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ZACHARY ROWE

On The Train

The train halted violently as it traversed the rails and slid by the freight train that was at a standstill. The train jerked backwards before coming to a full stop. The sound of the train wheels were masked by the sound of droplets hitting against the window next to me. I looked around the car I was in; half of the passengers were completely oblivious to the fact that we had stopped. My eyes took note of all of the passengers who were wrapped up in their computers and headphones and of those whose thoughts were suspended in deep sleep. That was also when I saw her.

She was in the row next to mine. The grayness of both the train and the world outside made her short and bright pink hair stand out. Her light skin was shadowed by the bright colored hair, with shades of bleach blond appearing in the light of the small reading lamp provided by the train. Her nose was practically buried in a book, but I couldn't make out the title or what the cover looked like. She was beautiful, even with a book for half of her face. I imagined that her face looked both timeless and current. A face that would rival Helen of Troy's, but was seen on the silver screen. A face that Homer would've dreamed of as clear as day in his mind, but now a reality, sitting cross from my aisle, seemingly hiding from Minerva, Juno, and Aphrodite behind her book. And I imagined all of this beauty from half of her visible face.

Were I a braver man, I would've said something. Perhaps I would've said "Excuse me? Do you know why we've stopped?" or, "What book is that?"

Perhaps she would've responded with "I don't know" or "A freight train's blocking us; it'll have to pass before we can get going again." Perhaps she would've said she was reading *Fifty Shades of Grey* or *For Whom the Bell Tolls* or some kind of biography.

I imagined her to be literate and deep. I imagined that she used to read for fun before she came to college, but now she can't help but to pick out things she

learned from her classes or can't help but to examine what she's reading.

I saw her respond to my question in my head:

"I'm reading *Fifty Shades of Grey* to see its similarities between the *Twilight* saga," or, "To see if it's an accurate representation of the BDSM culture," or "A friend recommended it to me and gave me her copy for the weekend."

I thought about her response to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*: "I've read his book, *In Our Time*, and thought I'd see how his writing grew and evolved."

I imagined her telling me that she was reading a biography on James Joyce or Sylvia Plath or Ernest Hemingway or Lydia Davis. I imagined myself responding to the fictional banter, saying that I've read *Ulysses* or *The Bell Jar* or *In Our Time* and *The Old Man and the Sea* or how I've read Davis' *The Cows* and how she was a teacher at my university. She would ask where I studied and I would tell her "At the University at Albany." She would ask me for my name and I would ask for hers. Even in my thoughts, I would hope that she'd like the sound of my name and I would casually say "Likewise." She would ask me about my major and I would tell her English, hoping she would laugh or respond with disgust, allowing me to defend it by saying the noble phrase "I want to be a teacher." I imagined that she would smile wide; a pretty smile, like her hair color. I'd ask her if she was in college. Maybe she'd say yes and mention a college that I would know little about. Maybe she would say yes and that she was studying at Albany for English as well. Maybe she would say no and ask me for my opinion about Albany. Maybe I would tell her that it's a great school full of opportunities and that the writing institute is on campus. Maybe I would tell her that it's not what I had expected, but it's still a good school with caring teachers. Maybe I'd tell her that it's a party school. Maybe I wouldn't say anything until I knew more about her.

Maybe we would chat about music or hobbies afterwards or talk about interests. Maybe we would talk about where we were from. I would tell her that I'm from Liverpool, a small suburban area next to Syracuse. I would hope that she was from some place nearby. Maybe she was from Syracuse too. Maybe she was a bit further away, like Buffalo or Rochester. Maybe she was from Utica. Maybe she was from Albany and simply visiting friends while on break. Maybe she was from a small suburban area like mine and just enjoyed train rides. I imagined that she felt lonely in those train rides, like she had in her small suburban area or at her commotion-filled college. Maybe I would've told her that I felt the same way and that we could be lonely together. And maybe she would've laughed it off. Or, maybe, she would've thought that it was a good idea.

Suddenly, the train jerked and started moving forward. My glasses and her book fell onto the aisle floor. I froze. Everything was still. Raindrops stopped racing down the window, staying in place where they landed. But my mind was still running; "Now's your chance." But my hesitation lasted too long, long enough for the freight train to get by, long enough for us to reach the next sta-

tion. I saw my glasses, then the hand that was holding them up, and then the person the hand was connected to.

“Thanks.” It was all I could manage to say before she got off the train and walked into the raining, gray world outside. The train started moving again and the rain started running down the window once more.