

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/4

Emma Deimling
"London 3AM"

London at 3AM sparkles like a dingy bucket of soap. The night ripples with orange laughter and yellowing smiles fizzing out into graying frowns as you scrunch up against the window of the top level of the double-decker bus.

"Admit it," Hannah slurs, poking you in the stomach.

You sigh through your nose as Trafalgar Square bleeds past, the streets mute and smoldering with neon signs and stop lights. "There's nothing to admit."

Hannah attempts a raised eyebrow that quirks into a furrow of comic shock. Your fingers grip the metal bar on the seat in front of you. You think of the stone statues in the British Museum and imagine yourself among them in a foreign place, alone and headless.

Hannah goes back to being drunk, giggling sideways over the edge of the seat into the French girl's lap next to her. You stifle a laugh as the man in the seat in front of you turns and smiles at you. He starts flirting with you in his thick Austrian accent. You don't understand a word he says, but you don't mind. Boys usually look over you as if you were a discarded doll. And the girls—well, the girls never look at you at all. You pointedly ignore Hannah mouthing nonsense words at you.

You watch the sophisticatedly snobby marble buildings slug past, reminding you of warn out, forgotten gods judging down at you. "I just saw the fucking Lion King, what's not here to like?" you say to Hannah but she is too busy scrambling over your lap and pointing to the warm yellow and sickly green of a Subway sign. Your mouth goes dry, caked with muddled homesickness.

"It's dirty," the French girl chimes in as Hannah staggers to her feet still giggling.

"It's dirty," the Austrian man agrees.

"It's not your home," Hannah adds, shrugging off the words as if the mention of America soils her with residual American-ness. The Austrian man gets off at the next stop. Your thoughts are violin strings quivering back into stillness, into snapping. But then Hannah is tugging you to your feet, tugging you off the bus, tugging you back to the facsimile of nostalgia cropping up in your throat like cut flower stems. When the three of you stop at Subway, you barely hide your flinch. It even smells like Subway. You still can't get over the fact that no matter how many miles you run or fly or study yourself away from the place that used to be your home, it still worms its way back to you. You swallow your shudder and let it tremble in your gut, the butterflies in your stomach bloating.

"Just wait," Hannah yell whispers to the French girl when they finish ordering, "she'll be moping back home within the month."

You get a message on phone, notifying you the Austrian man wants to be friends on Facebook. You accept. "She lives in a cornfield," Hannah tells the French girl.

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“Next to a cornfield,” you mutter, yanking a piece of thread unraveling from the hem of your black dress. It unravels further. You imagine if you did live in a cornfield, it would be nothing but a dried husk of hungering dreams and dried-out flames. Your Subway sandwich goes mushy in your hands.

The three of you stumble the rest of the way home to your apartment on St. Pancreas that sits across from the duly named Ugly Brown Building. You stop and buy yourself a cup of ice cream from the Ben & Jerry’s vending machine as Hannah giggles her way up the stairs, the French girl giving you a soft wave. You like her, but she never looked at you. You look away.

Hannah’s words trickle back to you as rain begins to spit against the only window in your apartment. *Just wait, she’ll be moping back home within the month.*

But what if I don’t have a home to mope back to, you think. You open your cup of Ben & Jerry’s before your ice cream and resolve can melt.