a point of *rendez-vous* for the extended family of Joneses from Shropshire and Wales, who would occasionally stop on their way to somewhere else. Cousin Sue was thus *en route* to visit her younger son in Spain, and as there was at that moment no spare room for her, I was asked to share my room, on the second floor at the back of the house. I had never met Sue, but had heard lots about her and I agreed: it was only for one night, and it would be a favour.

On the eve of Sue's visit, Thomas Jones wondered aloud whether they had enough gin in the house. Margaret pointed to the litre bottle she had bought and a bit left from her last visit. "Yes, but will that be enough?" My mental image of Sue thus fleshed out a bit more.

The house was in darkness when I returned at about 23.30 the following evening. I knew something was wrong the minute I closed the front door behind me: I could hear snoring. "Odd, nobody snores in this house!" Then the penny dropped: Oh no!! The sawing wood, loud enough to be audible at the other end of the house, yet was not loud enough to drown out the transistor radio still playing beside her bed.

I had already half decided to sleep on the sofa in the sitting room downstairs, but for some reason tried to turn off the radio. As with most similar models, there was no obvious Off switch, so the best I could do in the dark was to fiddle with dials until it stopped making a noise. I then put it back, but what I couldn't see was that the table was piled with her belongings, so the radio slipped off toward the bed, taking with it a glass of water that it encountered on the way. Retrieving the glass and placing it back on the edge of the table, I was intrigued that the floor was still quite dry. It seems that the contents of the glass had somehow gone entirely into Sue's handbag on the floor between the table and the bed. Not a drop seemed to have escaped. You couldn't do that if you tried.

Now I had two possible courses of action, but I decided that any attempt at damage control was fraught, as a woman disturbed from her gin-induced slumber might take unkindly to the sight of a stranger emptying her handbag. From what I knew about her, she was unlikely to have a mobile phone, but probably did have a chequebook and probably notebooks, which may or may not survive the inundation.

So I left things as they were and went to sleep on the sofa. But, concerned that everybody would be upset that I had not been comfortable, at about 5.00 I came back to bed. The snoring having now stopped and the radio silent, Sue woke at about

7.00 or so and came to introduce herself. I said I owed her an apology as I had changed the tuning on her radio. She said that was OK, but “what’s really curious, is that I left a glass of water beside my bed and the glass is now empty - but I can’t see where the water has gone!”

The Joneses are nothing if not good-humoured, and still delight in recounting the discovery adventure unleashed by the (apparently unprecedented), and very public, emptying of Cousin Sue’s handbag.