

READING

Without a mobile phone, you basically don't exist

1 arranged to meet a friend after work the other day. I live in north London, and Bill works in Battersea and has just had a child, so I do the decent thing. We arrange to meet at 6.30 p.m. in an upmarket pub near his work for food and drink.

5 I go to the gym in the afternoons, sometimes. The gym's round the corner from my house, so I change before and after at home. Anyhow, on this occasion, after donning my PE kit, I promptly lock myself out of the house. No wallet, no keys (obviously), and no phone. I consider going to my girlfriend's work, but I'm not too sure where it is.¹ _____, or at least not in this instance: she has only just started a new job, so I am not yet certain of her office address. Also, I don't want to embarrass her by meeting her new colleagues in my disgusting gym outfit.² _____, there's little for me to do other than to make my way to Battersea.

Without an Oyster card or money, I walk. It takes about an hour and three-quarters, and I enjoy it very much, this time spent away from communication.³ _____, not stopping to check messages at traffic lights. I have freedom to think, to dream. I remember with delight that I bought Bill dinner last time we met, and with my long, brisk walk as justification – much more honest and hearty than the gym –⁴ _____, with three pints of bitter or perhaps even four, and borrowed money for transport home.

20 I get there early. The pub is really fancy, more of a restaurant in fact, albeit one selling posh pies. I wait outside, people-watching. Glamorous girls walk past, eyes lowered. One clutches her handbag tighter. After a bit, I pretend that I am jogging, and do some stretching exercises across the street. A policeman stops and looks closely at me. My friend, of course, does not show up.⁵ _____, because
25 without Bill, I know that I am walking the whole way back.

After two hours, the situation eventually becomes untenable and I head home, my spirit broken. I am ravenously hungry. I arrive home just about six hours after I left. Luckily, my girlfriend has returned from her job at... that place.

30 Whatever. I have two dozen missed calls from Bill, some emails and voicemails,⁶ _____. In between wolfing the contents of the fridge, I phone him. He had emailed me in the afternoon, it transpired, to say: 'I'll be at my work, text me when you get down this way and I'll come down.' Not receiving any such communication, he assumed I was late or in transit. Eventually he went down to the pub to check.⁷ _____. It was for him beyond the realms of plausibility that I hadn't received any of the emails, texts, or calls.

Now that we're all connected constantly, addicted to updating our status and tweeting what we're up to, we can hardly conceive of someone not being contactable for even a few hours. Something as simple as 'I will see you in the pub at half six' has become not a firm arrangement, but a basis for negotiation. If you're not on your phone, you can't be contacted. To other people, you might as well not exist. And the worst of it? Those pies looked really nice.

Glossary

Battersea an area in south London

Oyster card a travel card used on public transport in London

pie /paɪ/ a typical British dish consisting of meat and vegetables enclosed in pastry

a pint of bitter approximately 0.5l of British beer

By Alan Tyers in The Telegraph

b Read the article. Tick (✓) the things that the journalist did that day.

- ☐ He agreed to meet near where his friend lived.
- ☐ He changed into his gym clothes.
- ☐ He went to the gym.
- ☐ He tried getting his girlfriend to help.
- ☐ He went to Battersea on foot.
- ☐ He thought about what he was going to eat at the pub.
- ☐ He jogged the last mile to the pub.
- ☐ He felt self-conscious while he was waiting outside for his friend.
- ☐ He waited for some time, but then gave up.
- ☐ Someone lent him the money to get home.
- ☐ He regretted having missed the pub food.

c Read the article again and complete the gaps with phrases A–H. There is one phrase you don't need.

- A With a break from Twitter, from email, from calls
- B but by then I had gone
- C increasingly frustrated and pointed in tone.
- D my thoughts turn to some sort of substantial pie
- E Needless to say, I wait a long, long time
- F but I understand with phones these days it's all about 3G and 4G
- G This is not because I am a distant or disinterested partner
- H With no access to my phone, or Bill's phone number

LEXIS IN CONTEXT

d With a partner, say what you think the writer means by the following phrases:

- 1 do the decent thing (line 2)
- 2 donning my PE kit (line 7)
- 3 with my long, brisk walk as justification (line 17)
- 4 albeit one selling posh pies (lines 20–21)
- 5 the situation eventually becomes untenable (line 26)
- 6 wolfing the contents of the fridge (lines 31–32)
- 7 beyond the realms of plausibility (line 37)
- 8 not a firm arrangement, but a basis for negotiation (lines 43–44)