

## **Corporate Entity 21,288 (and Robert)**

By Verity Sharp (UK)

7.30am, my alarm rang (Classical FM). I had to get up, jump in the (power) shower, dry my hair, brush teeth, dress. Leave.

I have to leave at 8.00am every morning.

I picked up my black umbrella from the puddle where I had left it, took a perfunctory glance in the mirror (Ikea £12.00, on sale) and pulled down the front of my single-button black jacket (Next), whilst thrusting my stockinged feet into my black court-heeled shoes (size 6.5), with white stitching (to match my blouse). I turned around and lifted my briefcase from the hook on the wall. I reached for the double-lock on the front door.

I have to be at the bus stop by 8.45am (or else it is too full and I can't get on).

On the street I balanced my briefcase between my knees, as I undid the fastening on my umbrella and opened it with as soft 'whoosh'. I replaced my briefcase securely in my left hand and set off at a brisk pace (clip clop, clip clop), the rain drops making a soft 'pup-pupping' sound on the taut material above my head.

Chin parallel to the chewing-gum patterned pavement, eyes straight-ahead (avoiding eye-contact with my neighbours, not that I know them anyway).

I arrived at the bus-stop at 8.39am and took my place behind a well-proportioned (from behind, at least), bespectacled brown-haired man (corporate entity 21,289 perhaps?). The bus arrived and the queue moved back (like line-dancers "five six, seven, eight...") to avoid the muddy rain-water that it sprayed onto the kerb. I closed my umbrella (gave it the regulatory shake) and produced my Oyster card from my left pocket.

The bus takes between 15 and 25 minutes to get to Waterloo Bridge.

The bus took 23 minutes to get to Waterloo Bridge. I rang the bell, stood up, pulled down the front of my single-button black jacket (Next), and stepped onto the pavement. The rain had stopped; there was no need to release my umbrella. I crossed the road and entered

Starbucks, “two regular cappuccinos, please”, I left holding them on a cardboard tray in my left hand (briefcase now in my right, along with closed umbrella). I walked towards Aldwych, and stopped in front of Aldwych House.

Robert (so-called because the first time I gave him coffee he quoted “O my luv’s like a red, red rose”. Ironically he is Scottish) is a homeless man. He sleeps (on cardboard, in a red, mildewed sleeping bag) in the doorway of Aldwych House. One day (over a year ago) Starbucks got my order wrong and gave me two cappuccinos. I gave the spare one to the first homeless person I saw; Robert. Since then I have ordered two cappuccinos every (weekday) morning. Robert takes the coffee, and graciously grants me a few lines of 18th century poetry (and then uses the cup to collect spare change in for the rest of the day).

That morning Robert wasn’t there.

Robert wasn’t there on Wednesday either.

Or Thursday.

Or Friday.

Or the week after.

I returned home from work. I walked up to my front door, retrieved the key from my briefcase, leaned my briefcase against the wall, and undid the double lock. I picked up my briefcase with my right hand. I stepped over my doormat (“Home, Sweet Home”), hung my briefcase on the hook on the wall, kicked off my black court-heeled shoes (size 6.5), with white stitching (to match my blouse) and turned to face the mirror (Ikea £12.00 on sale), and saw corporate entity 21,288 staring back at me.