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# The Girl on the Train

By Larry Brand

You're not real.  
Weren't your eyes green?  
And your hair?  
You weren't what I thought.  
A real person would never  
say that. That proves it.  
You weren't what I thought.  
Weren't your eyes green?  
That proves it. A real person  
would never say that.  
I get to make it whatever  
I want. That proves it.  
A real person  
would never say that.  
The things is,  
even after everything,  
I wanted to believe.  
Duct-taped to a chair,  
inches from oblivion,  
I still wanted to believe her.  
It's a myth that we use  
only five percent of our brains.  
Ask anyone who's lost  
even the smallest bit.  
No, we use  
pretty much all of it,  
and usually  
that's not enough.  
We never catch the turtle who sits  
on the turtle who sits on the...  
Yeah.  
It's turtles all the way down.  
A lot to learn.  
A moment too late.  
Are you ready?  
What did you have for breakfast  
this morning, Mr. Herzman?  
Who cares about that?  
I'm just getting  
sound levels.  
Ham and eggs,  
like every morning.  
Okay.  
The trains were hell.

But even hell has levels.  
Some are in the middle  
of the car,  
and they're probably  
not going to make it.  
The heat from the bodies...  
Their hell is worse.  
But my father pushed me  
to the edge.  
There wasn't a window there,  
but there were slats,  
and through the slats sometimes  
a breath of fresh air.  
Heaven.  
We stopped at a station  
somewhere.  
Standing still  
is worse than moving,  
even if you're moving  
to something bad.  
A bit of light  
hit my eye,  
so I squeezed closer  
to the slat.  
Then suddenly...  
a beautiful face appears...  
with innocent blue eyes.  
An angel.  
But I didn't believe  
in angels,  
even then when I was a boy,  
certainly not in this place.  
The Herzman story had been featured in a  
local paper and was picked up nationally.  
Before they knew it, they had a book  
deal, and there was talk of a movie.  
I thought it'd make  
an interesting documentary.  
History Channel?  
That kind of thing?  
Yeah.  
Internet says  
you make movies.  
Normally.

I prefer fiction.  
Why is that?  
It's more believable.  
I was late, as usual,  
hustling to make the 9:40 to  
Hudson where the Herzmans lived.  
In the city,  
you're always in a hurry.  
Gotta get to that meeting,  
business lunch, the ATM.  
People are just obstacles,  
inconveniences.  
And every now and then, a face  
you can't get out of your mind.  
Who is this person,  
and how did  
our trajectories cross?  
What histories does she bring, and what myths  
might we create if only given the chance?  
And you want to say something,  
but you can't find the words.  
You're just not that guy.  
So she'll always be a face  
among faces, a cipher.  
You'll never talk on the phone,  
recognize her scent.  
You won't face each other  
over a bistro table,  
taste the Malbec, learn  
each other's favorite color.  
She is, in short,  
every girl you'll never know,  
never love.  
Better never  
to have seen her at all.  
Now you understand  
the ancient wisdom...  
Rip out the offending eye.  
Except I'd captured her  
in my camera.  
And like that,  
she was gone.  
I was getting some B-roll, and she  
was just a face across the platform.

No reason to believe  
you'd ever see her again.  
There are physicists who believe  
there are universes like ours...  
but with one  
or two things changed.  
I thought maybe there was  
a universe where we might meet.  
I didn't think  
it'd be this one.  
Other universes?  
Yeah.  
That what you believe?  
I find it comforting.  
For simplicity's sake,  
let's keep to this universe.  
It was a little girl,  
maybe five or six,  
with pretty blonde curls.  
She peered at me  
through the slat,  
a boy only a little  
older than she.  
What must she have thought  
of this train...  
and its strange cargo?  
We looked at each other,  
only inches away,  
but it might have been  
different continents.  
Then she made  
a quick motion,  
and her small fingers  
pushed through the slat.  
She dropped something  
into my palm,  
and a moment later, as if the universe  
had known that this moment had ended,  
the train  
started up again.  
I looked down  
at my hand,  
and I saw  
that she had given me...

the little gold cross  
from around her neck.  
There is always a moment  
when your life changes,  
though you may not  
realize it at the time.  
The words spoken,  
the light falling across  
someone's face in a certain way,  
the moment you realize  
you're in love or out of it.  
History has turned on its axis,  
and you will never be the same.  
Right there.  
Was she getting a speck out of  
her eye or dabbing at a tear?  
That touch, however small, turned  
into flesh and blood for me...  
A soul with a past,  
a life with an arc.  
A pretty girl on a train  
is one thing,  
a crying girl  
a whole other matter.  
I wasn't sure if it was  
the same girl I'd seen before.  
She looked different.  
Are you okay?  
Sorry. You just...  
You seemed upset.  
You know, trains  
can make people sad.  
It's like in all those  
country-western songs.  
- Country.  
- Right.  
There's always a train,  
and there's always someone sad.  
No. No one's called it country  
and western in 30 years.  
- Well...  
- Your lens is showing.  
It's my job.  
If you're a private eye,

you suck at it.  
Nothing surreptitious.  
I'm shooting a documentary.  
Is it on now?  
Camera shy?  
Who are those people who believe  
a photograph captures your soul?  
Aborigines.  
Pretty sure they're wrong.  
What's it about?  
Your movie.  
I guess you could say  
it's a love story.  
I thought documentaries  
were nonfiction.  
That would be  
cynicism?  
You think just because something  
really happens, it isn't fiction?  
I was pretty sure this wasn't your  
average girl on the commuter line.  
She give you  
any personal details?  
She had a way of turning  
your questions around.  
You thought you were talking about her, but  
you were really just talking about yourself.  
Why were you crying?  
You tell me.  
I get to make it  
whatever I want?  
Sure.  
Okay.  
Seven years ago, you met  
a man on this very train.  
You got to talking, but you never  
exchanged more than first names.  
He gets off at Poughkeepsie.  
As he steps onto the platform, you realize  
you should have gotten off with him.  
He was the guy. He was your one  
chance to escape the wheel.  
But the train's already moving.  
You've missed your chance.

So you spend weeks looking through  
the Poughkeepsie directory,  
but you've only got  
his first name.

Which is?

Bob, unfortunately.

If only it were  
Zebediah.

You call every one of the 373  
Roberts, Bobs and Bobbys.

- I would never call a Bobby.

- With no luck.

But every day for seven years,  
you buy your ticket,  
you get on the train,  
take it to Poughkeepsie,  
and then you turn back  
and head home alone.

Next stop will be Westport.

Westport Station in two minutes.

That is such a guy story.

Yeah?

I wouldn't spend that much time tracking  
someone down if they murdered my mother.

So you're really  
not gonna tell me?

You know, the difference  
between trains and planes is,  
on a train, if you don't like  
the conversation,  
you can change  
your seat.

Or get off  
at the next stop.

Shouldn't ask  
for your number then?

Let me see your hand.

You gonna tell  
my fortune?

That's easy.

You'll know moments of joy. You'll  
lose what you love. You'll die.

Can I get a second opinion?

The other thing



about trains is,  
you get to see the world  
passing in real time.  
When you're eight miles up,  
you can convince yourself...  
you're still the same person  
when you get off.  
So, a million questions  
without a questioner,  
a hundred replayed nights.  
How do I find myself  
in this sweaty bed?  
Who is this person  
beside me?  
Why are there more scars  
than I remember wounds?  
Right. Memory is flawed.  
But isn't memory all that knits our moments  
of existence into a sense of self?  
Of course, philosophical  
questions lose power...  
when you're staring  
at your own mortality.  
It's one thing to know you're  
going to die at some point...  
in the indeterminate future,  
another to watch  
the clock wind down.  
And, yeah, I'm not  
the only dead guy in the room.  
So you went back  
to work?  
I had to finish  
the project.  
But now you had a name.  
There were no Lexi's  
in Westport.  
There were three Alexandras,  
but none of them were her.  
When we got to the camp,  
everything is very simple.  
A man points left or right,  
and you live or you die.  
For my mother

and sisters, death.  
I was big enough to work, so my  
father and I go to the right.  
I still held the little cross  
in my hand,  
but I saw that they were taking every  
little piece of gold they could find...  
Rings, bracelets.  
You could only keep  
the fillings in your teeth.  
That they took  
when you were dead.  
I decided then and there...  
that I would hold on to the little  
cross the girl had given me,  
no matter what.  
I slipped it under my tongue.  
Having a mission,  
even if it's  
only in your mind,  
keeps you alive.  
When I wasn't working,  
I found myself  
wandering the streets.  
I would think I saw her  
maybe a dozen times a day.  
Somehow, I'd always wind up  
back at the same place.  
I remembered an old photo  
I'd seen somewhere.  
Watch things in real time,  
and it's easy to believe  
we're part of the world,  
that our motion  
is more than random,  
our presence  
more than accidental.  
But a long exposure  
reveals the truth.  
We're just ghosts,  
illusions we perpetrate  
in ourselves.  
So a guy's getting his  
morning coffee and paper.

In line in front of him,  
he sees this vision.  
Gorgeous. I mean, right out  
of the swimsuit edition.  
And she's buying  
a lottery ticket.  
He's smitten.  
Can't get a word out.  
He lets her get away.  
The next day, he goes back to the  
store and he asks the owner,  
"Do you know the girl who  
bought the lottery ticket?"  
And all the English this guy knows  
is, "You buy something or get lost."  
Right?  
Well, our boy figures people  
are creatures of habit,  
so he finds himself  
the nearest coffee shop,  
plants himself where he's  
got a view of the store,  
figuring sooner or later  
she'll come by for her ticket.  
He gets obsessed.  
Days turn to weeks.  
Seasons change.  
He shows up late for work. He's  
unavailable for his friends.  
But wouldn't you know it. The day he  
finally decides to give it all up...  
She shows up.  
Turns out  
she was out of town.  
Let me guess.  
He never makes his move.  
Why?  
He sees the future.  
They'll have their affair, and in  
time it'll be no more than that...  
An affair.  
He can anticipate  
the purr of her throat,  
the scratchy quality

of her voice in the morning.  
He closes his eyes,  
and he can almost smell her.  
It'll be good, but they have  
about as much chance...  
of making it in the long run as  
she does of winning the lottery.  
Because good  
is never perfect.  
In his fevered mind,  
he's realized...  
the unbridgeable distance  
between real and ideal.  
So he would rather let her walk  
away with her sad lottery ticket.  
He would rather let her live in  
the purity of his imagination...  
than succumb to the spectacle of  
flesh and blood, scent and sorrow.  
He's lost something, sure...  
Another conquest, maybe even  
an enduring relationship.  
But think what he gets  
in return.  
He will forever be the man who  
waited in the snow and rain...  
day after day  
for the lottery girl.  
He will be the one  
who walked away...  
at the moment  
his dream was realized.  
He will be mythic.  
You want to know  
what really happens?  
Sure.  
He's out of that  
coffee shop so fast,  
he sloshes his half-caf latte  
on his hand, extra hot.  
He almost knocks her over, they strike up  
a conversation, and they begin dating.  
Two kids and a summer home  
in Montauk?

Lasted eight months. "It's not  
you, it's me." That kind of thing.  
What? Don't be smug.  
He gave it a shot.  
My version  
would've lasted forever.  
Now I know your secret.  
Didn't know I had one.  
You'd rather have a great story  
than a great love.  
You didn't think it was odd  
running into her like that?  
I guess I wasn't  
thinking at all.  
What?  
I haven't quite figured out  
if you're a victim or a suspect.  
Well, I suppose you could pretty  
much say that about anyone.  
And the lottery ticket?  
She won.  
You try to find me?  
There are no Lexi's  
in Westport.  
I didn't say  
I lived in Westport.  
You gotta give a guy  
a fair chance.  
I found you, didn't I?  
You look different.  
Different day.  
What color was your hair?  
Here's the thing about two  
people meeting on a train.  
If they know they'll  
always be strangers,  
it frees them.  
You can create me any way you  
want, and I'll never disappoint.  
I could ask you to kill for me, and I  
won't know if you'll carry it out.  
We have no reason  
to lie to each other...  
unless the lie

is prettier than the truth.  
We're no longer  
on the train.  
No?  
How did you find me?  
Don't tell me you're one of those New Age  
types who don't believe in accidents.  
You're not gonna ask me  
to kill someone, are you?  
Why don't you  
show me what you do.  
Can I get you  
a pain pill for that?  
Actually, the pain  
helps me remember.  
Sisters at Saint Jude's  
would agree with you.  
Catholic school?  
You bet.  
Her patron saint.  
I held the cross  
under my tongue...  
until there was  
a bloody sore.  
I ate with it...  
like that.  
I slept with it.  
Eventually the pain fades  
and the callous appears.  
My father only made it  
a few weeks.  
One morning  
he refused to work,  
and they beat him to death  
with their rifles.  
Bullets were too expensive.  
When I was young, my mother used to  
tell me this story when things got bad.  
"The world ended when Jesus  
hung on the cross," she'd say.  
And all of history  
is just a dream...  
in the last instant  
of a Roman centurion's life.

Coffee?

That's when she asked you  
to tail Carl Pruitt.

Not at first.

I knew she was hiding something,  
something from her past.

It wasn't so much  
what she said...

It was

the way she said it?

More the way she didn't say  
what she didn't say.

You some kind  
of cop detective?

Yeah.

You don't look like cop.

Yeah? What's a cop  
look like?

Better dressed.

Guy cheating on his wife.

I seen it all right here.

Yeah, I bet you have.

Nothing like stories  
from cab driver.

One guy tries to strangle hooker in  
backseat. I say, "Not in my cab."

He say,

"I give you big tip."

So what'd you do?

I throw him out. He strangle  
on street, his business.

Not in my cab.

People fucking, okay.

A big tip covers it.

Killing?

Yeah, I get it.

Not in your cab.

You can bet you.

That's him.

Want to hear

strangest story ever?

Does it involve dwarves?

Dwarves? What?

Somehow they always seem to involve

dwarves, and they're never true.  
This happened 100%.  
My brother, he's fucking  
this girl two years.  
Met in spinning class. You know,  
bicycle doesn't go nowhere?  
Only women in these classes.  
My brother joins for women.  
So he's fucking this girl. One night  
she asks, can her friend join in.  
My brother is like  
winning lottery.  
Of course.  
More is merrier.  
Let me guess.  
The friend is a man.  
Man? You crazy? Is more beautiful  
than one my brother is fucking.  
Big tits, everything.  
So they have wild night.  
Everything is on menu,  
soup till nuts.  
My brother thinks he died  
straight to heaven.  
In the morning, I get call.  
He wakes up, everything's gone...  
Girls, wallet, flat-screen.  
He calls police,  
but nothing to do.  
Her cell doesn't work no more. She's gone  
from spinning class like she never exists.  
Let me  
get this straight.  
She's with him for two years  
so she can steal his TV?  
His whole house. Lucky she  
left him his underwears.  
I tell you  
it was crazy story.  
He never found her?  
Every day he sees her.  
On subway,  
walking down street.  
But never her. One woman



he followed for half an hour.  
She called police.  
My brother is never same.  
Stopped spinning classes even.  
So she had you  
playing detective?  
It wasn't until the next time  
I saw her that she asked me.  
The time in the camps...  
stands outside normal time.  
The time in the camps...  
The time in the camps...  
stands outside normal time.  
Hello?  
Can you meet me?  
Where I grew up everything  
was flat, even the cities.  
This seems more honest.  
Eye to eye with everyone, you can convince  
yourself we're not that different.  
Step over a homeless guy  
to get to your penthouse,  
you know better.  
Grow up poor?  
Shows?  
My mother was always getting  
mixed up with the wrong guy.  
Father got out  
before I was born.  
Can't say I blame him.  
You ever try  
and find him?  
I heard he had  
an uncle in the east.  
That's why I came  
out here originally.  
He wasn't much use though.  
You still close  
to your mother?  
I grew up using her  
as a model of who not to be.  
When I was about seven, she finally  
seemed to get her life on track.  
Stopped drinking,

met a guy from a wealthy family.  
She always wanted me  
to be provided for,  
so he agreed to put  
something aside for me.  
It was good for a while.  
For a while.  
He never laid a hand on me,  
but I decided then and there  
I would never be a victim.  
It's important to keep  
promises to yourself.  
Isn't it?  
This the photo  
she showed you?  
I knew I was gonna do  
what it took to help her.  
At first it's, "You know you  
like it rough, don't you, babe?"  
Makes you feel like you're  
always the one at fault.  
If I hadn't done this,  
hadn't said that.  
You look in the mirror  
one morning and realize...  
it's not only your  
mother's eyes you've got,  
it's the bruises  
around them.  
Is that why  
you called me?  
I called you...  
to get drunk.  
That when she told you  
she was married?  
Not in so many words.  
More the way she didn't say  
what she didn't say?  
So who was she?  
The one who  
got to you.  
What makes you think  
there was only one?  
Devil takes many forms,

but there's really only one.  
You should've been  
a priest.  
Not an option  
for a woman.  
I'd make a terrible nun.  
There's always one  
who sets the standard.  
For most guys, it's the girl in  
college who barely knew they existed.  
There were a couple  
of those, I guess.  
It's just as well.  
If you'd gathered  
the courage to talk to her,  
you would've noticed  
her teeth aren't perfect.  
Her eyes  
are slightly askew.  
You ever notice how  
it's always those quirks...  
we find the most charming in the beginning  
become the most irritating over time?  
What about you?  
I'm more comfortable  
on this side.  
As long as there's  
no tape in it.  
It's digital.  
No tape.  
It was high school,  
backseat of his car.  
I wish I could be  
more original.  
He plays it cool,  
a little smile on his face.  
But in that smile is a world  
of expectation and sadness.  
The flower is beautiful,  
but it dies.  
The girl is fertile,  
but she will age.  
They won't find each other in an old age  
home at the sunny edge of the world.

Won't wind up in L.A.  
This is their moment,  
and they better take it.  
If there's anything  
you need to tell me...  
about your relationship  
with this young woman,  
now would be the time.  
I needed to know  
if it was possible to know...  
I needed to know if it was  
possible to know someone...  
- I love you.  
- Really know someone.  
I always have.  
I wanted to know  
what was real...  
Our souls were born together  
at the beginning of time.  
And what was just some kind  
of image of her in my head.  
I love you. I love you.  
I always have.  
Our souls were born together  
at the beginning of time.  
I love you.  
I always have.  
I always have. Our souls were born  
together at the beginning of time.  
Our souls were born together  
at the beginning of time.  
I love you.  
I love you.  
Our souls were born together  
at the beginning of time.  
It wasn't in college.  
We met at the museum.  
Impressionists?  
How'd you know?  
You always find the best women  
in the impressionist wing.  
We went out  
a couple of times.  
She invites me

back to her place,  
and we're sitting  
on the couch.  
When she gets up  
to throw a log in the fire,  
I notice a slight  
stiffness in her step.  
Somehow that tiny  
sign of age...  
made her real for me.  
She was perfected  
by her imperfections.  
And in that moment,  
I can see the future.  
We will move together  
into the bright haze,  
fighting age and decay,  
losing gloriously.  
I will come to love her cancer  
scars, her arthritic knee.  
And I know that sex and love  
are just animal things,  
the genes liking  
what's good for them.  
But maybe there's  
another possibility.  
If love is more  
than the sum of its parts,  
maybe we are more  
than the sum of our parts.  
But there's  
another future.  
She will leave me,  
or I'll leave her.  
I'll feel the pain  
but only for a while.  
And I know that if I ran  
into her a year later,  
she won't be someone that I could  
imagine falling in love with.  
In fact, I'll question  
that I ever did at all.  
So which future did you choose?  
Sometimes the scorpion

stings you,  
even if it means  
he'll drown too.  
When I was little, my mother  
told me about the saints.  
Saint Jude  
was always my favorite.  
Patron saint of lost causes.  
Why did you  
really call me?  
I agreed to help her out  
with Pruitt,  
but there was a condition.  
She still hadn't told me why she was  
crying that day I met her on the train.  
He was a brave man once.  
He was in Cuba on business  
during the revolution.  
Somehow he managed to convince  
both sides he was with them.  
He infiltrated the guerrillas  
on behalf of the government,  
told the revolutionaries he was  
gathering intelligence for them.  
Both sides suspected  
he was C.I.A.  
I think eventually even he  
didn't know what the truth was.  
One time he was able to warn  
a village about a coming attack.  
About a dozen families  
escaped.  
Do you have chocolate?  
I need you to do this  
for me, Danny.  
What will following him  
with my camera give you?  
Ammunition.  
Not everybody  
has a double life.  
Not everybody  
has a secret.  
That's where  
you're wrong.

You assumed the elderly gentleman was her great uncle? I imagine he was just some old-timer she used as a prop. She was very good with stories. That's when you agreed to follow Carl Pruitt. He was a criminal defense lawyer. I knew he'd have some unsavory associations, but I didn't think much of it. You were led to believe this ammunition... was for a potential divorce proceeding? She never actually mentioned divorce. Right. The way she didn't say what she didn't say. About a week in, it started to get interesting. That was the first time you saw James Fenetree? Well, we weren't formally introduced, but, yeah, that's him. Of course we already know that. For the record, I didn't leave her. So, sometimes the scorpion gets stung too. You replay the last weeks and days looking for a reason. Did you say something wrong, commit some callous act? Can it really be so fragile? Or you can move on. Envy those couples who've been together so long... they can't remember why.

In the land of the one-eyed,  
envy the blind.  
With the Americans approaching,  
they were in a hurry...  
to finish up with us.  
Finally it would be  
my turn.  
I thought back to the  
little girl by the train.  
In a place where evil  
seemed so big...  
Also so small,  
so everyday...  
I believed...  
that this one little act  
of kindness saved my life.  
I had to know that  
there was something else,  
some people existed  
who could be good and kind.  
You didn't notice anything odd about the  
picture she showed you of Carl Pruitt?  
Not exactly  
a family portrait.  
That's taken  
with a telephoto lens.  
Well, she doesn't like  
getting her photograph taken.  
Right.  
The aborigines.  
I guess I took  
a lot on faith.  
Well, I thought all you  
movie people were atheists.  
Only when it comes to God.  
In the morning,  
so much excitement.  
The camp guards  
have disappeared.  
People are running around.  
The Americans  
have liberated the camp.  
They had  
hot food for us...



Just some broth  
with a little meat.  
But it was so long since I had  
had anything so hot and good,  
I ate it so quickly that the little  
cross came loose, and I almost choked.  
Just think about it...  
If after all I'd been through  
I had choked...  
on this kind gift.  
I took it out of my mouth...  
and hung it round my neck.  
A Jewish boy wearing a cross?  
I got tired of explaining.  
So if they thought  
I'd converted, let them.  
I'd seen Pruitt go into  
the building a couple of times,  
so I decided  
to get a better look.  
Ever seen him before?  
His name's Spider.  
Of course.  
Carl represented him  
a few times.  
He's required to do a certain  
amount of pro bono work.  
And Spider?  
He's a provider.  
Drugs, girls, you name it.  
Carl likes to get paid  
one way or another.  
Are you asking  
for the time?  
Do I need  
some kind of wrist band?  
It ain't part of the club.  
I wasn't getting past  
this guy anyway,  
so I figured  
I'd come back another night.  
He had to take a break  
sooner or later.  
You didn't think you might be

getting in over your head?  
Ever try and jump off  
a moving train?  
If there's anything  
you need to tell me...  
about your relationship  
with this young woman,  
now would be the time.  
I thought I wasn't  
a suspect.  
Yet you're willing to walk into a  
potentially dangerous situation...  
armed with  
a video camera.  
I guess I wanted to know  
what was real...  
and what was just some kind  
of image of her in my head.  
I needed to know if it was  
possible to know someone,  
really know someone.  
It seemed very important.  
My wife died last year.  
Thirty years.  
I got the call I'm usually the one making.  
Car accident.  
Funny thing is, she wasn't even  
supposed to go out that night,  
but she did go out.  
She was going out to see  
the guy she was screwing.  
For weeks I bounced  
between anger, hurt, loss.  
The hardest thing was jumping  
from one feeling to the next.  
I couldn't get  
a foothold.  
So finally I decided  
to pick one emotion.  
I tried to remember  
who she was...  
and why I loved her.  
And then when the dark  
feelings would rise,

I would...

What do you call it when  
you turn lead into gold?

Alchemy.

I'd take everything about her,  
even the things I hated,  
and I'd tell her in my mind  
how that made me love her...

because that's what made her  
who she was, even the flaws.

I see it every day.

Love a person half your life,  
then wake up one morning...

and you can't find a single  
thing about them not to hate.

I've seen women carved  
to ribbons by men...

who two days ago would have jumped  
in front of a truck to save.

I wasn't gonna let  
that happen.

I wasn't gonna turn  
gold to lead.

Did it work?

Sometimes.

You know, there's a tab  
on the camera menu,  
you can turn off  
the tally light?

That way the suspect doesn't  
know he's being recorded.

You're good.

You share. I share.

Was it true?

Didn't Jesus say,  
"What is truth"?

Actually,

I think it was Pilate.

Eventually I made my way  
to New York.

I found work with a relative  
who sold small gifts,  
religious trinkets  
from the church.

He always made fun  
of me anyway.  
"The goy," he called me  
because of the cross.  
"Go out and sell the saints."  
So every day I went to the cart  
out on Coney Island.  
I couldn't believe how happy  
all the people were...  
just for nothing,  
for some cotton candy...  
and a few silly rides.  
This happiness  
was more foreign to me...  
than the new language.  
One day  
I'm pushing my cart...  
when this pretty young woman approaches  
to buy something for her niece.  
I hear she has an accent,  
so we start talking German.  
I never talked  
about my experience...  
with a Gentile,  
certainly not a German.  
But she was so kind,  
so gentle,  
I let her know  
I was a Jew.  
She could figure out  
the rest.  
So much was different  
between us,  
and yet it was so easy  
to talk to her.  
I never forget her smile.  
Finally she buys  
a trinket,  
and I reach down  
to put it in a bag,  
and the cross comes out  
from under my shirt.  
Her eyes get very big...  
like two blue pools

of water.

"Where did you get this?"

she asks.

I don't want to tell her

the whole story,

but of course

she already knew.

"Why is a Jewish boy

wearing a cross?"

It seemed like forever.

Neither of us

said a thing.

Then there are tears

in her eyes.

"I was punished when I told

my parents I had lost it."

I had found my savior,

the little girl whose kindness had

seen me through impossible times.

I left the cart right there

on the boardwalk,

and we walked for hours,

just talking...

Two people so different.

It was like we'd known

each other our whole lives,

which, of course, we had...

in our imaginations.

Seeing the worst

that people are capable of,

I had also seen in her

the best.

Now that I'd found her,

I promised her, promised myself,

I would never

lose her again.

And I've never

broken that promise.

I was wrong.

You don't want to choose between

a great love and a great story.

You think that's

what this is about?

I woke up one morning,

and I saw my mom standing  
over the kitchen sink,  
and suddenly  
I knew what hell was.  
You see the world,  
but you're not in it.  
People walk by your grave,  
laughing, alive,  
forgetting you.  
But still you remain,  
a bead of awareness  
in a universe of uncaring.  
But what if  
there's a way out?  
What if there's a bridge  
to just one moment,  
a story,  
a sentence of our lives?  
Do we become  
a part of that story?  
Does that become  
our eternity?  
I don't know why I didn't  
tell her about the Herzmans.  
I wonder  
if it saved my life.  
She took the cab  
down with me.  
The idea was I'd collect the footage  
and we'd meet later in a diner.  
You should have  
fought for her.  
You thought it was her  
imperfections that you loved,  
but it's really  
just the story.  
Makes you  
into a nicer guy...  
than the one who would've  
left her for someone younger.  
The great lost love  
has its appeal,  
even to a girl like me.  
Stories don't age and die.

You can tell them  
over and over.  
Problem is,  
they always end the same.  
Seriously, man, what the  
fuck were you thinking?  
Fair question.  
I mean,  
what did you expect?  
Damned if I know.  
Damned if you don't.  
Good one.  
Yeah? Well,  
take it to the grave.  
What am I doing here?  
Hey, man, you chugged  
in here on your own steam.  
It was  
a rhetorical question.  
I was asking myself.  
I know what  
"rhetorical" means.  
No disrespect.  
You know what I like  
about vampire stories?  
The good ones, anyway.  
I couldn't begin to guess.  
The victim has to invite  
the vampire in.  
I think I might  
have misjudged you.  
It's a common mistake.  
Did you really think  
you could have her?  
Think she'd ever  
show you her real self?  
I guess I wasn't thinking.  
That's where  
you're wrong, partner.  
You think too much.  
Girl like Lexi,  
she isn't about thought.  
She tell you  
what floats her boat?

Tell you to grab her hair,  
push her face  
into the pillows?  
Tell you  
she likes it rough?  
I just had  
a funny thought.  
Wouldn't think you'd be  
in a laughing mood.  
About a patron saint  
for lost causes.  
Yeah, that's  
one of her raps.  
Unlike you, I don't imagine I'm  
the first man she's told that to.  
Probably not the first to wear  
this around his neck either.  
You always believe women when  
they tell you you're their first?  
Actually  
I never believe that.  
Well,  
there's hope for you yet.  
You know, of course,  
that's a scorpion.  
And your name's Spider.  
Why do you...  
Why have you got  
a scorpion tattoo?  
You do have a right  
to remain silent.  
Hey, I'm just saying.  
Just saying.  
In the end, does all that  
smarts really pay off?  
I mean, look where I am.  
Look where you sit.  
Doesn't that strike you  
as funny?  
Well, not funny.  
I have this theory  
about smarts...  
That it gets in the way  
of seeing things.



What? Did you think  
she cared?  
Just what I thought.  
Only a smart guy could be  
that fucking stupid.  
Here's another smart guy.  
See how fucking smart?  
So, want to hear the plan?  
Our girl asks you to get some dirt on old  
Carl over there, which isn't hard to do.  
He's much more interested  
in pain than women.  
What's the difference?  
But you wind up  
falling for her.  
Decide you  
have to have her.  
She brings that out  
in a man.  
Let me guess.  
I kill him.  
See? Those smarts again.  
Why do I kill him if she's  
going to leave him anyway?  
Hang on a minute.  
Because he put a fucking  
nail through your hand.  
Of course, I'd been  
following Pruitt,  
collecting all this footage,  
so it had a certain logic.  
Spider.  
Scorpion.  
Whatever your name is.  
Arachnid!  
You like pain  
or something?  
Look, I know smarts  
has its limitations,  
but dumb won't get you  
very far either.  
Seriously?  
You really think  
you're gonna end up...

on a paradise island  
with her?  
You really don't know  
what's what, do you?  
- She's not real.  
- No?  
She only shows you  
what she needs to.  
See, a man like you will  
never get what she's about.  
Upper West Side pussy.  
Think I don't know you?  
You walk the line, afraid  
to give the littlest offense.  
Tell them what they wanna hear,  
fuck on their schedule,  
tiptoeing nine paces  
behind them.  
You're right, hoss.  
She'll never be real to you.  
Just about done here.  
And you thought the nail  
was a good idea because?  
He pisses me off.  
So let me get this straight.  
He kills Carl, and then he hammers  
a nail into his own hand.  
Carl fucks him up with the nail,  
but he gets himself free.  
He does Carl  
with the knife,  
and Carl has just enough left in him  
to put a bullet between his eyes.  
What did I say  
about improvising?  
Where is he?  
I want to see him.  
I've waited a long time.  
Who the fuck are you?  
Jesus.  
Now he's dead.  
He didn't know you.  
You have the gun?  
Cold as they come.

Why didn't he know you?  
No. Let me.  
You sure, babe?  
He's my responsibility.  
There's my girl.  
Come on. You can do  
better than that.  
If it makes a difference,  
I'm sorry.  
Can't blame the scorpion  
for stinging you.  
What was that she said?  
About living out an alternative future  
in the last instant of your life.  
...future in the last  
instant of your life.  
Is that what all this has been?  
Is that what this is?  
Are you always the last  
to realize you're already dead?  
...always the last to realize  
you're already dead all along?  
Maybe I should have been  
paying more attention.  
Well, that was the death that  
flashed before my eyes anyway.  
No. Let me.  
There's my girl.  
For the record,  
I never liked it rough.  
He pisses me off.  
You weren't what I thought.  
You're exactly  
what I thought.  
He won't be needing it.  
So where will you go?  
Someplace warm.  
Who will you be  
when you get there?  
You invented me as much  
as I invented myself, Danny.  
The vampire can't enter  
without an invitation.  
I knew he didn't come up

with that line himself.  
You want me to tell you  
it was real for me?  
That I loved you  
if only for a moment?  
That's why you're alive  
and Spider's dead.  
Okay.  
I love you.  
I always have.  
Our souls were born together  
at the beginning of time.  
I can't tell you anything  
you don't already know.  
I believe you.  
Will you remember me?  
Safe bet.  
The thing is,  
even after everything,  
I wanted to believe.  
Duct-taped to a chair,  
nail through my hand,  
two dead guys on the floor,  
I still wanted to believe her.  
Homo creditus.  
Man the believer.  
Pretty fucking stupid?  
Just overmatched.  
They're smarter than us.  
You know that.  
At least you're not one of  
the dead guys on the floor.  
Does that make me  
a suspect?  
I don't think you killed  
Carl Pruitt.  
And I don't really think that she  
ever expected you to take the rap.  
My guess is her plan was to get rid of  
Pruitt and Spider at the same time.  
So why use me?  
What Spider lacked  
in moral clarity,  
he made up for

in street smarts.  
He knew somebody would have  
to take the fall for Pruitt.  
Well, she convinced him  
it was you...  
so he wouldn't know  
it was him all along.  
But why kill Spider?  
I guess she had a short fuse  
on this kind of thing.  
Tell you  
she likes it rough?  
She was never  
married to Carl.  
He didn't seem to know her.  
He knew her.  
But I decided then and there  
I would never be a victim.  
The mother  
was married to him.  
He killed her.  
D.A. went for manslaughter.  
Carl claimed she came at him  
with a kitchen knife.  
He was acquitted.  
She never said  
she was married to him.  
What?  
Or that he was the one  
who beat her. She just...  
You look in the mirror  
one morning and realize...  
it's not only your mother's eyes you've  
got, it's the bruises around them.  
She just...  
She just let me  
fill in the blanks.  
Turns out the mother insisted that  
Carl set up a blind trust for Lexi...  
before she'd marry him.  
Carl stipulated the trust  
wouldn't go into effect...  
until he  
and the mother died.

She always wanted me  
to be provided for,  
so he agreed to put  
something aside for me.  
She cleaned out the trust  
three days ago.  
I imagine she hooked up with  
Spider as a way to get to Pruitt.  
He'd represented him  
on a couple of drug beefs.  
Once Spider laid a hand  
on her, his fate was set.  
You knew all along.  
Be nice if we could see  
the rest of the room.  
Well, I'll be more careful  
next time I drop my camera.  
You will get me the footage  
that you've been collecting?  
So I'm free to go?  
I am curious though.  
Earlier you mentioned something  
about that couple, the Herzmans.  
Something you  
never told her.  
I didn't want him  
to do this. Never.  
I was in the camps,  
just as I said.  
And I saw many trains  
pass by with prisoners.  
But I never  
even saw Morris.  
That day on Coney Island  
was the first time we met.  
We fell in love  
and were married.  
The important parts  
are true.  
But the story of the girl  
with the cross? Your angel?  
That I made up.  
It was just a trinket  
he was selling.

I thought it was so funny, you know,  
a Jewish boy selling crosses.  
I've worn it ever since.  
But it's not even real.  
Of course it's real.  
It's just not real gold.  
When the book publishers  
did their fact checking,  
they found that the dates  
and places didn't match.  
Morris came clean, but of course  
he lost the book and movie deal.  
Why'd he do it?  
For the money?  
Not exactly.  
It was a wonderful story.  
It made people happy.  
But it's not true.  
Agh! It made them feel good.  
Do you care when you read a novel  
that it didn't really happen?  
Are you angry at Shakespeare because  
Juliet never said those words?  
Our love is real.  
Fifty years.  
That part is real.  
So what's more important?  
I gave them something beautiful,  
and now it's gone.  
Is there too much beauty  
in the world?  
Believe me, where I was  
there wasn't so much beauty.  
A story like this would've  
given those poor souls...  
more hope  
than a hundred gold crosses.  
That's why I was on the train  
when I saw Lexi the second time.  
I was on my way up to do the follow-up  
interview with the Herzmans.  
You will get me  
that footage.  
You're welcome to it.

She never let me shoot her.  
Maybe she was right  
after all.  
About it capturing  
your soul.  
She asked me if I'd choose the  
great love or the great story.  
But is there a difference  
really?  
In the end, you aren't  
who you think you are.  
You're who  
I perceive you to be.  
In the world of matter, you are  
uncontrollable, unpredictable,  
a babble of random motion.  
I capture you in a net of words, and  
you are known, if only for a moment.  
We imagine we create words.  
But what if they create us?  
This is the secret poets know.  
Words are incantations  
weaving magic spells.  
If the word initiated  
the universe into existence,  
what will close it?  
Why didn't I tell  
Detective Martin?  
I guess I was never purely  
victim or suspect.  
You could say I was  
an accomplice of sorts.  
Check my heart.  
Why did I give her the memory  
card, let her keep her soul?  
Why did I go back there,  
knowing?  
Sometimes you just have to  
find out how the story ends.  
Of course, I did back it up  
to my hard drive.  
I really do miss  
our conversations, Danny.  
But this time I'm just going



to have to imagine your side.  
In a way,  
it's just as well...  
since we can't ever  
really know each other, can we?  
Men and women,  
people and people,  
we're all alone  
in the end.  
But maybe that's okay.  
It's what makes us hope and fear  
and sometimes love each other.  
It's what keeps us awake  
at night...  
and makes us pull the blankets over our  
head against the glare of morning.  
It's the throbbing in your brain at 4:00  
a.m. as you look for the bathroom...  
in some stranger's apartment to piss out  
the chemicals from the night before.  
It's fingers  
scratching across tiles,  
my knees pointed at the ceiling,  
my back arched like a cat's.  
Love is a religion,  
a denial of death,  
a descent into fiction  
and improbability,  
a lighting of candles,  
a bridge to the impossible,  
a lunatic babbling  
on the uptown I.R.T.  
It is this tenement basement with  
its stink of cockroach and death.  
It is Jesus above Rio.  
...denial of death.  
It is sex and it's withering.  
It is blood on the floor.  
You will kill for it  
and die for it.  
It is hope  
and the death of hope.  
You'll open its shroud and see your  
face etched in dirt and sweat.

It fills you and empties you  
in the same heartbeat.  
A bridge to the impossible.  
It is hope  
and the death of hope.  
Love without sex  
is life without death.  
Sex without danger  
is God without the devil.  
If you can't risk being damned,  
don't imagine you can ever love.  
Love straps your arms  
to the cross,  
drives nails  
through your hands and feet.  
Love is the spear  
that pierces your side...  
and the blood and the gall  
that splashes to the ground.  
It is a rag of vinegar  
pressed to your lips...  
and the thorn  
pushed into your scalp.  
It is a desert mirage,  
an echo in a cave,  
your own words  
returning to mock you.  
It's every great painting  
you'll ever see...  
and the way we know art from the scratchings  
an elephant can make with his trunk.  
Hard center or soft?  
Soft.  
Never much cared  
for the hard center.  
Nor I.