

The Woman on the Train

by Pat Pujolas

When I awoke she was there again, the woman with the blue scarf. She was standing by the compartment door, gazing out at the passing countryside, the rolling hills of France. I had seen her before, at the market buying flowers, outside a cafe hailing a taxi, and here inside this very train. I have spoken to her, I have kissed her, I have been in love with her for thousands of years.

She waits for me and I go to her. At first we stand there, regarding one another with familiarity. Fascination. Her eyes are blue, like the scarf, the color of oceans and skies and everything permanent in this world.

This time, we don't say anything. I lean toward her, I close my eyes and I kiss her. In this instant, I am perfect. Each mistake I've made is amended. Each sorrow slips away like the passing hills outside the train. My sense of self, too, is slipping away. My soul detaches from the mind's eye. It is unsettling, dizzying.

Time smears out before us. It slows, then stops altogether.

The next station.

We have arrived and she must leave. She steps down from the train, and I watch her walk away. Her movements are pure and fluid, as if moving required no effort whatsoever. She does not look back.

She never looks back.

The train lurches forward, gathering momentum, until we settle once again into steady rhythms, the hypnotic sway of the cars, the comforting grind of wheel against rail. The sun falls below the horizon and the sky darkens, first purple then black. One by one the passengers get off, until I am the only traveler remaining. At the final stop, the conductor waits for me. He is patient, as always. The man nods as I step down from the train onto the empty platform. And softly, ever so gently, it begins to rain.

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