

It Came to Pass After This

by Karen Eileen Sikola

When the conductor spied me running for the back car, he actually waited, and opened the doors again. I struggled for the ticket in my pocket, my hurried breath muting any attempt at a thank you.

The morning train was eerily empty, the muffled beats from earphones noticeably absent. Rows of seats on either side faced each other and no one.

I sat in a space with an empty seat on either side.

A man sprawled across three at the back.

At the next stop, a woman entered, plaid rubber boots squeaking as she scooted into the seat beside me. She tapped my shoulder.

"Excuse me," she said.

I expected her to ask for directions.

"Do you need prayer for anything today?"

I could have asked for any number of things, had my faith not wavered years ago, if I still saw prayer as a means for anything. For patience, or understanding. For stability, or strength. Instead, I said, "I don't, but thank you." Confrontation makes me uneasy, even from a face like hers, with eyes that served to punctuate her good intention.

"I just like to ask," she said. "If you need anything, I'm sitting right here."

We sat in silence, the entire train, the few other passengers in anxious wait to see if I would change my mind. We all flipped pages, glanced up at each other, looked away when noticed.

The woman pulled a coverless copy of The Bible out of the backpack on her lap. She opened it to Second Samuel, Chapter 10. *Be of good courage*, she underlined.

I closed my book, searched for a pen between the two frozen entrées in my purse, scribbled something on the back of an inbound commuter rail schedule.

At my stop, I handed her my request. I couldn't bring myself to look at her, to thank her aloud, as if the words inside the folds of

paper would somehow lose their mystery, and therefore their power.

