

Arrivals and Departures

by Foster Trecost

1. On the Platform

Because of her I showed up early, and like I predicted the train was late. I paced to pass time before taking a stationary position on the platform. An elderly gentleman stood a few feet away and I spoke to him, but looked him over first. He seemed safe enough, so I said, "I bet if we'd been late, the train would've been on time. And we would've missed it."

"That's not how it works." he said.

I questioned his sparse utterance. "No?" I asked. "Then please tell me, just how does it work?" I admit to being condescending.

"Trains get here when they get here," he said. "And we get here when we get here. But these things have nothing to do with each other."

To tell the truth, that made sense. A whistle burst wafted onto the platform, then another. The wait was almost over.

2. Earlier

"You better go," she said, "or you'll miss your train."

"If I leave now, I'll get there too early. Trains are never on time anyway."

"Sometimes they are."

"I'll get stuck talking to someone I don't really want to talk to."

"Then go. You might learn something."

"At the station?"

3. The Road Goes on Forever

We sat next to each other and continued our conversation, but I changed the subject to something less lofty. Trains are hardly the place for philosophical revelation. "How far you going," I asked. It was a simple enough question and I anticipated a simple enough answer.

"I'm taking this train to the end of the line. And if this one doesn't get me there, then I'll take another."

So much for simplicity. To think about it now, this is when I should've left. I could've gotten away with changing seats, but as it played out I had to change trains.

"I was born on a train," he said. "And I plan to die on one."

4. Much Earlier

It did not matter where they were, only that it was time for him to be somewhere else. Miles from the next stop, a baby boy was birthed into a moving world. The real world raced past through the windows of a train.

"I'll name him Pullman," said his mother.

The gentle swaying relaxed Pullman; he slept and stayed asleep until they reached the station.

5. The Highway Never Ends

"On this one, right now? You're going to die right now?" More than my palms had begun to sweat.

"That's not for me to decide."

And with that I'd had enough. Maybe some things really have nothing to do with each other, but I got off at the next stop and it had everything to do with him. I stood alone on the platform and caught the next train going in the same direction.

Later that night and all the next day, and for many days after that, I scanned the news. I looked for headlines about trains, but never found anything. I imagine he's still out there looking for the end of the line, hoping he's riding the rails when he gets there. If I ever see him waiting for a train, to be safe I'll wait for the next one.

