

The Platform

By the time the conductor calls for the 5:30 train to Rochdale, something is already terribly wrong. Her arms dropped to the side, her strength drained from her body. If she wanted to stand, she'd need to use her bruised knuckles again. Her thighs felt weighted, as though sandbags had been strapped to them. She scanned the platform for a single soul willing to save her. But no one seemed to take notice. She brushed off the idea as quickly as it came...and took a deep breath, unable to control her tears. She felt broken at that moment. She reached for her tote bag she had dumped beside the chair. Regretting her choice of carrying *The Count of Monte Cristo* in it.

Hands trembled as she pushed herself off the chair. She managed to stand. Her attempt to reach the train was useless. Unable to lift her foot off the ground, all she was left to do was drag one foot at a time. While her eye twitched from the stress that was consuming her limbs. Her right leg betrayed her. In a moment of panic, she quickly shifted most of her weight to her left. Who was she kidding, she thought, as she battled with the idea of making it on that train or returning to where it all began. But she had to get on that train. Even if it meant falling and having to crawl. She shook the idea off and sighed. Darkness consumed her mind. At that moment, home felt impossibly far away.

Frozen. She watched the people rush towards the train. Unseen. The desperation on the faces of finding a seat. As if this train was the last of them all. Her chest tightened. Anxiety claimed its place. In her throat. She slumped back into the chair. The muscles in her thighs aggressively twitched. She called her brother. Three rings. No answer. Then her friend. Nothing. Finally her ex. Voicemail. This was loneliness. The tears were more impactful this time, slicing her cheeks. Unable to lift her arm to wipe them, she let herself drown. A voice appeared beside her. Quiet and steady. "I've got you. Let's get you home". An elderly man. A stranger. Finally she felt seen for the first time. She took his hand as he slowly guided her onto the train. The driver took notice, delaying the train for a moment longer. The elderly man gently lowered her into the seat. Strange, she thought both seats were empty during rush hour. She finally looked up from wiping her face and the elderly man was gone.

The man across from her frowned slightly when she asked where he'd gone. The platform drifted further away, leaving what was now her past behind. She rested her head against the window. As the rain began, she exhaled as she loosened her grip on the seat for the first time that evening. Home no longer seemed so far away.
Her phone rang...