

Layover

by KYLE HURST

The news didn't ruin my appetite. My stomach, running on its own timetable, demanded food. I suppose she thought we'd both part ways after she said her piece but I, in hungry defiance remained, waiting for my order to arrive. When it came, she didn't touch her plate and after a couple tense minutes of watching me eat, she left some cash on the table and departed. I sat there and watched her make her exit. I didn't say anything. You could always depend on me to clam up in situations like this. Maybe at a later date, when I could look back on this moment from a distance, I'd have something to say to her. On second thought, maybe not. A stoic, silent, and permanent rift in a relationship was more poetic. It fit with the running theme in my life.

Sitting there at the bar I worked my way through my food. It was late, and for as small a bar as this was, about as full as it was going to get for a Friday night. I liked the place; it was cozy. Current events may tarnish this place with bad memories, but I'd be back. There wasn't a single bar in the area I'd rather be. I had no reason to stay up any later than I was so after I finished my meal and downed the rest of my drink, I made for home. The bar was near the office, which meant finishing my evening commute by train, as usual.

There was only one other person in sight on the platform: a coat lain over a bench 20 feet away, backside up and with two small legs sticking out from the bottom. Coat-legs had the right idea; it was much too late for decent, productive people to be awake but the idea of commuting in the morning, among the nine to fivers, with unkempt hair and wrinkled clothes--as tempting as sleep at that moment was--kept me awake. In the long while I sat there fighting my eyelids, trains bound for elsewhere slid into to the station, paying lip service to the platform with their open doors and empty cars. Completing this perfunctory duty, they rolled forward into the darkness, quietly tracing their way out along the lines that ran into the night.

Women were like these trains. Bound for other destinations, they'd pass through my station. Every time they made their stop I would be there same as ever, eternally stuck in transit. She always arrived late--something that initially annoyed me, but I quickly came to expect. During this short layover we would catch up and then, when our polite rendezvous was over, she'd slip out back into the world, off to wherever the tracks took her, and I would remain. It was alright, I decided, I wasn't the right kind of passenger, besides, Honeymoons are a tourist

trap anyways. I continued to console myself until the pain in my left index finger and right ring finger subsided; it was a psychosomatic response that I found strange and specific. They only ached when I waxed nostalgic. Physical pain aside, the response was a good reminder that I needed to stop fretting over things I couldn't control, a little flashing light on the mental control panel that alerted the brain to destructive emotions. Head shook. Shoulders shrugged. *sho ga nai*. It couldn't be helped.

Wicked Witch of the West still lay under Dorothy's coat by the time my train arrived. Taking my seat by the window, the only other person in the car was some businessman, legs sprawling out into the aisle and his magazine pitched over his face to block out the overhead lights. I'm sure he was past caring how ridiculous he looked. Considering how likely his life mirrored the lives of other salarymen who commute to the city, I couldn't in good conscience pass judgement. A crowded commute into the city, long hours, a commute back only to find your family asleep and a few hours in bed ahead of you before getting up to wash, rinse, repeat was far down my list of preferred fates.

Forty-five minutes later, the train arrived at my stop. From there I had a short bike ride ahead of me. I had rounded third, here comes home. It was better that things didn't work out. The next one will be the one, just be patient.

Train to bike. Bike to door. Key to lock.

Coat to rack. Face to pillow.

Mind to her.

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