LOVE ON THE EL

a short story
by
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I awoke from a sleepless night thinking, "Ugh, another day at the office." Even though I had just started a new job, it wasn't in a very warm environment. Scrutinizing looks from the women and ogling eyes from the men made me feel very uncomfortable. The job was in an old established firm in which the people and furnishings were also old and established. However, I was desperate. I had become excited about leaving small town America to experience the electrifying wonders and mysteries of big city life. Now I needed to pay the rent and put food on my table. After too many rejections with the typical excuse, "Sorry, we need someone with experience," the ad that read "Opportunity to learn bookkeeping and accounting skills; no experience necessary" was music to my ears. I was hired the same day I applied. Oh well, I had to give it a try. The incongruity of it all escaped me until I started working there.

I drew myself out of bed, showered, then looked for something to wear that might better hide my physical attributes from leering eyes. That would not be too hard since most of my clothes now fit rather loosely, my physical being having diminished in size. Dwindling funds have a strange affect on satisfying appetites. I downed some cereal and sipped some coffee while preparing a 'yummy' peanut butter sandwich for my delightful lunch.

I walked to the nearby elevated station and proceeded slowly up the dingy staircase to stand with the other blank-faced commuters. We all looked pretty much the same – men wearing dark suits and well-shined shoes holding onto their slender brief cases; women bedecked in dark dresses hobbling on their high-heeled shoes. My dress was as drab as was my disposition. Oh well, no one paid any attention to me – or to anyone else standing on the platform for that matter. We all stood as if in a chorus line, heads turned in the coming direction of our train, eyes staring towards the empty tracks, waiting to surge through the narrow passage that would soon open into our mobile conveyance to our workaday worlds. An elephant could have been standing on the platform and no one have even noticed, unless, of course, it pushed its way ahead of the rest of us.

"Good morning!" a pleasant voice greeted from behind my drooping shoulder and startled me into a state of shock. No one ever spoke on the platform. It seemed to be some kind of unwritten rule. I slowly turned my head to stare into the face of a man.

"Good morning!" I returned back.

Wow, what a specimen of a man – and he *talked* to me! I turned back to assume "the position" as our train pulled into the station.

The doors of the train opened with the familiar "whoosh" of its old, compressed-air motors. Inward pushed the commuters like a herd of cattle, each one rushing to establish

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his own territory and to secure himself against the lurch and sway of the train. I found an empty seat next to the window. The handsome man who greeted me on the platform slid in beside me.

"OK if I sit here?" he asked politely.

"Yes," came my immediate, if shaky reply. The ice was now broken, so as we sat together, we talked and laughed about unimportant topics of conversation the entire way into the city. He was dressed in a medium-colored brown suit with a blue shirt and coordinated tie. His well-groomed blond hair completed the picture of a good-looking man. When my stop came up, I rose and departed from the train. He remained seated.

My work day seemed to go a little better after such a good morning start. Even my own disposition brightened, as I sat in a workspace among lines of gray desks stacked with papers met by faces filled with broken dreams. It had bothered me the first two days of my job, but it didn't today.

The next morning I awoke with a new feeling of vigor. I searched my limited wardrobe for something brighter to wear and found two outfits that complemented my brighter disposition. I kept the prettier of the two for the next day; after all it would be Friday and singles' night out! I dressed, brushed my long blond hair into a pretty do, and added a little more color to my make-up. I felt happier than I had since moving to the city. For the first time I looked forward to the dawning of a new day.

I walked to the station and up the stairs to await my morning train. I stood on the platform and looked all around me at the gloomy faced statues. I found myself softly giggling. "I won't become like one of you", I spoke underneath my breath. As I silently wished for the appearance of my mystery man, almost on cue came forth those incredible words.

"Good morning!" he said.

I turned, smiled and returned his greeting. "Good morning!" I replied brightly.

His smile, his eyes, his sensuality made my passions leap forward into his awaiting arms. I wanted to be naked with him in a bed of unconditional bliss. I felt my thoughts coming through in my expressions, so I turned my slightly blushing face back to stare at the empty train track.

"You look lovely this morning", he said.

"Thank you for your kind words", I responded. The train pulled into the station and we got on together. We sat down in our seat of my imagined passion.

Whether real or imagined, I felt the stares of people sitting and standing among us, but I was too engrossed in my companion to see if that was the case or not. I looked into his eyes and thought, "here are two lonely beings on a distant shore of life entangled in a sea

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of love". My body felt warm and glowing. Neither of us spoke. I was sure that he felt as I did. We were making love.

My train stop came up suddenly and way too soon. I didn't want to get off, but reality told me that I must.

"Have a good day," we said in unison,

I disembarked from the train and under my breath my passion completed the thought, "… until tomorrow, my love".

I waved at him as the train left the station and before I was pushed into the thundering herd of commuters, blindly thrusting to their daily toils. For the first time since arriving in the city, I felt truly happy.

My job and my fellow employees seemed to take on a much brighter light. People in the office became friendlier and seemed willing to teach me. Maybe they finally realized that I wasn't competing for their precious jobs. To me, this job was just a stepping stone to something more meaningful. The company was going to pay for my night school classes; this had been a key attraction to taking this particular job. However, maybe now the job and the classes won't be necessary because my mystery man may take me away from all of this. However, in the meantime, I had to be realistic.

I so looked forward to the next day. Maybe he would ask me out for a drink? Maybe that would be followed by a night of heightened passion and into a world that I had never before entered. Maybe... Suddenly, sensibility again entered my thoughts. I really didn't know anything about him. He had said nothing about his job or about his personal life. Maybe he was married. Maybe he was a con man, a rapist, a murderer or..... Oh, enough! Maybe he was just my long awaited love as I was also his. Maybe.

The next morning I danced to the shower and bathed my body in special oils that I had been saving for such a potentially special occasion. I put on a pretty royal blue dress, that nicely hugged my body. My long blond hair was swept up into a special, dressy style. I completed the picture with complementary makeup, and was now ready for love.

I walked to the station at a heightened pace. The man at the flower stand said "Oh, please accept this flower!" as he handed me a lovely, royal blue poesy. I thanked him and smiled as I put the flower in my hair. He looked pleased.

I glided up the stairway to the platform. A few faces actually looked at me and smiled. I smiled back. Maybe today we'd see an elephant! The darkened world of everyday commuters suddenly glowed in the light of the golden sun. The drab gray platform was bathed in sensual color. I was happy and so was the world around me.

Then, as before, came the voice from behind my shoulder.

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"Good morning". I turned and smiled as I gazed into the eyes of my mystery man.

"Good morning!"

"You look especially lovely this morning", he expressed with both his words and his eyes. Then he handed me the most beautiful, perfect red rose that I had ever seen.

"Loveliness begets loveliness", he said. I took the rose from his soft, warm hand, brushing my fingers against his as I clasped the stem. We entered the awaiting train and sat in 'our' seat. On each of the last three mornings we had taken the same seat. This particular seat seemed to hug our bodies in its embrace. As I looked around, nearby passengers returned my glance, smiling with a sense of appreciation at this extraordinary coupling of two lovers on the train of life.

"You must have a special date tonight," he said.

I wanted to say "No, not yet", but instead I said, "Tonight is a celebration of the end to the first week in my new job. It is Also TGIF". Then boldly, for me, I asked, "Do you also plan to celebrate the end of the week"? For the first time since our meeting he hesitated, then finally spoke.

"I wish I could join you in your celebration, but I cannot." His smile had faded and his eyes looked sad. We were nearing my stop. *Oh, please stall the train. Oh please, mystery man, ask me to continue with you on our train of love. I'll go anywhere you ask!* Then his warm smile returned and he spoke, "If only … maybe in another time and another place." He put his hand on my hand which was tightly grasped around the beautiful rose, "I will always remember this picture of true loveliness. I will never forget you. Please have a good every day and a good life. Always remember loveliness begets loveliness".

He stood as I got out of my seat. As I walked to the open door, I looked at him, smiled, and said. "Thank you for the rose. Thank you for you." I disembarked the train. He waved as the train pulled out of the station. I felt happy and I felt sad. His words had seemed so final. A light flow of tears fell on the soft petals of our love.

The days, the weeks, the months passed by, but my mystery man never again appeared. I tried going to work at different times of the morning, but to no avail. Even though not seeing him again was sad to me, I never forgot him. He had brightened my dark world, and, although I desired so much more from him, I had those special moments to remember.

I pressed the lovely rose and kept it in a book of poems that I had eventually written, some of which were inspired by him. Whenever I feel sad or lonely, I pull out the rose and hold it next to my heart and remember his words, "Loveliness begets loveliness." Then I kiss the rose and I again feel happy. *Thank you dear mystery man on the elevated. Thank you for your gift of love.*

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