

The Missing Matches

To the memory of Emma-Jane Mackay, British Gas Customer Relations

Scene: A man beside a tent, who is looking around him perplexedly, is approached by a jolly man, who is carrying a box of matches.

- Jolly man:** Hi! I borrowed these yesterday.
- Perplexed man:** *(after a pause)* You borrowed them?
- Jolly man:** Yeh.
- Perplexed man:** From my tent?
- Jolly man:** No.
- Perplexed man:** Where from then?
- Jolly man:** This table.
- Perplexed man:** This table beside my tent?
- Jolly man:** Yeh. But I didn't know they were yours.
- Perplexed man:** Did you not assume they belonged with the tent?
- Jolly man:** Maybe. I didn't think about it much. I needed a match.
- Perplexed man:** As did I, this morning.
- Jolly man:** Not sure I get you.
- Perplexed man:** You borrowed them yesterday and didn't bring them back till this morning.
- Jolly man:** I've brought 'em back this morning.
- Perplexed man:** Late this morning... I need them early.
- Jolly man:** I had things to do.
- Perplexed man:** I needed them. They were mine; not yours.
- Jolly man:** Shouldn't leave them lying around then.
- Perplexed man:** So it's my fault you took them?
- Jolly man:** I didn't know they were yours.
- Perplexed man:** You knew they belonged here. When did you take them?
- Jolly man:** Last night.
- Perplexed man:** Time?
- Jolly man:** Don't know.
- Perplexed man:** Roughly.
- Jolly man:** About 7.
- Perplexed man:** I was here. I was either in the tent, briefly; or in the washing up room.
- Jolly man:** *(indicating)* I think I saw you going that way.

Perplexed man: Ah! And you took my matches.

Jolly man: The farm shop was shut.

Perplexed man: And you took my matches.

Jolly man: Borrowed 'em, mate.

Perplexed man: For half a day.

Jolly man: I only used a couple.

Perplexed man: And deprived me of all the others.

Jolly man: Like I say, I only used a couple.

Perplexed man: And left me to go through everything in my tent, lift everything up several times, until I came to the extraordinary conclusion that some sneak had taken them.

Jolly man: You're out of order there.

Perplexed man: I'm out of order? You knew they belonged to someone here. You saw me going away from here. Then you took them. Sounds sneaky to me. Do you know how many thefts there are in this community when there are no outsiders?

Jolly man: I wish I hadn't brought it back if this is how you react when someone returns your property.

Perplexed man: There are none. No thefts. Crime comes in with us. Along with selfishness and bullshit. You could have borrowed my matches if you'd asked. You could have brought them back immediately.

Jolly man: You're fucking crazy. It's only a box of matches. I'm off.

Perplexed man: Don't touch anything of mine again.

Jolly man: Or you'll what? Eh? What'll you do?

Perplexed man: Please grow up.

Jolly man: You haven't got an answer to that, have you?

Perplexed man: Apart from euthanasia, you mean?

Jolly man: What?

Perplexed man: Go away, please. I'll even let you take the matches if you promise to set fire to yourself.

Jolly man: What like a Buddhist monk?

Perplexed man: Like something irreparably damaged.

Jolly man: What?

*Performed by Lawrence Upton and Tina Bass at **Writers Forum Workshop**
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Perplexed Man*