

**A love&travel short novel**

SABRINA BARBANTE

LONDON

POEMS  
IN MY HAIR





## LONDON

### Poems in my hair

*A [very] short love&travel novel by Sabrina Barbante*

After a couple of very frenetic days, I came to the conclusion that there were two things that I really had to do in order to save my 'honor'.

First of all, I had to give 5 more pounds to Charles, the guy who sold me my useless but beautiful gramophone I'd bought from him, with no other reason but that it was sold by him.

Secondly, I had to buy at least a stupid record to justify my purchase.

I hardly remembered how to arrive to that pub where Charles worked, and I was even feeling a little guilty for not calling Clara and ask her to come with me.

In the end, I was going to see the guy she liked. But I knew she was working, and that I didn't want to wait for other days before doing my duty and.... and and and.

I just had to give 5 pounds to someone. Attractive. Well, when Clara called me that morning I told her I was going to the supermarket. I lied. And that I was not supposed to come home right away. Second lie. But actually I didn't mean to go to the pub and stay there for more than 5 minutes. If she came with me I would spend there at least one hour and find something else to stare at, and buy, while she was talking to Charles.

'I'll go, I'll give him the money, I'll leave'. I thought. So, I went, I gave him the money.

And... And I smiled at him (well, he smiled at me first). And he said something like 'how are you' or so. And I just answered to one question he made.

- Are you enjoying your gramophone adequately? You know, it's a shame if you don't use it.

- Well, I don't have adequate resources, presently, to allow the object to make the work that it was meant to - my way to look around was adequately ridiculous - BUT, there are good possibilities that the present use of this gramophone can be the one of a very good esthetic exposure till...

- Jasmine, sorry, I don't get it...



– Well, I don't have records, ok? Not yet..

He laughed. A lot. Noisily.

– I can lend you some of them.

– No, you cannot. Oh, I mean, no need to. I'm just going to buy some. Right now. So, bye bye.

I turned around to leave. He stopped me.

– Where are you going to buy it?

– Oh, well... any suggestions? – I love me so much when I act like the fooliest of fools!!

– If you wait half an hour we can go together.

– Oh, no, please. I feel like... walking, alone. Do you just have some suggestions?

– Well, yes. – He looked quite surrendered right now. I was glad of it.

– There is a small shop in Holland St. There you can find good prices and records of so many artists. The old man who works there is an expert. You can ask him no matter what and he'll find it. Then there's Camden, Notting Hill... and e-Bay.

– I'll go right now. In Holland I mean. Thank you, really. Bye.

I did nothing. There's nothing wrong in the fact that I just said 'bye' and he answered 'bye'. The fact that he added a kiss to his bye is not my fault. No, it's not.

Well, it was not a kiss, but it was a lip-to lip contact. Just this.

I tried not to think about what happened, since it wasn't but an unwilling lip to lip contact. I could pretend not to think about it till I arrived in Holland street. There, it was like I could feel Charles's smell, as if he had a kind of bakelite perfume on him.

'I have to take a couple of Jazz record and go away. It can take no more than 5 minutes'. I thought.

And, in fact, after 4 min and 20 secs I was about to pay, but an old lady talked to me.

Well, it was not immediately clear she was talking to me... since she called me Lizzy.

– Lizzy, hey Lizzy.

I looked around and behind me. No girls and she was looking at me. I just... smiled and looked for the rest of my money in my wallet.

– Lizzy, you should not have your hair cut. You cut your hair. You should not.

She smiled.

I had no choice but answer, since she came closer and still looked at me.

– Oh, lady, I'm afraid you're wrong. I'm not Lizzy.

– Sure you are.

The man of the shop intervened.



– Mary, she’s not Lizzy. Have you heard of her? She is – he looks at me  
– Melanie. – I said.  
– She’s Melanie – he told her, as if it was an obvious thing.  
So, I understood she was an old acquaintance in that shop.  
– You know, Lizzy – Lady Mary added – if you cut your hair, how can anyone hide some poems in it?  
She left.  
I paid. And left. And, since it’s proved I’m insane and senseless, I followed Mary.  
– Mary! – I called.  
– Yes, Lizzy.  
– I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be rude... It’s just...  
– Yes, Lizzy?  
– It’s just I’m not Lizzy. I’m Melanie. But... I hope someone will write a poem about my hair. – I smiled and looked for some money to give to the old crazy lady.  
– No, Lizzy, not write. Hide. Someone will hide poems in your hair.  
– Oh, sure.  
I gave her 5 pounds or so. She took them.  
– But... I really think it will take long, so long, before someone will hide poems in your hair.  
She left, tilting on her way. Singing

*White his shroud as the mountain snow,  
Larded with sweet flowers,  
Which bewept to the grave did go  
With true-love showers.*

She left me a bit disappointed. I’m quite sure no one will ever write poems about me, nor ‘hide poems in my hair’, but if the crazy man/woman of the street tells you something, foresees something without even knowing you and refusing to accept your name, most of the times what they say is true.

Upset, I don’t feel like going home. I’m close to the Tate Gallery. I wish I was closer to the National Gallery. I haven’t been there for a while. Three weeks maybe. I can’t stay for so long without a brownie, without a glass of white wine and without a visit to the National. But... I’m close to the Tate now, it’s a piece of desires I can substitute.



And there I re-discover the fascination of the Tate Gallery. I last came here at least five years ago, the very first time I came to London.

I was quite sure I hadn't seen the preraphaelites the other time. Or I simply ignored them. Or they weren't here then. But I spent something like one hour just watching and getting lost in some of their portraits. Why the hell were those paintings so interesting to me?

- Self celebration? – Someone said, as if it was an undesired answer to an unasked question.

I turned around and saw a big (very big) black woman. She had the uniform, she was a guardian.

– If you like those pictures so much, this should be a kind of self-celebration.

She rectified. – You see, you definitely look like Elizabeth Siddal, the woman portrayed in so many of those pictures. Have you noticed you really look like her?

Oh, God, she was right. The long (very long) red haired woman in Rossetti's portraits such as 'La Ghirlandata', and even the singing-and-sinking Ophelia of Millais... looked like me.

– Oh, well, thank you. I think I don't look so... medieval, but it's a very nice compliment.

– They portrayed Elizabeth as medieval, because that kind of damsel in distress, delicate and epic was what they loved and wanted to see. But she was not like that. Look at her, look good. She was so strong, look at her eyes and strong features.

– Was she strong?

– Well, yes, modern I'd say. Brave. She was a poor model, who was able to wait many years so persuade her beloved to finally marry her. Even if they lived together. She needed marriage. It was a social matter.

Like today. But he was a rich asshole. And when he finally decided to get married with her, the woman he loved, she was already sick and had already gone through several breakdowns. And she soon died.

– Poor her – said I, looking at her fierce eyes. – Who was the asshole?

– The painter. Dante Gabriele Rossetti. Talent is not enough to make a true man. And he was a poor asshole, in love and loved by a woman who was too much for him. When she died he was desperate. And he put poems in her hair, in the coffin.

– What? – I was astonished.

– He did. And then he took the poems back after some year, when he was becoming blind, to have them published. The friend who was with him said she was still beautiful, as if she was alive. And that her hair was longer, still growing.



– Really? How is it possible?

– Well, his friend was a famous mentor. But the most beautiful fairytales were born out of a lie.

– He buried poems with her. In her hair? I can't believe it...

– Oh, come on miss, is it the first romantic story you've heard? Have you ever heard about Romeo and Juliet? Enjoy miss.

And she left, ignoring the true reason why I was so astonished.

And she left me so puzzled.

I looked at 'Lizzy' Siddal for another little while, then I went home thinking about the old crazy lady.

She told me I must not cut my hair, to have some poem left inside it.

But when someone will do it, this means I'll be dead. Or that I'll die for someone.

I put a record on.

Amazing sound.

I started reading. Or working. Back to (this amazing) real life, for that day I tried to stop thinking about what an amazing fairytale can be born out of a lie. One of mine, also.

The social and historical importance of a lie. Interesting.

I'll write a novel about it one day

*Editing and English review by Antonio Aloisio*