

Dinner with Sam Rockwell

by Shelagh Power-Chopra

Sam Rockwell and I met up in a caboose train with dim lighting and the drone of an ancient PA system echoing around us. It was the latest trend in restaurants—entrepreneurs rescuing old freight trains and other abandoned industrial steel containers and turning them into trendy eateries. Sam was taller than I thought and he wore a mustache, like he did in that robbery flick, *Heist*, with Gene Hackman. I wasn't crazy about the facial hair—it engulfed his small face like a brush fire and I told him so.

“I liked you best in *Choke*—you were sexy in a lazy, sort of ‘70s way.”

He blushed and said he couldn't watch that film, didn't like to see himself so naked on the screen.

We talked about backgammon and croquet, two sports he really admired and I told him I was keen on poker. He gave me a look straight out of *Moon*—a bewildered and sickly glance. “So, why choose me?” he asked and tapped his fingers on the table loudly.

The waiter bounded over—an old railroad worker's hat on his head. “No, we're okay,” I said and told Sam I admired his staunch accountability—his precise ability to sneak into a scene and take over. “But honestly, I like your stature—your swindled physique.”

And I did, I really did, I felt like I was in one of those first loves, a love so strange and strong, you want to gulp that person up, keep swimming in their everyday. But instead I said, “I'd like to dig my nails into your side, sort of etch my way down until I reached the center, and I could think about the wicked, wounded world I don't belong to.”

I think he was confused—didn't know what to say, so used to playing parts and reading lines. But it was okay; I loved him simply for that, simply for his gestures, his humbled way. We nibbled on canned beans and pickled eggs and other railroad food I couldn't identify and just then, as the blue, tired world followed us from the tiny windows of the train car, he did a great imitation of Gordon

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Ramsey shouting at his kitchen staff. The wait staff got nervous and kicked us out and we took the pickled eggs with us.

We walked for hours, the slow moon behind us. He told me the best thing about trains were that you were always moving—always heading towards the best and leaving the worst behind. “It’s sort of like acting,” he said, “build me a container, put it on wheels, roll me by the world and the rest of you can fuck off.”

I imagined him curled up on a berth in a sleeper car, the paparazzi outside snapping photos. And just then the moon left us and we fell asleep, right there on the rails. I dreamt of life in the woods, a tiny house made of twigs and spirit; and he dreamt of auditions.

