2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

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The Girl on the Train

To better understand the following events you, as the reader must grasp the following ideas;

That this is A: a story picked from the brain of a girl no older than 9 years old, therefore reality has been somewhat tipped.

 And B: this story takes place in an in-between land between the world we live in and the world we want to be in. This land is called NoWhere, and it is simply where one goes when they don’t want to be where they are. And in NoWhere there are tons of things to live in. There's Clams Casino, casino. Two palaces. A submarine, a few pirate ships and a train that wraps around it all.

Today a girl appeared in NoWhere crying in a train car. She was riding first class in the fluffiest seat the NoWhere Steam Engine could offer. The rain spilt down her window and seemed to be flooding the earth around her (this is what I was referring to with the reality tipping. To our girl, this is the worst storm she’s ever seen, but I know that the storm was instead the more average type, with occasional lighting bolts and thunder bombs but nothing too frightening).

“Tests…” She mumbled, seemingly unaware of her new NoWhere surroundings, “Tests…” she curled up into a little ball, her arms held her in, and her pigtails covered her face like curtains. “Tests…” “tests….” in her mind visions of Frankenstein steel tests tables lit up and disappeared with the rattling from outside her window. She breathed harder until she felt like she was suffocating. Her throat hurt sore and her hands rattled against her legs like she was a wind-up toy. “Tests,tests,tests…”

She couldn’t figure out what the word meant. Her eyes were glossed over like poetry. She lashed out to grab a table sitting in front of her and held it tight.

Her cheeks burned red. She touched them and swore steam sprung off of them. Nothing is right. Nothing makes sense, Nothing is right.

“Tickets!”

The Girl  sprung up

A shadow traced the door to her train car,

“Tickets!” it said again.

The Little Girl then disappeared away from NoWhere and back to where she came from.

A half a day older the girl reappeared. She was still warm, her cheeks still felt crusty wet, and her pigtails still remained high on top of her head like horns, and blocked her eyes. This time in the train car she came more into the light, she did so to be in the middlemost of the car and pick up some of the decorative pillows.

They were a cherry satin color of a very fine material. Regardless, she still tossed it across the train car to the adjacent seat, before getting it back, and doing it again. Then she started squeezing the pillow into a small little ball. The satin, now in desperate need of ironing, was thrown against the train car yet again followed by an instant collapse of the girl onto the Train Car seat, and lying there to be swallowed whole by her mind. She was spiraling out into the aisle.

She thought one bad thought

Then it got worse

And worse.

And worse.

And worse.

*Worthless.*

She thought *I’m the big sister. I couldn’t do anythin-*

“TICKETS!”

The voice from outside the train car came again, but unlike before, now it was angry.

“TICKETS!”

“THAT MEANS YOU TO KID!”

The voice slammed open the sliding door to The Girl’s train car. On the other side of the door, the voice now had a body. “You disappeared last time!” he yelled, “But now I got you.”

The Girl gulped, she should stop crying. She slammed her teeth together, in response her body started squeaking like a teapot.

“Huak” “AUgh”

The ticket man only heard muffled chipmunk noises. He thought them rather aggravating. He straightened out his blue vest and checked the time on his pocket watch. “I have a few minutes…” he mumbled and took off his blue brimmed cap.

He held out his ticket puncher, “you got a ticket?”

The girl shuffled in her pockets with uneasy hands and brought out an ivory ticket she didn’t realize she had. The man punched it in and sat across from her on the train car.

“I’m Conductor Valve” he pointed to his shiny golden badge, “What’s wrong?”

*What’s wrong?* The little Girl thought, *What’s wrong?* Though she didn’t understand her own thoughts, she knew ‘what’s wrong’ was to water down what she was feeling.

“Ma-m, Sis-usK” words weren’t working for her. She was trapped in her mind. The Conductor sighed, “ok.” he started, “take a deep breath in?” The girl tried to do that but kept gasping and struggling to breathe. “Hold for 8 seconds.” The Girl tried again, she still fumbled, “then breath out.”

He rhythmed the breathing with the ticking of his pocket watch,

“In…”

“Out…”

“In…”

“Out….”

“Ok?

The girl tried again and again but kept gasping in the middle of the breaths. Ruining the entire technique

The man nodded, “good.” He looked around the train car. “It’s gonna be ok.” the girl shook her head no in response. “No.” -she lit up a bit in surprise, that was the first full word she said all day.

The conductor nodded, “Is someone hurt?’

The girl nodded strongly then exploded again in uncontrollable gasps and tears. The rain outside followed her and got heavier as she went.

“In….”

“Out….”

“In….”

“Out….”

“In….”

“Out….”

“In…..”

“Out…..”

The girl shook out a breath and tumbled over to the man before grabbing onto his arm.

“You’re just a little kid,” He noticed the girl wore a visitor badge on her print dress. “Too little.”  The badge was for a children’s hospital. “It’s ok,” he said. He gave her a handkerchief and offered a shaky smile,  “You’re going to be fine.”

The girl looked at him with a sour look in her eyes. “Do you promise?”

Offered his pinky to hers, “I pinky promise.” -Anyone who is Anyone knows that in NoWhere a pinky promise is a promise of the highest caliber. You couldn’t break it in a million years or risk being kicked out of NoWhere. Pinky promises were unbreakable.

The girl crossed her pinky over his and shook her hand.” ok.” she mumbled, “...ok.”

The moment the words left her lips a bolt of lightning jerked his eyes away from the little girl with pigtails.

The Girl disappeared.

Her problems were not solved, but better. You see, that is how it goes, and that's how it’s always been. And as the oldest kids say;

 In NoWhere there are submarines and oceans green. Ships ripped in half and filled with the prettiest things. There are cities and villages like most places have and everyone who leaves always feels a little less sad.

                                                                      -Fin-