

The Gentleman on the Train

by Nora Nadjarian

Did any of this happen? I ask myself. I live in a haze these days. Haze, daze, I don't know, same thing. Somebody smiles at you and you think everything's oops-a-daisy. And that somebody is a gentleman: blue-blooded, clean-shaven, well-off, gentle yet strong, every woman's dream.

Let me start at the beginning, or what I think is the beginning. The gentleman discreetly eyes my cleavage at intervals as we travel together from London to Manchester. We are not travelling together, as a couple. We just happen to be on the same train. He happens to be sitting opposite me. I happen to be a size 34C. He looks up from his Financial Times and smiles at me from time to time. I think he is a gentleman.

"Going to Manchester?" he asks.

"Yeah."

"Live there?"

"No, visiting my boyfriend."

"Ah... Tell me about him. Been with him long?"

This shouldn't be happening, but it is. What does he care? And why should I tell him? Should I just tell him to mind his own business? Or...

"We've been together for... er, about a year now..."

"About a year...That's nice. And what's he done to deserve a smashing girl like you?"

Smashing girl. I'm a smashing girl, and I don't even know it, because nobody's ever called me a smashing girl before. I can just see myself going round smashing men's hearts and denting their lives with a hammer and asking them what they've done to deserve me.

"What's he done to deserve me?" I laugh. "I don't know. He loves me, that's all. He ...says he loves me."

"...That's all?"

"Well, what else is there?"

"There should be more to a relationship than your boyfriend just saying he loves you..."

While my fellow passenger is saying this, my mind's doing a fast rewind of the past year and I'm thinking: Shit, when did he tell me that he loves me? I made that up. We're just...We just sleep together, that's all. We sleep together and we live apart, and I don't even know what he gets up to on weekdays when I'm not with him and he's supposed to be studying and I'm supposed to be working, and everything's supposed to be Okay.

"Do you love him?"

"What do you think?"

"I think you're incredibly sexy."

"Are you flirting with me?"

"What do you think?"

So I dump my boyfriend there and then, so to speak, in an almost empty compartment on a train and smile an oops-a-daisy smile at the gentleman. I may even be blushing at the same time.

But let me start at the beginning. The gentleman is discreet, but his eyes wander from his paper at intervals as we travel together from London to Manchester. We happen to be on the same train and he happens to be sitting opposite me. I happen to be a size 34C. He looks up from his Financial Times and smiles shyly at me from time to time. And then I decide to open my big mouth.

"Where you from?"

"Pardon?"

"Where are you from?"

Hesitation hangs in the air. "Originally? From Windsor," he says. And adds even more hesitantly, as if he's tiptoeing into some unknown territory: "I- live in Surrey."

"Oh, right. So you're on a business trip to Manchester?"

"Er, not really."

"Travelling for pleasure, then?"

There's a tiny, ever such a slight, loss of self-control in his eyes. And he lets out a small, embarrassed cough, which he hopes will cover his next two words. "Not exactly."

"What 'exactly', then?" I ask, looking him straight in the eye. "Why can't we Brits say exactly what we mean? Why do we always have to beat about the fucking bush?"

It's come out all wrong and I have an urge to laugh. The thought of a bush for that purpose!... I can almost read his mind. Should he pretend he hasn't heard and carry on beating about the... reading about the ...latest crisis in the Financial Times? In the end, he lets out a chortle.

"I'm sorry, your name...?"

"Sharon. Yours?"

"John."

"Are you married, John?"

"Yes." Monosyllabic, gentlemanly.

"Just yes? Is that it?"

"Well... What else is there to say?"

"Describe your wife to me, for example. Where did you meet? How long have you been together? How many kids? What kind of car does she drive?"

"A Volvo."

"I see."

"What?"

"What do you mean?"

"What do you see, exactly?"

"Exactly? Okay, I'll tell you exactly what I see, because I can read minds, you know. In your mind I see a beautifully detached house where everybody lives a detached kind of life. Two kids, a son and a daughter who go to school. A detached wife who doesn't really remember when or why she was ever attached to her husband who doesn't really want to know anything about anything other than what's written in the paper, can't detach himself from the Financial Times...I'm sorry... I- I'm just being rude. I'll just shut up for the rest of the journey."

"No, don't."

"Sorry..."

"You weren't being rude, honest. You're honest... I mean, you're right. And you're also..."

"Yeah?"

"I think..."

"What?"

"You're very sexy."

So he divorces his wife there and then, so to speak, in an almost empty compartment on a train. He smiles at me, and he blushes. It's rather sweet of him to blush.

So let me start at the beginning. The gentleman eyes my breasts from time to time as we travel together from London to Manchester. We aren't travelling together, we just happen to be on the same train and he happens to be sitting opposite me. I happen to be a size 34C. At times, he looks up from his Financial Times and smiles at me. He seems like a gentleman. Neither of us speaks throughout the journey. It's a game I like to play, and the gentleman plays it to perfection.

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