

Things that Shouldn't Be Done on a Train

Luke Rolfes

I closed my eyes, but nothing happened. I could not find the darkness. My head felt like it was a tether ball being yanked around by a stiff rope, but nice and slow, letting me savor the very instant when the ball's momentum lost against the pull of the line. My head was so heavy I could barely keep my chin off my chest.

I gasped in lungfuls of stale train air, but that did not give me any relief from my impending sickness. I told myself to stay calm, to listen to the rhythmic pounding of the heavy wheels on the steel track. Peering out the darkened glass, all I could see were dim lights. We were still somewhere in the Alps, as we had been all night.

The swinging came again in my head, and I clenched my body tightly, trying to ride out the storm, but this time it was too strong. My face dropped to my shoulder and the tether ball effect raced down to the lower part of my body. I swore in a gurgled voice as my stomach spun in a slow arching circle, propelling me forward to the black rubber trash bin in the corner.

I attempted to focus on the shredded balls of graph paper I had tried to do my architecture homework on earlier that evening but could not stop the gag reflex that I knew was coming.

Then it happened, all at once. My body went rigid, dragging my mouth open as wide as it would go. I knew it was coming, but I could not unlock myself from that feeble pose. The hot vomit fell out of my mouth like an overturned can of creamed corn. When it stopped, I sucked in as if I was trying to swallow the entire train's worth of oxygen in one breath. Then the whole thing happened again. Several times.

When it was over I felt as if my insides had been scraped raw by a dry wooden spoon. I lay on the ground with my head against the trash bucket. It hurt so bad I was crying.

"I'm sorry, God," I whispered. "Please don't make me throw up any more. I can't take it. I don't want to ever drink again."

It was at this point that my life seemed to gain a sickly new perspective. I was almost graduated from college, and my attempt to expand my horizons and see Europe had turned into just another excuse to get drunk out of my mind. And there I was, drunk out of my mind and lying on the floor next to a trash can full of my own vomit, somewhere in the mountains of Europe. I thought

about making a major life change.

Then I passed out.

When I woke up there was sunlight streaming in through my train window. It felt like one of the snow-tipped mountains had toppled over onto my head. The train had stopped, but I had no idea where we were. Definitely not where I was supposed to get off.

I rose slowly and went to the next door compartment to see if I could beg some aspirin off of the resident. A man in a business suit opened to my knock. The first thing I noticed about him was his very small tattoo of a snake squirming up from the knot of his tie towards his cheekbone. I had never seen a tattoo like that before.

Another man in the room cleared his throat and I was surprised to find myself being stared at by an elderly priest. He was a portly man, wrapped in the whitest of robes, and almost entirely bald, save the few gray strands clinging to the scalp above his ears. Immediately, I was conscious of my disheveled appearance and knew that I must reek of alcohol. It had to be a priest. The message was clear. I thought back to last night when I begged God to ease my pain. God was taunting me now; I was sure of it.

These men were probably talking about piousness and had spent the whole night sipping on ginger ales and reading the Bible. I, on the other hand, was some lush college student drinking away my semi-promising future and squandering my summer's earnings on a "study" abroad in Europe. The priest looked at me like he was going to say something but did not speak.

"Yes?" said the man with the tattoo.

He gestured for me to enter their cabin, never taking the toothy smile off of his face. I started to take a step forward but stopped.

A large bottle of wine in the priest's hand caught my eye. I watched in confusion as he raised it to his lips and drank, not a ceremonial sip, but a hearty swig. A small trickle of red escaped down his chin as he leaned his head back, and I could not help but make the parallel between the priest's countenance and the face of a blood-drunk vampire, fat on the veins of countless victims. The man with the suit continued to smile and motion for me to come forward.

The hairs on the back of my neck stood up. God was taunting me.

I stared at the priest for a moment, but ended up slowly backing up and shutting the door without saying a word to the man in the suit.

I thought about going back to my room and throwing up again, but I didn't. That would be too ironic. Instead, I went straight down the hall to try to find my friends. I needed to erase what I just saw. I needed some more alcohol.