

Falling

by William Owen

She lets the book drop through her fingers to the floor and stares straight ahead watching the red lights streak by in the darkness. The train rocks her away from the seat and back; she rolls her spine along the plastic to absorb the motion, taking it away from the train. She watches him, in the seat across, his gaze shifting from the book, to her, and back to the book. His eyes rising and falling but never meeting hers like a dawn never reaching noon.

He waits for movement in her shoulders, a muscle twitching or contracting, but they are unmoving. His dark eyes come up from the book on the floor to her chest, inches below her neck, where the first indication, a pull or shift beneath her shawl, would signal that she is bending forward to pull the book from the floor. He feels sparks bursting beside his ear and feels them popping through the shirt covering his shoulder, as though sprites and fairies were setting quarks to spinning or playing jai-alai with neutrinos. They were spitting out plasma which would cost him a loan later today, when he couldn't think straight while filling out the application. The shawl has been pulled tight around her neck, and realizing he is staring at her chest he looks up, feeling awkward at seeing that she has been watching him.

She does not change her expression when he turns red and sheepishly rubs together his hands covered in wood-stain. The train stops and she rises from her seat, walking smoothly through the doors onto the platform toward a stair with the string of elves and leprechauns trailing behind her in the air.

He looks back too late to see the girl, head wrapped in a hive of dreadlocked hair, hemp twine, and beads, waiting, shaking with anticipation, dart her hand out from beneath a dark poncho to grab the book, and all he sees is the dirty floor.

