

There is a train wandering down the track of some godforsaken countryside, in a land without a name. It will pass the bare trees in the sunshine, and it will glide by the lonely houses on the hills. Seas and rivers will watch it move on past, without remembering when it went by. Mountains will cradle it in their arms before it slides through their fingers. The skies will change their colors in honor of its passage. The sun or the moon will shine on the glass windows, the metal casing in which the gears and levers throw themselves against each other. The people inside will sit in their plastic seats, long against their backs like shadows in the sunset. The people inside will walk, or sleep, or listen or talk to each other. They will sit silent and look out the frosted windows, the dusty windows, the smudged windows. While the miles rush beneath their feet under the charred stones and metal rails, none of them think about what they will do when they get to where they are going. They only listen to the sound of the track, they only feel the twists and turns, and they only see the inside of their own heads.

There is a girl sitting in the back left corner of coach number nine, seat 21D. The sun through the grimy windows lights her hair gold in a halo around her pale heart-shaped face. Laid against the artificial blue seat, her bones like feathers against her t-shirt, she opens her eyes slowly against the air. The sunlight fills up glass eyes. She was waking from a dream about something blue, or was it something white, an iceberg or the blue flames on a kitchen stove. So young to be dreaming about nothing at all. Young enough to fit a whole world in a worn out canvas backpack, young enough to dream about death like an old friend that writes letters but forgets to call. It was a long sleep, she rubs her eyes with a paper thin fist, chipped black fingernails and piles of colored friendship bracelets on her insignificant wrists. She doesn't think about those friends anymore, they have become the bracelets themselves. They are no more than summer memories half-remembered on arms around the world. When she even does notice them clinging to her skin, she lets the movies

play in the back of her mind where she can't see them, and she looks at the patterns that she doesn't perceive anymore. The seats around her are empty, a force field compartment kingdom and she is the queen. She still acts like someone is watching her. This girl is a silent actress in a music video, sitting there in a plastic chair and looking out the window, lost in thought. Every strand of hair artfully messed on her empty head, every stain and rip in her clothes is a story: this hole is from the baby tooth of a hyperactive puppy, this green stain is from a careless dab of oil paint. She can't remember the last time she washed this sweatshirt. The trees outside standing thin make the shadows dance over her face, flitting over her cheek like flocks of birds, gone in a millisecond and back again. The train slows to a shambling roll, falling gently asleep as the people inside wake up with placid nods of their chins, running fingers through their hair and gathering crunching bags or suitcases. They will blink in the sun and look down as they walk away quickly. Moving feet as fast as they can to get back in the world.

Something is happening outside her window. It takes a moment for her eyes to focus through the splotches of mud splattered on the glass. She sits forward slightly, letting her hands fall to her lap like dejected birds. There is a crowd of bored faces in puffy coats and jackets in various shades of muted colors standing around a stretcher as it is wheeled onto the platform. A white sheet hangs softly over a nondescript lump, somehow innocently. A wrinkled hand, more of a bundle of twigs than a human appendage, floats out of the left side of the cheap white regulation sheet; which is undulating slowly in the gentle breeze and the movement of the wheels. An EMT carries a huge, gaudy purple purse, the kind of purse that old women buy in antique stores. He trails after the ambling stretcher, obviously in no rush.

The train starts again, slowly sliding dejectedly away from that grisly little vignette on the platform. The girl turns her head to watch as it slides out of view, the stretcher rolling away

harmlessly like a sailboat on a lake. When she can't see it anymore, she takes a moment to stare in the direction it used to be. Realizing this, she turns around again. As the train picks up speed, the sun sinks below the hills and the bare, birdcage trees hanging like black lace in the tangerine sky. The lights flicker on in her compartment, not ungently. Funny, she didn't realize that they were ever off. Looking around, she also notices a few more passengers in this compartment. When did they get on? There is an old couple sitting graciously apart from one another, cramped into their chairs uncomfortably and clutching shopping bags. A well-dressed woman sits alone and bites her nails above her expensive jewelry. There is a sweatpants, hoodie wearing youth with headphones, sitting alone and splaying his feet in front of him like bricks. When he turns his face, she can see that he has no eyes before he pulls up his hood over his head. No that can't be right, she looks again, startled. Just a pair of dark sunglasses. Unnerved, the girl decides to go to the bathroom behind her, making sure to take her wallet with. Maybe a walk will do her some good, she can't remember how long she has been on this train. In the kitchen cupboard sized bathroom, she shuts the plastic door behind her with a soft click. The smell of rotting lavender soap fills the stale air. She turns in the cramped space and comes face to face with an old woman, soft paper wrinkles framing a sad smile, wispy white hair and sunken, cloudy pale blue eyes stared at her for a split second. The girl sprang backward into the sink like she had been electrocuted. A small gasp flew out of her mouth unwillingly, trying to escape. She blinked and then it was just her own reflection again, staring at her out of the mirror with a white shocked face, she had never seen her own eyes this big before. She took in her own unwrinkled personage for a few more moments, unmoving.

After a few endless seconds, she reaches a hand to touch the smooth surface of the small undecorated mirror in front of her. She looks in her own blue eyes for some explanation, finding none there, she can't seem to look away from the mirror. Fearful that the old woman will reappear

there. In one motion, never taking her eyes away from her own, she slides open the door and backs out into the train corridor again. Taking stock of her painfully normal converse shoes, her mismatched socks and scuffed wallet, she looks around furtively. To shake the vision from her mind she shakes out her hair, tucking it safely behind her ears.

The girl walked fast back into her compartment. Still thinking about the mirror, at first she doesn't notice the change. Looking down at her shoes, she realizes that they are bathed in sunlight. So are her goose-flesh arms, gold in the light. She looks at her hands for a moment, marveling at the warmth before raising her head completely. The train was surrounded by golden fog, she had never seen anything like it before. She rushed back to her seat, kneeling on the plastic to press her face against the window, somehow the dirt had been washed from the outside so she could look out of it more clearly. The golden fog lifted off into space like a wave, and she could see a whole world of painted clouds in a landscape around her as far as she could see. Robin's egg blue sky hung above her and below her, the clouds rolling gently off view from her window. Flocks of birds flew below her compartment, her hair fell in her face as she watched them disappear.

She could see patches of green fields far below the train, she could see the empty railroad stretching through them like a tiny river, the trees like toys, the dollhouses scattered carelessly. The girl saw her perfect, unblemished hands fall through the window. She felt a soft cloud against her fingertips, like rabbit fur. Drawing back, she stood on the carpeted floor of the train and smelled her mother's apple scented perfume. She stood there like that for a long time, with the light on her face as she flew through the sunset. The train door slid open gently behind her. She was busy looking at her reflection, her face changing into an old woman's face in the glass: a face that she had grown herself over the years, then changing again into something timeless. A face carved out of marble, a girl remembering everything she ever learned.

A soft hand grabbed her small palm, gently covering old scars, and led her kindly off the train as it wandered slowly into a station.