

Grades 9–12, Third Place

“The Train Ride”  
Hope Martin  
John Adams High School

I boarded the train, its red paint chipping away and followed my mother to our seats. As I passed a mirror, I studied the image reflected back at me. I was of average height for a fifteen-year-old girl, but nowhere near as gorgeous as I wanted to be. My hair was too dull of a brown, my eyes were too small, and my smile faltered too often. I looked beyond the mirror, and began to think. I was a fairly smart girl, and I had a lot of friends, which reminded me that I was on a train, driving ten hours away from all of them, and not wanting to go.

Just then I felt a hand grab my wrist, “Jenny, Jenny, let’s go! I’m sorry sir,” my mother said a little too loudly.

“It’s alright ma’am, I’m just trying to get to my seat,” replied an oversized man with a grin that made a smiley face look sad.

I muttered an apology and allowed myself to be lead by my mother to our seats. “Mom, why do I have to be here again? I’m missing two Halloween bashes and Brenda Dunkin’s sixteenth birthday party!”

“Now Jenny,” she replied in a tone that said, “we already talked about this,” “I’m sure Brenda will understand that you’re going to visit your grandmother for a few days and as for the bashes, there will be plenty more to go to when you return. Come on,” she pleaded, “let’s just have a good week and make the best of it.”

I gave her a meek smile, but didn’t say a word. Instead, I pulled out my iPod and moved my gaze to the outside of the windowpane. As music roared in my ears, I couldn’t help but think of my friends having fun without me, while I was missing them terribly, wishing to return home.

It began to turn dark outside and I felt my eyelids getting heavier and heavier. Soon, the swaying of the train rocked me into a gentle sleep and I remained content, until I was jolted awake by the sudden stopping of the train. Looking around bewildered I let my eyes adjust to the pitch black. I was sure that I saw something dart down the aisle, but it was gone in a second and I assumed it was my eyes tricking me. My mother was no longer in her seat. She was probably in the bathroom, which sounded like a good place to go right now. I got up from my seat, and made my way to the bathrooms. To my surprise nobody was on this part of the train anymore. “Well, they couldn’t have gone too far,” I muttered to myself.

After going to the restroom, I decided to return to my seat. After all, I didn’t want the train to leave me behind and I had no clue where everyone was. When I arrived back at

the familiar section of the train, everything was as I had left it. My iPod was tucked in between the two chairs and my blanket was lying carelessly where I had thrown it. I was just about to put my ear buds in, when a dark, masculine voice said, “I’ve been waiting for you Jenny, everyone else has followed, everyone but you that is.”

“Wha...wha...what?” I managed to stammer, “How do you know my name? Who are you?”

“Those questions are thoughtless and dumb,” he replied. “The question is, how do you get away from me?”

Pondering this for no more than a second, I leaped out of my chair and began running frantically down the aisle. “HELP!!” I screamed, “SOMEBODY HELP ME!”

“There is no one to help you Jenny,” the stranger replied calmly as he jumped over my head and landed on his feet in front of me. “Foolish girl, did you really think you could get away from me?” he asked.

Not expecting a reply, he grabbed my wrists and tied them tightly behind my back with rope that appeared out of thin air. “Ha, you like that?” he said sarcastically, “Well believe me there are plenty more ‘tricks’ to show you!” he exclaimed as he shoved me down the aisle.

Soon we were outside and along the tracks were many different creatures—ones only imagined in fairytales. I recognized only a few, werewolves, vampires, goblins, but there were many more, which showed no recognition in my brain. Some of them were standing, watching me as I walked clumsily in front of the stranger. Others slept on the ground or were talking quietly amongst themselves. As I walked on I made eye contact with none of them. Instead, I stared at my feet and thought about how I couldn’t believe the mess I had gotten myself into by falling asleep which brought me to another point. Why hadn’t my mother woken me up at the first signs of danger?

“There were no signs of danger,” replied the stranger and seeing my startled expression he continued to explain. “I can read your mind, and all the other creatures here too. See that werewolf over there?” he asked, pointing his finger in the direction of a tall, hairy beast with food caught in his beard and a wicked smile upon his lips. I nodded.

“Well, his name’s Jeff, and right now he wants to jump up and kill you, but his friends are saying that you’re the “special one” so he can’t and that vampire over there? His mother just got killed, but he doesn’t cry. He’s planning revenge,” he concluded.

“Yo Tom, what’s with the little chick?” Jeff asked, licking his lips as his eyes set on me.

“She’s not for you Jeff,” replied Tom. “I’ve been instructed to take her to Eclasse, the witch,” he added for my benefit and we continued walking down the path.

After we had gotten past all of the creatures, I was permitted to walk beside Tom, which allowed me to finally take a long, hard look at my kidnapper. He was tall, six foot five I would guess and his arms were long and thin. He was in shape, I could tell from the way his calves bulged from underneath his jeans. He wore a regular polo shirt and his hair was almost the same shade of brown as my own. He almost looked...

“Normal? Human?” Tom’s voice asked bringing me back to reality once more. “Well, that’s because I was once, but then I was taken in by a witch who I would later call my mother. Now, I have powers and you can too, if you accept our ways that is,” he said looking directly in my eyes as if pleading for me to accept the way he lived.

The path we were walking on led to a small cottage where the silence was almost overwhelming. Glancing around I realized how beautiful the path we had been walking really was, although somewhat scary. Gigantic trees formed a forest where pairs of eyes— some yellow, some red, and others green—would suddenly appear occasionally. As we approached the house Tom once again grabbed me and pushed me forward towards the door. Just before we went inside he whispered in a soft, caring voice, “It’s nothing personal babe, you just happen to be the chosen one. Do what she says and you may get out of here alive. Disobey what she says, and life will never be the same.”

With that, I was shoved through the door and as I tumbled down a small set of stairs, now alone, I contemplated the advice he had given me. My dungeon was a small room with a lit fireplace and a sofa sitting in front of it, nothing else. Considering there was nothing else to do, I sat upon the sofa and waited for whatever events were to come next. I was not disappointed. Within five minutes of waiting a bright green puff of smoke filled the room and a pretty, angelic voice filled the air.

“Oh Jenny, Jenny, I’ve been waiting for you dear! You have something that I want. Do you know what that is?”

Soon a pair of glittery, orange shoes could be seen through the smoke. Then slowly, I observed two legs, covered with a long glitzy gown of gold. Finally, the whole body appeared and there before me stood a beautiful lady with her blonde hair put up in a fancy bun. She was of average height, slim and slender, but she carried with her an air of power. “So Jenny, do you know? Do you know what I have longed for ever since I saw it? Ever since I sneaked a taste of it at a human party, ever since it touched my small, delicate lips? I bet you don’t know, but you will learn in time my desire child, because I want it and you will learn quickly that I get everything I want.”

With these last words a puff of smoke appeared once more and she was gone. In her place lay an envelope with one word, written in beautiful cursive was what she desired. Chocolate. Why would she want chocolate? I wondered to myself. As if I had spoken allowed Tom once again came through the door and said, “Because, chocolate in our world is like money in yours. It allows her to do almost anything she wants to.”

“Well, that doesn’t seem so bad,” I said aloud.

“Oh, but what you don’t understand Jenny is that it is, it’s horrible. With chocolate, she will be able to take over both our world, and your world. Here chocolate is magical, it’s how we summoned you. We had only a crumb left and it was just enough to get you to come here.”

“But why are you telling me this?” I asked aloud and then without him actually speaking aloud I could hear Tom’s voice inside my head.

“I trust you,” he said. “I don’t like it here and I was kidnapped and taken here, because originally she thought I was the chosen one to find an endless supply of chocolate. Later she discovered that it was not I, but I made a great servant so she kept me instead of killing me. I want to help you, but I’m not sure what to do.” He concluded, and vanished into thin air just as the witch returned to the room this time through the door.

“So my dear, have you thought about it? Will you help me get my chocolate?” she asked, almost begging.

Thinking fast I replied, “Yes, but I need Tom to take me back to the train. I have quite a few candy bars in my bag and that will help you get started with whatever you’re planning.”

“Oh that’s no necessary,” she began. “I’ll go with you!”

“No!” I said a little too fast, “I mean, you need to rest! I want to surprise you with how much chocolate I have. After all, the chocolate doesn’t know you; it might get scared and melt.” I explained, making up the ridiculous story hoping she knew nothing about chocolate except for how sweet it tasted.

“Oh why thank you!” she replied, “I had no idea that it could be scared away like that. It must have a thing against witches? Oh well, I do feel awfully tired. Tom! Tom! Where are you?” she called as she vanished once again with a puff of green smoke.

“Let’s go,” Tom said before even arriving in the room. “We don’t have much time to waste and I have a lot to explain before we can even think about getting you home.”

With that we were out the door and a long explanation of what their world was and how to escape began playing in my head. It was Tom’s voice, I could tell, but unlike before I could hear other voices in the background too. “Now focus only on my voice,” Tom began. “You’re beginning to hear other people’s thoughts too, because you’re turning into a witch. I know it’s hard to understand, but we must get you out of here fast! The only way to do that is to go back to the train station and try to get the train going.”

By this time, we were practically running to the train station. “Slow down!” Tom commanded in a loud booming voice, so loud that I couldn’t tell whether he spoke it aloud, or said it telepathically. I looked up just in time to see the group of creatures we

had encountered on our previous walk, headed our way forming a mob. Without a moment's hesitation Tom grabbed my arm and suddenly, I felt warm all over and weightless, as if I was floating. There was no longer any noise, just air. No trees, no surroundings; it had all disappeared, but then I was back to reality within a matter of moments.

"Holy smokes!" Tom said aloud. "I've never done that before!" Seeing my bewildered look he continued to explain, "Only powerful witches can take people and themselves and move them from one point to another. It's called jumping and I have never achieved doing it with anyone else. It took me forever to just learn how to jump by myself!"

I looked around in amazement, as I took in my new surroundings. The train where I had been taken from not long ago was standing right before me. We climbed aboard sat on the chairs once again so Tom could explain what I had to do.

"What you need to understand," he began. "is that this train isn't really here. What I mean is this isn't your real train. This is a form of imagination that the witch has put into your brain. Only you can see it, I see something totally different. Now look around, there should be one place that shimmers a little bit. Do you see it?"

Looking around I tried to find the shimmer, but the pressure of it all was making it nearly impossible. Soon angry voices filled my head and one voice stood out among all of them. "JENNY!" the witch's voice bellowed, "DON'T LISTEN TO HIM! HE'S CRAZY! CHOCOLATE WILL SAVE US JENNY CHOCOLATE WILL SAVE US..."

I felt a hand gently push me forward into a wall. Expecting scratches and a massive headache I covered my face with my arms and braced myself.

Instead of pain, I awoke to my mom frantically shaking my arm. "Honey! Jenny! Are you okay? You were mumbling something in your sleep!"

I looked around bewildered, what had happened? Turning around something caught my eye in the seat diagonal from us. As if on cue a man's head turned slowly towards my own. Tom winked, and mouthed, "Thank you," and with that he was gone... POOF!