

Museum Pieces

by Jake Barnes

I ride the tube in London. I stand outside before descending the stairs and read the messages the whores leave. I spend my days in Hyde Park and the British Museum. In the museum, I attend the lectures. The lecturers are retired professors from Oxford or Cambridge. They are snarky and wise and aloof. They do not abide a crying baby in the audience. One talk is about the Magna Carta. A monument to tyranny, the old prof. says.

I see a beautiful girl in a market and follow her around. Suddenly she is standing in front of me, hands on hips. She is hopping mad. "What do you want?" she asks. I smile, shrug, melt away.

I see a play in which Alec Guinness has the lead. I see the debut of West Side Story. The Brits go nuts at the American Hit. I get into both for fifty cents.

My friend John W. is in town visiting his mother. John is a doctor on the staff at the University of Minnesota. Over there he wears a length of rope instead of belt to protest his meager salary. He takes me to his mother's house, and I meet his mom. She is a tiny, chipper old lady. When we walk in the door, a smile lights her face. "I've just been watching the tele!" she says.

