

# Train to Nowhere



*A short Story  
By Ina de Man*

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Jenny slowly woke up from her nap as the train pulled up to the station. She felt a nagging pain in her neck, probably from sitting in an awkward position for too long. She suppressed the urge to yawn and rolled her shoulders one by one to loosen her muscles.

The constant drumming of the wheels on the rails, that had rocked her to sleep slowed down as they clickety-clacked over the joints in the tracks. The shrieking sound of the brakes made the hairs in her neck stand up. Moments later the iron wheels locked in place and the coach skidded to a stop. One long hiss and a short puff and the train stood still.

Jenny noticed she was alone in her compartment, which was a bit of a surprise to her. The coach was quite full when she boarded the train in her home town. She saw a girl ogling a free spot on one of the benches so without hesitation she pushed by her and dropped in a window seat. The girl gave her a dirty look but she had no other choice than to grab one of the overhead rails and try to keep her balance as the train pulled away from the platform.

Jenny looked left and right but all the seats in her eyeshot were empty. She got up and looked around the compartment. She frowned and dropped back into her seat. Where did everyone go? The only explanation she could come up with was that everyone had gotten off the train while she was sleeping. All of a sudden she sat up and clamped her hand over her mouth. She realised that she must have missed her station and the train had stopped at the end of the line.

She peered out of the window and looked around to see if she could find the name of the station. And even though her coach had stopped just in front of the station house, there was no sign with a name, which was strange. Without signs or names, how were travellers supposed to know where they were? What was more, the platform was completely empty. No commuters, no baggage carriers, no women with children. No-one.

Suddenly she heard a hiss and a swoosh and the doors slid open. From where she was sitting, she could just make out the edge of the doors. She was baffled to see a leg in jeans appear and milliseconds later an arm, a torso, and a head. A man had just boarded the train but where did he come from? The platform had been empty!

The new passenger looked a bit lost when he entered her compartment. As if he had forgotten why he was on the train. He gave her a glance and a nod and overlooked the rest of the coach. Then he pointed to the seat in front of her and asked if she wouldn't mind if he sat there. She said she wouldn't. It occurred to her that he had a nice voice, soft but firm, civilized with barely an accent. He saw that she was observing him so he gave her a shy smile.

She had to ask him. Ask him where he came from, seeing as the platform was empty when he boarded. But as she was forming the words in her head, the train hissed and puffed, and with a little tug, he started moving again.

Jenny had trouble figuring out the man who sat across her. When she asked him where he came from, he said he had no

idea. He had a vague memory of driving his car on Highstreet and the next thing he knew he was stepping onto this train. She wondered if he had had some kind of accident, maybe he bumped his head and forgot what had happened between driving on Highstreet and stepping onto the train. But he seemed unscathed. There was not a spot or blemish on him, his clothes looked like they just came out of his dressing.

He asked her where she came from and Jenny said she was on her way to her mother. The man looked puzzled. He told her this train was not going in the direction of her mother's place. But he couldn't tell her what the destination was.

They were interrupted by a train conductor as he slid open the door that separated the compartment from the lobby. 'Tickets please' he said. Jenny put her hand in her coat pocket and produced a ticket, which she gave to the conductor. He gave it a good look, snapped it with his ticket punch, and handed it back to her. But as she was about to grab it, he pulled it back and looked at her.

'Are you certain of your destination, ma'am?' He said as he ploughed a furrow in his forehead.

'What do you mean?' Jenny looked at him inquisitively. He showed her the ticket and as she wanted to reply that she knew where she was going to, she saw the destination that was marked on the ticket. 'Purgatory'.

'Wha..what... what is that? I'm going to Brighton!' She exclaimed.

'No ma'am, you are going to Purgatory as mentioned on the ticket. That's why I asked you if you were sure.'

'No!' She cried out. 'I'm not going there, what is happening! I want to get off this train!'

The man sitting across from her gave her a reassuring smile. 'Don't be scared, sooner or later we all have that destination'

'But, does that mean that...?' She could hardly breathe and felt as if there was a heavy stone pressing down on her chest. She could hear her heart beating in her ears. 'Boobong, boobong'. The rhythm stayed the same but the sound became louder and louder. She could hear voices, distant ones as if they came to her in a mist.

The conductor returned the ticket. 'If you are not travelling with us to our destination, you need to get off here, ma'am' he said as he moved along the coach and disappeared through the door at the far end. Jenny looked at him in bewilderment. She hadn't noticed that the coach had stopped and the doors hissed open.

The man across from her gave her a reassuring smile. 'Ma'am, you need to get off here. It's not your time yet.' Jenny scrambled to her feet, took her belongings with her, and rushed to the open door. As soon as she stepped onto the platform it was as if a white light engulfed her. The light was so bright it hurt her eyes. She heard the voices again, ringing in her ears, louder now and more urgent. She could make out words.

'Hang in there, love, hang in there...'

'Give her some space, she needs room to breathe'

'Please clear a path! Let the EMT's through...'

The light began to fade, like the mist lifting from the surface of a lake. She could make out shapes. Human shapes they were. There was a face, hovering over hers.

'There she is, she's back now!' The face belonged to a middle-aged man. He looked relieved and gave her a radiant smile. She saw little drops of sweat trickling down a pearly white collar with two silver arrows pointing in opposite directions adorning the tip.

'You gave us quite a scare, young lady!' He said, as he moved back and gave her some room. She looked around, puzzled. She was still in the coach on the train but now people were standing around her, looking worried. A conductor gave her something to drink and as she accepted it gracefully, she shot him a quizzical look. 'What the hell was going on!'

'Don't you know what happened?' The man asked. She shook her head. 'You nearly kicked the bucket!' he said. 'Good thing this young man saw you were in distress or you would not be with us now.'

'Wha... why is that?' She managed to say.

'You had a heart attack, pet. We got you back just in the nick of time. A few minutes later and you would have been a goner!' As she looked up to the open doors of the train, she saw the young man that had been sitting across from her for the last part of her

journey. He smiled and waved goodbye. Except, he didn't get off the train, he just dissolved.