Upper East
by Katrina Dessavre

As the 5 train gained momentum away from Fulton Street, Helen took her seat with the alertness and suspicion of someone who had spent the day negotiating prices with dirty fishmongers. She moved her bag where she could see it, closer into her husband's grey wool coat that was now gathering folds around her small arms. With that coat, a black hat smoothing down her hair, and a stern expression, she had almost passed for a man at the docks.

"City Hall!" a voice hollered after the train screeched to a halt and an influx of new passengers took the last of the available seats. Lydia kept her gaze fixed on some indistinct point past the blackened windows. To her the announcement meant that she had four more long stretches on this train to linger in fantasies of the past. The subway car was a carriage and the din of steel rushing over steel was the polite conversation of familiar faces. She was wearing her old coat, made entirely of fur instead of a black one with just the trimmings. Her fantasies never had any narrative or destination, but they always made the ride seem too short. The warmth of the carriage in her thoughts flushed the life from her face and she projected an image of royalty, clad in a crown of black felt.

The announcements for 14th Street and Grand Central were lost among the noise. Helen took stock of the passengers, categorizing each based on their possible destinations and general situation in life. When her eyes met those of another, she turned her gaze to a Lifebuoy soap advertisement in total absorption.

At 59th Street, Helen leapt from her seat and took a spot in front of the doors to make sure that she would be the first to get out on the next stop. Lydia waited until they opened to make her way onto the 86th Street platform. The two women emerged into the winter night without any notion that they had exited the stage together.