

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

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A Night Out of Town

The story begins at the end of a party thrown in the south Bronx. I'm sixteen and I have to be home by eleven-thirty because my mom is overprotective, but I'm excited because I was able to drink and I'm about to get home on time with no stress. It's eleven o'clock. I've arrived uptown and just got off the train. I'm walking down the stairs thinking to myself that I'm almost home—all I need to do is walk one block up and I should be good. Well, at least that's what I'm thinking.

Right before I go through the turnstile, a strange man comes out of nowhere with this girl. She looks very tired and he looks worried and confused. His vibe seems unusual. I try not to make eye contact, but he grabs me aggressively and says, "Yo, little man, can you please do me a favor?"

I look around for help, but find no one.

The man continues: "Can you bring my girlfriend home? She's very sick and not in her right state of mind. I have to take care of something really important," he says.

"I can't do it," I tell him, but he tries to bribe me with money and weed. I can see in his face and in the tone of his voice that he is desperate and being serious. I tell him, "I'm sorry. I can't help."

He grips me with all his might and screams, "Please!" A tear runs down his face.

I stare at him blankly for about five seconds and I feel like I have to help him. "Where does she live?"

He gives me a paper with the trains to take and where to get off; she lives somewhere out in Brooklyn. Just as I realize how far it is, the man thanks me and tells me to watch over his girl. Then he runs off.

I can't believe it.

This girl can't hold her own weight so I have to carry her up the stairs to the platform of the train. As soon as we get there, the train arrives. It's not too crowded, just an average amount of people inside. They're all looking at me and the girl I am with, but I pay them no mind. Some guy with his children gives up his seat for us to sit down. I am very grateful.

We're on the train for about thirty minutes, but it feels like an hour. The train is empty now, and I observe the unconscious woman next to me. She looks like she's about five feet tall; she has long hair, bronze skin and a beautiful body. She is very attractive. I notice the bruises on her body and on her face. That's when I actually feel bad for this girl. I'm emotionally involved now, so I have to help her—even though fifteen minutes ago I was contemplating doing what her asshole boyfriend did to me.

We're about five stops away. There's maybe six people in the car altogether and a group of older men come in. There are five of them. They smell funny and look like they live in the subway. What catches my attention is how, as soon as they all walk in, they give the girl I'm with a sexual look like they're fantasizing about taking advantage of her. They must think she's alone because there's a little space between us. I move closer

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to her, put my left arm around her, and ball my right hand into a fist. I put a serious expression on my face and I look straight forward. I know I'm probably offending them, but I refuse to let this girl who already had a rough night get taken advantage of by these crackhead-looking passengers. We finally get to the last stop to transfer to the next train. Thank god they don't follow us.

The next train takes us to her stop, but it's still going to be a little ride. I've got time to contemplate my situation. It's two in the morning, my phone is dead, and I'm somewhere out in Brooklyn with a complete stranger. What am I doing? I think about her so-called boyfriend. What kind of man throws the security of his lover's life in a complete stranger's hands—a teenage boy at that? I'm upset, nervous, and anxious to go home.

Fifteen minutes after these thoughts, I realize she's woken up and she can barely move or open her eyes. I'm too afraid to ask her any questions. She turns to me and pulls my braid. I look at her and she smiles. I'm trying to figure out how she knew I was the guy escorting her home.

Apparently it shows because she says, "I heard everything and I glimpsed occasionally just to make sure I was in good hands."

I snicker. "Do you consider your boyfriend to have good hands?"

She pauses for a second then says, "My boyfriend is a great man. His mom is dying, and he had to bring her to the hospital. We were at the station when he got the call from his baby sister—she's only ten years old."

Now I feel bad for all the things I thought about him when his problems in life are far worse than mine.

She touches my face and says, "Don't feel bad—you have a big heart."

Her eyes close and she's drifting back to sleep. Everything's clear to me now, except what happened to her. But with those bruises, scars, and her not being able to move, it made me assume she was drugged and beaten up. Who knows, maybe I'm wrong.

Time is now two fifty and a religious man gets on the train and begins his little speech. He claims that Our Father watches over those who are on the path of righteousness and this makes me think about this whole situation again. Is Our Father looking out for this girl? Is she righteous enough for Him to care?

We finally arrive at the girl's stop and the scenery looks like something out of my nightmares. There are people who look dangerous, creepy, and depressed. On the paper it says to go one block up after we get off the train and hers will be the largest building in front of us. I think at least it's not that far, so everything should be good. I also notice she is able to walk, but I still have to support her by holding her upper body up.

As we get closer I notice in front of her building there are about twenty-five guys smoking, drinking, and blasting music. They're all tall and grown. That's when fear rises up and clutches my body and my mind. But I haven't come this far just to abandon this girl, so I swallow my spit, hold my head up high and look straight ahead. My heart feels like it's going to explode out of my chest as I get closer to them.

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Then one of them leaves the crowd and begins speed walking towards us as we get closer to the building. His body language tells me he's angry, but his facial expression sends a different message. He's relieved and quickly gives me—and the girl I'm with—a huge hug. That's not what I am expecting, but it feels good to know I'm not going to get beat up by twenty guys. The man looks me in the eye and says, "Thank you so much for bringing my sister home. I don't know how I can ever repay you. This is all I got." He pulls out fifty dollars.

I could really use the money, but it doesn't feel right. "Thanks, but don't worry about it."

"God bless you," he says and asks if I would like to stay the night.

"Thanks, but I'm going to head home."

He shakes my hand with a very tight grip. "Alright man, get home safe, and thanks again."

His sister is regaining her strength. She gives me a light hug and a kiss on my cheek, then whispers. "Thank you."

I smile and walk away.

The train ride home is actually peaceful, and I feel extremely good about myself. Then I realize it's six o'clock. By the time I reach my stop I'm pretty sure my mom has probably been panicking and sitting in the living room for hours.

Unfortunately, for the first time of the night I am right. She looks like somebody robbed our house for all her jewelry and money.

"Where the fuck was you?" she says very calmly.

I freeze up. Should I lie or tell the truth? My heart says to tell the truth and that's what I do.

She has a skeptical look on her face like she thinks I'm lying, so I show her the paper with the directions on it. Her expression changes to surprise. Ever since I was young, my mom has been able to tell when I was lying, so she knows now that I'm telling the truth.

She gives me a big hug and says, "I'm sorry Cecil—I'm so sorry, go to sleep. We'll talk tomorrow."

My night ends with numerous unanswered questions but it feels good to be home.

When I wake up several hours later, I feel like a cargo ship that just unloaded its luggage. My mom's not stressing me, but I'm still trying to absorb the events that went down last night. I wonder if I'll ever meet that girl again or even her boyfriend. This makes me think about that saying, "everything happens for a reason." The preacher comes back to mind. Was I sent to look out for her? Was it a test? Maybe the reason was merely for me to be strong and never give up—I don't know. I just hope one day I meet her again because I know that face will always be imprinted in my mind. It would be nice if one day we could go for a walk through the park and actually exchange names.

Only time will tell, I suppose.