

THE CROSSING

The delay was almost an hour. The lack of air conditioning or any ventilation combined with hot jets of menopausal heat to stain Mira's t-shirt. She drank mineral water from a large bottle and felt the downward flow pressing uncomfortably against her bladder. But she didn't think you were supposed to use the toilet if the train was lodged in the station. Outside, train after train were supposed to use the toilet if the train was lodged in the station. Outside, train after train pulled out for parts unknown. Norm would've gotten off long ago after complaining about Italy's failed economy, the validity of ethnic stereotypes, the folly of romanticizing travel. She would have followed him.

But now she was staying put despite the ordeal. There was not only the delay, she was alone. The face to face blue vinyl seats, sticky now in the heat, were for four passengers. They folded into a bed and above each one was another bunk bed. When she had booked a so-called couchette, she had imagined the compartment attaining a slumber party atmosphere. That she was the sole occupant -- the train was nonstop -- made her feel foolish and lonely. Maybe she should have asked Ben, the retired scientist man she was dating, to accompany her. But she wasn't ready to bring him as her escort for her son's wedding in Sicily. Besides, she liked the idea of travelling amongst strangers, being alone but not actually alone.

Mira tried again to get interested in the frayed copy of The Odyssey on her lap, but found she couldn't concentrate. So she took out some postcards purchased in the station. One showed a photo of the front of a gleaming Trenitalia train rambling down a track as if it was about to crash into the viewer. She scrawled a message on the back: "Sitting on the night train bound for Sicily" and wrote her home address. Sending a postcard to herself was an old habit. As a teenager when

she received a postcard view of a sun setting over pristine water, she was reminded of the best parts of that trip to the Bahamas. Not the fight with her sister or jelly fish sting.

Another half hour passed. Finally, without warning, the train jerked forward. The electricity snapped on and cool air flowed into the compartment. The train departed the station slowly, like a runner getting his footing, and then increased speed until it settled into a steady rocking motion. Through the encroaching darkness, Mira barely made out buildings sooty and crumbling, patches of weeds littered with empty pasta boxes, plastic bags. Gone was the elegance of the Spanish Steps and the smart stores of the Via Condotti and the tiered grandeur of the Coliseum, which she had spent the afternoon exploring. Instead there was just the uniform ugliness of poverty.

Sliding open the door, she treaded her way along the rumbling narrow corridor. to the toilet. Behind the other compartment doors were ebony-skinned, lanky Africans in colorful prints, women in hijab and shapeless long dress coats, hard-faced children toting enormous bags that engulfed them.

How far this was from the Italy she'd fallen in love with almost 40 years ago. Back then the country was filled with young men in tight pants and hair black as shoe polish who looked like Al Pacino. Women tottered on spiky high heels with gold crucifixes bouncing around their exposed cleavage. That was summer of her freshman year in college when heartache – an unexpected break-up with Howard, the pre-Med she was dating – prompted Mira to buy an unlimited Eurail pass which took her all over the continent. She met her counterparts from around the world: Australians on their leisurely seven-month tours of the continent; Germans outfitted with sturdy sandals and rucksacks who were efficient and thrifty; Iranians who had fled

the revolution and were living as refugees in Paris or Turkey wondering if they would ever be able to return home.

Mira traveled solo with no set itinerary or reservations, loving the freedom of jumping spontaneously from country to country. And she let herself go sexually on that trip, sleeping with several men including those she never would have considered back home, including a high school dropout turned U.S. soldier stationed in Heidelberg. This was the age before AIDS. The most to be feared was getting pregnant or a bad reputation. But she was on the pill and no one had a reputation while travelling. Only once had it been scary. She had been on a night train somewhere in Spain when a middle-aged Frenchman seated next to her started rubbing her upper thigh. She'd bolted up and ran into the café car where she spent the rest of a sleepless night, terrified she'd almost been raped. But a few days later she had met a good-looking Israeli on a train in France and accompanied him into the bathroom to have very uncomfortable sex. It was fun to flirt and feel desired, come together and so easy to separate. Never, and never since, had comings and goings been so easy.

The toilet was filthy, apparently others had not waited until the train moved. Mira willed herself not to look into the hole as she enjoyed the relief of uncorked pressure. When she returned to the compartment, she found she had company. There was a young man sitting opposite her seat, having apparently spent the delay elsewhere. He was slight, wearing frayed jeans and a simple blue t-shirt. Around his feet, encased in plastic sandals, was an oversized and overstuffed nylon bag with holes crudely patched over with Scotch tape. She guessed he was in his mid to late-20s, older than her only child. His face had that unblemished look of youth, with a soft olive sheen, darker than most Italians, and the faint outline of a mustache. Thick dark hair

fell into his eyes; if she was his mother she would have told him to get a haircut. Yet there was a weathered look about his appearance as if he had experienced life beyond his years.

Mira smiled at him in greeting. He nodded wordlessly. But did she detect curiosity? She wasn't sure as he turned toward the window, although there was nothing to see there now. They might have been anywhere, even on the D.C Metro.

With her headache now gone, Mira opened The Odyssey. At the private school where she had taught English for many years she had successfully fought to get the classic once again included in the ninth-grade syllabus. She believed that even today, especially today, teenagers should be pushed to come out of their comfort zone with books.

The young man looked with interest at the book's cover showing a drawing of ancient Greek warriors armed with shields, arrows and swords –fallen soldiers around their feet. When Mira's eyes caught his, he turned toward the window again. She put down her book. She had always been good talking with strangers, although Norm had discouraged it.

“Do you speak English?” Mira asked.

He smiled widely, as if she'd opened the right door.

“Yes, yes, I speak English.”

“Are you Italian?”

“I am Albanian. And you, where are you from? England?”

“No, the United States.”

“The United States of America?” His voice rose even more in obvious appreciation.

“That's right.”

“Oh, this is wonderful country, best country.”

“Thank you,” said Mira, who didn't know what else to say.

“Which part? Which part of America, please?”

“Washington DC.”

“The capital. Most important place in most important country.”

She laughed nervously as if she had been personally complimented. “My name is Mira. What’s yours?”

“My name is Ardit.”

“What a lovely name. Does it have a meaning in your language?”

“Yes, golden day.”

The compartment door opened, and the conductor staggered into the compartment. He towered over them, reeking of cigarettes and impatience.

“*Biglietti.*” the conductor said.

Mira realized that she’d forgotten to remove her ticket from the money pouch hidden under her shirt. She could just hear Norm’s voice sneering at her rookie mistake in security. As she tried to discretely fish out the pouch the conductor’s eyes passed over her body. After he made holes in her ticket, the conductor turned to Ardit who got to his feet and reached into his jeans pocket, revealing a swatch of downy bare skin. Ardit spent several seconds searching but still came up empty-handed. Mira, who focused on her book so as not to embarrass him, feared he wasn’t supposed to be in the couchette. Perhaps he just had a cheaper ticket for one of the compartments with seats or perhaps he didn’t have a ticket at all. Maybe she would be alone in this compartment. Finally, to her relief, Ardit produced a crumpled ticket. Wordlessly, but clearly sneering, the conductor scrutinized it and then punched into it holes. Then the conductor turned toward Mira.

“Madame, you want me help you sleep?”

“Excuse me?” Was he propositioning her?

“Private sleeper. I get you one. 70 Euros. You want?”

“Oh no, that won’t be necessary,” she said, feeling foolish at her misunderstanding. “I’m quite comfortable here.”

“Better than here, no?”

She shook her head again, annoyed now at his persistence. The conductor shrugged, perhaps assuming she couldn’t afford it even though her money pouch bulged with Euros. Of course, she could have afforded travelling in a cabin where there was a made-up bed and even a private toilet. But why take an overnight train to travel like that?

The conductor slid open the compartment door and it clanged shut behind him.

“He wasn’t very friendly,” Mira said.

“Italians, they don’t like Albanians. He feel -- how do you say -- He feel he must protect you.”

Mira felt annoyed that she looked like a woman who needed protecting.

“Where did you learn to speak English?” she asked.

“I study in university.”

“What did you study?”

“Engineering.”

“Do you work as an engineer?”

“No, not possible in Italy. Please, may I ask? You come to Italy for holiday?”

“In a way. I’m going to a wedding.”

“Wedding? You have Italian friends?”

“No, my son is getting married.”

“He marry Italian?”

How did you explain to this young Albanian the concept of a destination wedding? Aaron insisted it was both his and Serena’s idea. But Mira suspected her future daughter-in-law had talked her son into it. She had wanted to like Serena, who Aaron had met less than six months ago. But it was hard. Serena wanted an oversized engagement ring and a down payment on a McMansion in Potomac which Mira knew was beyond their means. Dislike of Serena and her family was one of the few subjects she and Norm had ever agreed upon so fully. Both of them knew, in that heartbreaking way parents know, that their only child’s pending marriage was doomed. Yet they could do nothing about it.

“His future wife is American, but she thought it would be fun to marry in Sicily.”

“Please, may I ask? Why you take train to Sicily? Better for you, I think, to take airplane.”

Others in Mira’s life had said as much. Ben emailed her several articles describing the filthy toilets, soiled seats and maddening slowness of the Rome to Palermo train. Serena had expressed concern – albeit not to her directly -- that Mira wouldn’t be able to sleep on the train and look “haggard” in the wedding photos. Norm had put it the most bluntly: “What middle-aged and middle-class American woman in her right mind takes a 13-hour night train?”

Several years ago, during a trip she hoped would revive their sinking marriage, she suggested taking the night train from Paris to Nice. Norm, the economist, lectured her about the illogicalness irrationality of train travel during the age of airline de-regularization. When she said that trains were romantic and exciting, Norm rolled his eyes. “There’s nothing romantic or exciting about wasted time.”

Only Aaron had understood. “Sounds like fun,” he had said.

She thought there was a wistfulness in his voice.

“Come with me,” she said.

He laughed. “Serena would kill me.”

When Aaron was a preteen she had taken him on a road trip during spring break while Norm was abroad. They’d travelled through Virginia, visiting Civil War battlefields and small towns where people spoke with thick accents that sounded as if they came from another country. Once they ate at a diner with knotty pine wall paneling and a most curious feature hanging upside down and glued to the ceiling: a circular table set for a meal alongside two hard-backed chairs. She and Aaron had both found this quirky installation – a mirror image of where they were eating -- delightful

When she called Norm that evening to tell him about the diner, he seemed to barely listen until she said she was considering driving all the way to Charleston, South Carolina. He argued that it was “a bit much” and tried to talk her out of it. After she got off the phone, Mira decided to drive there anyway. But she only got as far as the North Carolina border when she turned around, as if she wanted to hold it against her husband for denying her this pleasure.

She first heard about the Rome-Sicily train journey from one of the owners of the *Pines of Rome*, where she and Aaron, then a boy, had always eaten when Norm, who didn’t like the restaurant, was busy working. When she told the owner, Mario, she was travelling to Sicily his face lit up and he suggested she take the train. He described how as a young man growing up in Sicily he waited on line 18 hours for a one-way train ticket to Rome where there were lucrative factory jobs available. Having scored that magic ticket, he put on his heaviest coat, sure it would be freezing in Rome even though it was July.

“That train trip was the first time I see my own country,” said Mario,

The best part, he said, was the crossing. The Rome to Sicily route was the last place in the world where passenger trains were still put aboard ships to pass through the Straits of Messina. Mira, drawn by that idea, did some online research and was delighted to learn of a coincidental literary allusion which further seemed to justify taking the trip. The strait's turbulent waters were symbolized by Scylla and Charybdis, mythical sea monsters, from The Odyssey. Navigating past the monsters threatening from both sides was one of the many challenges facing Odysseus in his return home. Mira planned to take a video of the crossing on her new I-Phone to show her class when they discussed the book.

“And you? Are you going home?” Mira asked the young man.

“I go to Sicily.”

He didn't volunteer whether that was home. Mira suspected the answer was complicated. Mira knew little about Albania, except that it wasn't a country where you wanted to be from. Vaguely, she remembered once reading an article about the sinking of a boat of Albanian refugees trying to make it to Italy. Or was she confusing that with a story about a refugee boat from Central America? Anyway, most likely Ardit was working as a menial laborer of some ranking even lower than the native Sicilians. As someone who'd hoped to become a university professor but had settled for teaching high school, Mira knew a little of what it was like to compromise professionally.

But Ardit didn't want to talk about Albania. As the train ran through the darkness he asked Mira question after question about the United States: Did she eat meat at every meal? Had she ever met the president? How much money did people in America make? How difficult was it to get a work visa? She couldn't recall ever having met any foreigner so curious about her own country. These days, foreigners felt they knew everything they wanted to know about America,

most of it negative. Trashing America had become disturbingly trendy. A British guest she was chatting with at breakfast in her Rome hotel allowed herself a snide remark about the “incompetent” U.S. president. She had seen red graffiti splayed in the station: “Fuck USA.”

“One day you must visit America, Ardit,” she said.

“Difficult, I think. Very difficult.”

“It can happen. Maybe I can help.”

After she spoke, she felt foolish. What could she do anyway? She didn’t have connections in getting visas which were known to be very difficult now to obtain. Obviously Ardit had little money. She could only imagine that he probably dreamed of many things that would never happen. Meanwhile, it had become popular among her friends to make bucket lists of experiences adventures that they could feel confident of enjoying -- parachuting, going on safari, hiking in the Himalayas.

She had questions of her own for Ardit: How and when had he come to Italy? How did he support himself? Where was his family? Why was he even on this train? But Ardit answered vaguely and then immediately asked her another question. He didn’t want to share the facts of his life, perhaps for reasons of pride. She let him ask most of the questions which, when she was a pleasant change, so much of the time people just wanted to talk about themselves.

When Mira took out a package of Biscotti from her carry-on bag, eager to offer him something to eat, her Michelin map of Italy fell out. Her misdirection was a family joke. Once, after they’d first moved to Washington, DC, she directed Norm the wrong way on the George Washington parkway. They missed an exit and ended up at the CIA and then in Anacostia. “Mira almost got us killed, twice,” Norm said when he told people the story.

“Ah you have map. Please may I see?”

“Be my guest.” And then she heard herself say, “Let’s look at it together.”

She suggested he sit next to her so she could spread out the map. As he moved over, she became aware of the earthy smell of his body odor. How often did he have access to hot water and wash his clothes? Did he ever floss his teeth?

Outside the window was whirling blackness imprinted with the landscape of the world’s famous boot, like a film reel flapping on an old projector. Ardit asked her the time and when she consulted her phone and told him, he knew exactly where they were, as if he’d taken the trip many times before.

“We leave Amalfi coast. Now we go Calabria. In 45 minutes, we arrive Puglia.”

Perhaps those were places to visit one day. Maybe she’d even get a Eurail pass and repeat the trip across the continent she’d done so long ago.

Ardit scraped a chipped and dirty fingernail against the speck of blue on the boot’s toe: The Straits of Messina.

“So small. I think we can swim,” he said.

Mira tapped *The Odyssey* and explained how for Odysseus crossing the Straits was perilous. He was advised by travelers to avoid Charybdis, a lethal whirlpool that could suck in all his men at once. So instead he passed by another monster, Scylla, who scooped up six of his men.

“Imagine them in the monster’s mouths, their head and feet kicking in the air,” said Mira dramatically. “They call out ‘Odysseus, Odysseus,’ one last time. But it’s too late. Odysseus calls it the most horrid sight that he’d seen until then in all his travels. But, unfortunately, there would be many others.”

She paused. Being pedantic was an occupational hazard. But Ardit seemed interested in the story. He said the book reminded him of an Albanian saga which he described as a “long, long” poem about warriors and *zanas*, spirits who live near springs and protect warriors, vampire-like creatures known as *lugats* and *drangues*, winged creatures with supernatural powers. There probably wasn’t a country in the world without its own version of The Odyssey, a point she should make in class.

“I would like to read your book,” said Ardit.

Mira’s copy of The Odyssey was marked up. But maybe getting a new copy and making new notes would spark some new ideas. It would surely mean so much to this man to give him such a present. She extended the book to him.

“Please take this. It’s not an easy read, but it’s worthwhile. I think you will enjoy it.”

He held up his hands. “Please, I cannot accept such a generous gift.”

“You can and you will.”

He placed the flat of his hand on his chest. “Thank you.”

He stuffed the book into his lumpy plastic bag as if he were embarrassed by her generosity. He then inspected the map again.

“They must, I think, build a bridge over this water.” Ardit said. “Job for good engineer.”

She laughed, “It will take more than a good engineer, I’m afraid.”

Mira knew from her online research that Silvio Berlusconi, the controversial former Italian prime minister, had wanted to build what would be the world’s longest suspension bridge. But the plan had been spiked and was unlikely to be revived. Building a bridge was too expensive, harmful to the environment and vulnerable in an earthquake. But an underlying

reason, and perhaps the major one, was that the mainland Italians didn't want to be so easily accessible from Sicily, synonymous with poverty and the Mafia.

“Any way it's lucky for us there's no bridge because we'll get to experience the crossing,” she said. “It's incredible to think they're going to put this entire train, including all of us passengers, on a ship without us even having to move. Have you ever seen it?”

“No. We will go together.”

She was touched. It would be so more enjoyable to view the crossing with him and see it through his eyes.

Mira produced some 100 calorie granola bars from home which Ardit examined like objects from another galaxy. She helped him decode the information on the bar's packets. His reading wasn't particularly good. He'd never get through The Odyssey, but he could still enjoy owning the book. She then suggested it was probably a good idea to get some sleep since they'd be waking up in a few hours to see the crossing.

“Somehow these seats turn into a bed,” she said. “Let's call the conductor to show us.”

“No. I do.”

He stood up and moved toward Mira. With a quick movement, he flipped first her seat and then his over so they were transformed into a bunk with a padded ledge. From the rack above the bunk he hauled down pillows, sheets and blankets.

“You certainly look like you know what you're doing,” she said.

Then she laughed nervously because she didn't want him to think she was making fun of him. He said nothing as he made up the bottom bunk and she wondered if she should sleep on the top bunk to give them both privacy, but the small ladder made her nervous as she imagined herself falling off.

“Please,” he patted the bed. “For you.”

Then he put sheets on the bed facing opposite, turned out the light and stretched out on his back. He motioned toward the compartment door.

“I lock?”

Why would he want to lock the door? There seemed to be no reason.

“Let’s leave it open,” she said, wondering if he would be insulted.

He shrugged and laid out on the bed. How strange to sleep in this compartment alongside this young man, as if they were intimate. The churning of the train’s wheels felt so warm and sedating, like being rocked by one’s mother.

“Mira, you sleep now?”

“No, Aredit.”

“Why you have no husband?”

“I had one. We divorced two years ago.”

“He must be sad without you.”

She laughed. “Not exactly. We didn’t get along well.”

“He is stupid man. I do not like him. Now you have boyfriend?”

The frankness of the question surprised her. But she considered it. Ben was her boyfriend. But sometimes she felt as if she was just settling for him. Her online dating profile was still up, and she still received notes from men, although many of them 10 and even 20 years younger than her, which were very flirtatious and inappropriate. The first time she received such a message she thought that perhaps all the exercise and careful eating had paid off. Then she learned that such solicitations were common among women her age who were perceived as easy lays and sugar mommies.

“And what about you, Ardit? Where’s your family? In Albania? In Italy?”

“I have no family.”

“Your parents?”

“Dead.”

“I am so, so sorry. Has it been a long time?”

“I sleep now.”

Mira lay awake there listening to what became this young man’s gentle snoring as images buzzed through her old head: The simple grandeur of the White House which all visitors said looked smaller than on TV; Lincoln’s graceful but almost sad visage overlooking the Tidal Basin where Martin Luther King told of his dream; the sparkle coming off the Potomac in spring. She imagined Ardit’s face taking in everything in, determined not to miss anything the city had to offer. Well, why couldn’t she do this? She’d help Ardit get a visa and then buy him an airplane ticket. He could sleep in the extra room with the foldout bed. She’d make him breakfast, hand him fresh towels for his shower and take him out for Chinese food and sushi. No, it wouldn’t be unprecedented. Soon after her the divorce, she’d agreed to let one of Aaron’s college friends stay for a week as he was doing a training program in Washington. The visit had been fine except for an embarrassing moment when the friend barged into the bathroom when she was taking a bath, but she would be more careful and lock the door.

She had fallen asleep when she was jarred awake by Ardit sitting on her bed. He placed a finger on her lips and then into her mouth where he probed her teeth. Then he kissed her, his tongue lashing around her mouth with a sloppy ferocity. She struggled to get up, but he held her down as he unbuttoned her shirt, removed her bra and sucked on her breasts before pulling down her pants and unhooking her money belt. Everything fell in a heap on the floor.

Mira was aware of how she could try pulling him off. She was aware of how she could cry out. But mostly she was aware of how his flesh was free of the blemishes and that his sweaty scent was superior to Ben's old age odor. Ardit unzipped his pants and along with his white jockeys pulled them to his knees. Discreetly almost, he covered them both with a blanket and then roughly entered her, his erection full and insistent that was so different from Ben's flaccid one. She felt herself churning through a whirlpool alongside the train's motion. She was on a roller coaster ride, terrified but also thrilled as it sped towards the goal. She reached the end first, something else that never happened with Ben, and then he joined her with a loud grunt.

Almost immediately, Ardit rose and reached for his underwear. She saw now that the jockey's elastic band was twisted, and the cloth torn and realized the depths of his poverty. He then dealt with Mira's money belt. He removed the entire stash of Euros and U.S. dollars. There was the equivalent of \$1,200 in all. He took her new I-Phone as well. But he didn't touch her passport. She watched him stuff her items into his bag and did and said nothing. He gathered up his nylon bag and swung it around his arm.

Opening the compartment, he slipped into the darkness. Mira finally rose herself and dressed quickly with trembling hands without turning on the lights. She accidentally tripped on something: the discarded copy of The Odyssey, finding the ridiculousness of her gift to him as painful as what had just happened. Her mouth was dry and her temples pounded. She was desperate to go to the toilet and wash up, but she didn't want to go outside where she might see him or someone who had seen them.

So, Mira lay on her side in the bed which made her arm hurt but she didn't move. The bunk's vibration from the train reminded her of her orgasm and she started thinking about AIDS and other STDs. The first time she had slept with Ben, after he finally had an erection, a friend

had asked whether he used a condom. She had found the question funny. Why would she need a condom with Ben? And the friend had told her about the rise of AIDS among middle aged women such as herself. Now she would have to visit her longtime gynecologist and ask to take these blood tests. It was too embarrassing to contemplate.

The rocking from the train abruptly ceased. There were loud voices outside the compartment. Then the whole train loudly groaned and creaked as if it had become a monster or was in the mouth of one and there was a curious sensation of the car being lifted. This was surely the sign. They had reached San Giovanni, the crossing where the train was shunted in half as it was put onto the ferry. How could she have come so far only to miss the crossing?

The corridor had a festive atmosphere as bleary eyed, but animated passengers moved toward a short stepladder that had materialized. The conductor who had taken her ticket acknowledged her.

“Everything okay, madam?” he asked.

He seemed to be looking at her strangely. Did he know what had happened? Did he think the sex was voluntary? Had it been?

“Everything is fine,” she said hastily.

She scuttled up the stepladder, glad to be away from the train and outside, even if Ardit might be lurking there. At the top of the stairs she found herself on the deck of a boat. The sky was a pinkish mauve in the pre-dawn and she was reminded of that lovely refrain from *The Odyssey*: “rosy-fingered dawn.” The water looked inky black and turbulent, enough to believe in the presence of monsters. Mira gulped in the fresh air with its tang of salt and smell of freshly brewed coffee. She would have loved to have purchased a small espresso they were selling, but she didn’t have any money for that. She watched the other passengers sipping their espressos

and taking photos and selfies, like the ones she imagined displaying on the overhead screen in her classroom while she ready from the text:

“Thus we sailed up the straits, wailing in terror, for on the one side we had Scylla, and on the other the awesome Charybdis sucked down the salt water in her dreadful way.”

She thought again of the sex she had just had, humiliated and stunned by her orgasm. Would this be the last time she would have sex like that? Probably, certainly not with the available men she met and yet perhaps there was a chance. The ship tossed around, yet easily sliced through the strait’s choppy currents, which could have been easily captured by an I-phone camera. There were many photos and videos online of the crossing which she could show to her students. She could afford losing the cash and even the iPhone, which she might even be able to replace at the train station in Palmero when she mailed her postcard. Such was an advantage of globalization. Hopefully with the money he’d stolen Ardit could get himself some decent clothes or pay rent or buy food. She would, in deference to the bride, apply extra make-up to cover up the rings under her eyes and smile for the wedding photos as the contented-looking mother of the groom. She’d tell Aaron that whatever disappointments awaited, him she’d be there. Then she’d fly home by plane. She’d immerse herself in lesson plans and the grading of homework. She’d get the AIDs test, continue dating Ben, at least for the time being, and plan another trip abroad, because everyone needs a future trip in their lives. In a few weeks, she’d get the postcard from what would be her last-ever train trip.