

## Moments of Story

Shopping is never a simple task. Even if you set out with a single item written on a list, circled as if to remind you not to spend too much time or money you get caught in the flow of branded bags and daily footfall. The glittering windows beckon you with red and white discount announcements that hang from what you know is invisible string but still seems like magic. But look again behind the store fronts and shoe shine, you'll see a community that lives and breathes in small moments of story and conversation everyday of the week.

On Monday it's the big food share, a lunchtime affair where tables are pushed together in a massive platform, lunch boxes are emptied and trading begins. You can swap an English cheese sandwich for an Indian lamb samosa, some Lebanese homemade hummus for Japanese sushi or French soup. And when your stomach is full with that continental tour, shisha is smoked in celebration of good food and company.

Tuesday is dedicated to massages. A long line is formed that snakes past shops, up stairs and down escalators. Arms outstretched and shoulders relaxed, random strangers take away the tension of a long days work.

Wednesday hosts the learning centre. A magical mix of agony aunt and personal development. Here you can learn Arabic, Spanish or Hebrew. You can seek advice on the best way to get rid of moths, or how to decide between the latest BMW or Mercedes.

Thursday is reserved for the dream factory where people gather to exchange their aspirations of being a personal trainer, of a world where the only drink is Malteser milkshake and chocolate is currency.

And to welcome the coming of the weekend, on Friday arrives the Smile Stand, a makeshift kiosk selling anything from half a cheek-lifted to the full grinning beam.

Shopping is never an easy task. Even if you set out with a single item written on a list, circled as if to remind you not to spend too much, every now and then you get caught by the invisible. The mix of cultures, characters and ambitions that live between walking in and walking out.

### Yemisi Blake



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