

Night Train

January 1997, revised Aug 2010

In the eerie silence
Of the vast desert plains,
A tiny village
Is about to sleep.
Little thatched huts,
Glimmering with kerosene lamps
The star-lit sky,
Matched by another one beneath.

Mantras from evening prayers,
A baby's wail in the distance,
A lullaby floats in cool night air,
Crickets singing in the bushes

Flash of lights,
Thunderclaps,
The train zips by-
In one quick dash.
Serpent squeals, a clatter of wheels
Breaking the fabric of silent peace.

Mantras drown, the wail stutters
Clitter, Clatter, hisses, buzzes,
Deafening roar of the steel monster
Overwhelms, flushes, silences.

The noise recedes,
As quickly as it came.
Diminishing, vanishing
Yellow spot in the distance

The mantras resume
As if by magic,
Everything heals.
It is a matter of time
The crickets are singing again.

MISSED

CONNECTIONS

Note: Missed Connections is a section in some online magazines and print media where one could post a notice to connect with someone after missing a first chance

1. Grey shirt, can't bear missing you

You were the curly-haired guy in grey T-shirt who sat in the far corner of the library on Nicollet Sunday afternoon. I was the nerdy girl in dark-rimmed glasses who feigned interest in the *Unbearable Lightness of Being* you were holding and made some silly conversation while never lifting my eyes from your dimpled cheeks, kind eyes. Low chance you would see this. Still, coffee some time?
PS: Love your shaggy beard

2. Looking for the happy girl

Hey you, the girl in dark-rimmed glasses- We sat in adjacent cars waiting for the lights at Washington and Cedar late last weekend. You seemed so happy, carefree, singing loudly to yourself until our eyes met and we checked out each other. I was the mean looking girl in purple hair who stuck out my tongue at you. Your free spirit spreads such joy. Maybe a movie next weekend? Drop me a line, I don't bite.

3. Purple hair and perfect rings

Ten thirty pm, Sunday. Landmark movies. We were both taking a smoke break after a disappointing Ethan Hawke movie. You blew rings and winked at me. I tried blowing rings. And failed. I was hunched over because my trench coat is not made for March in Minnesota. You had a certain air that I would like to breathe. I want to feel that purple hair. If you see this, send a line to that skinny guy who can't blow rings.

4. Did I lose you for ever?

Seven years ago, we became room-mates at Spring Break. I said I was from Blue Earth. You said you were from Mars. We did everything two boys could possibly do. Still can't figure why you left- is it the three dreaded words I said? I still see your shadow in our usual corner in the library. Swing by sometime. We will just talk. Or remain silent. I am reading Kundera these days. You? Do you still smoke?

Distracted Driving

No officer, I was not distracted while driving

No officer, I do not do this all the time.

No officer, I was not calling for help.

Yes officer, I understand that screaming is a nuisance.

Yes officer, I can pass you my license and registration.

No officer, I have never been in a mental institution

Not thus far

No officer, I did not intend to bother other drivers
during evening rush hour.

Bear with me Officer,

I screamed in the car because

I have not screamed for a while

I hold it in in the morning,

smile and talk softly all through the day,

Play with my children and feed them at night.

Officer, I screamed in the car

because it is my one private space

Between meetings at work

and household chores at night.

No officer, I did have my windows down when I screamed

No officer, I have not had anything to drink.

Please let me go officer,

Don't shoot me officer,

I have kids to pick up

Arrhythmias

Breakfast is served at eight 'O clock sharp in the dimly lit ground floor hall where flowery wallpaper with ivy reminds me of glorious 70s and roaring 80s.

There is gardening at ten followed by soup and sandwich at noon; which I am allowed to take to my room with a newspaper that should be returned.

Manuela stops by at 1pm. 'Did you take your pills, Maam'? she enquires in her rough voice with heavy accent. I nod, she checks the dispenser to be doubly sure.

Esther from next door stops by. Her son is in town, she will be out for four days. Esther looked upbeat in her yellow skirt. The bright lipstick on her pale face barely concealing her excitement.

There is bingo at two pm (for those who can't nap)... I pretend to nap and close my eyes. I imagine Esther with her grand kids walking the beach. The beach never seems to end. Esther dissolves into the sea.

There is dinner bell at 5pm. Early birds with acid reflux gather under the ivy and say grace. We pray. We pray for our good health. For our children's happiness. I pray for a new day. A day when there are no scheduled naps or bingos.

A day when blinking ambulance lights won't wake me up at night.

A day when I will be as happy as Esther but still ready to go .

Peacefully.

Dead Ant

You avoid my eyes,
Shake the snow off your head, wipe your feet hard on the mat and bring in the chill.
I search what remains.

For what else is left
this evening, tomorrow and day after; as winter turns to spring; and still-
You avoid my eyes.

Dinner is quiet.
Store-bought, so no one cooks for the other; none to thank, none will blame or yell-
I search what remains.

For what's left behind.
Joint pains, no joint accounts, just joint breathing in of apartment air- dank, stale.
You avoid my eyes.

The old bed looks vast.
Our preferred sides didn't change over the years; we moved farther to the sides until
I search what remains.

Shared room, shared past-
Stuck together in an undesired space like that dead ant on the window sill.
You avoid my eyes,
I search what remains.