



THE TRAIN STATION

ABOUT

If on a winter's day a traveler is a Centre for Stories project for the City of Perth's *Winter Arts Season 2017*. It references Italo Calvino's 1979 novel *If on a winter's night a traveler* — a book about books, belonging, journeys, love, war, death, ideas, nature, fiction, reading and writing. During the month of July, we positioned ourselves at the City of Perth Library, the Perth Train Station, and the Forrest Chase mall, and asked curious passers-by to read a series of prompts taken from Calvino's novel, and write us a short story. We collected those stories, edited them into three sprawling, collaborative texts (one for each collection location) and have now distributed them on posters throughout the city. You're looking at one now — make sure you watch out for the other two posters!

CONTRIBUTORS

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#ifonawintersday
#embracetheelements



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The train is delayed. It allows her a chance to fret, to wonder and ask whether she should make the journey. A dozen years have passed since she last went there, but she still thinks of what happened. 'It is only a story', the others say, but she remembers every detail as though it were yesterday. Remembers the story of the retired colonel with the candlestick, which was just a red herring. Remembers the story of the widow with the pistol, which was just a red herring. Remembers the story of the chemist with the knife, which was just a red herring. She remembers all the details of the story and it makes her afraid of the train. What if there is another murder? What if something happens and she has to talk to the police? What if they ask for her papers and it turns out they are not in order? What then? She asks herself these questions while the sign for the train flashes 'DELAYED'.

Opposite the platform there are trees — bloodwood she recognises and there is some sort of strangled pine that looks demented and heartbreaking. She hears a low growl and jumps a little, but it is only some rodents emerging from a burrow. They are not the hulking beasts of her mind's eye. And then the train arrives, entering the cavernous station entrance. Its doors yawn open lazily, like a king reclining, welcoming grapes from an aide. She comes up for air, straightens her petticoat, and boards, clutching her ticket and papers. As she enters, the stench from outside, of hot oil mixed with dust and urine gives way to a lingering smell of bleach, as though the carriage was recently disinfected. Maybe that caused the delay she wonders? What happened here? What could they

be trying to hide? A murder? The lights of the carriage flare white and she is crowded by the closeness of the compartments. Again, she questions herself and asks why she is making the journey. But she quickly reassures herself, knowing that what she is doing is important, knows that it will be worth it. She smiles thinking about laying her eyes on the emerald that the whole nation has been talking about.

The train announces its departure and the carriages sway like seaweed over the tracks. Outside the dust rises and the sun catches her face. She is glad to be moving, glad to be on her way. And so, she reads her book, a book about trains and journeys and a winter far away from here; a book where a man falls in love with a woman he is not supposed to, in a society that fears its leaders; a book that is fond of metaphors about what it is to be on a journey, to be searching and seeking and looking for something mysterious and unable to be possessed but worthwhile all the same. For a moment, nothing seemed to exist but the story. Not the smell of bleach, not the dust outside, not her concern about a murder on the train that had itself come from a story she had read a dozen years before. As the train moves, the country begins to change, the dust gives way to green and out the window she notices lichen like jade and a wild steppe unfolding. In the distance there are mountains but she cannot see the train tracks that run toward them. For a moment, she wonders where this train is taking her, what route she is going on to get to the city far away where the emerald is.

It becomes cold as they leave the plains and the wind that comes through the window, blowing like a steel dagger, cuts through her

clothes. She places a rug around her shoulders and the tea man enters her cabin. They speak a little and she learns that he has five children, one now a doctor, another just finishing school with hopes of becoming a meteorologist, another studying to be a writer. He asks her what kind of book she is reading and she says simply 'it is a novel about a woman on a train looking for something.' He replies 'a little like you then, madam.' She laughs demurely even if it is a little forward, presumptuous even. He leaves and after him the newspaperman comes. She purchases a copy of the only national paper. In the culture section there is a story about the emerald she is going to see. They have a photo of it with people gathered around. She cannot help but notice the women and men who crowd it, some in ballroom gowns, some in black tie, others with stovepipe hats. No-one has seen a jewel quite like it.

At the next station, a man joins her in her cabin. They begin to talk. He is a geologist interested in the thin layer between the surface of the earth and its under-crust. She is fascinated by him and his talk of dirt, and her worries about the murder float away. It is all stories she thinks to herself. He asks her where she is going, and she says, 'to see the emerald'. He says, laughing, 'planning to steal it, are we?' The woman blushes a little, but does not reply for she would hate to tell a lie or explain why her purse contains a replica of a jewel. She simply waves her hand and looks out the window of the train taking her to a destination she does not yet know the shape of.

THE END

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