

5-2-2014

## Compagno di Viaggio

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Reid, Sophia K. (2014) "Compagno di Viaggio," *The Mercury*: Year 2014, Article 15.  
Available at: <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2014/iss1/15>

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# Compagno di Viaggio

**Keywords**

creative writing, non-fiction

**Author Bio**

Sophia Kareen Reid was born in 1992 in St. Mary, Jamaica, and relocated to Brooklyn, New York in 2002. She is a poet and writer. She is a senior at Gettysburg College, class of 2014. She has written numerous poems, and literary nonfiction pieces, in the form of memoir and personal essays. She is a poetry staffer for The Mercury.

# Compagno di Viaggio<sup>1</sup>

Sophia Reid

## Paris à Nice

The hardest thing was not speaking my mind. I sat wide-awake at the window of the night train as my traveling companion, Jonathan, ground his teeth and chewed on his tongue in his sleep. We were in Paris, heading to Nice. The window frame trembled with the swiftness of the train. Occasionally, dots of light slashed across the glass as I stared at the empty darkness, annoyed. My eyes drifted back to Jonathan as the weight of his head shifted onto my shoulder. The grinding of his teeth grew louder, drowning out the music coming through my white headphones. I looked at him, then at the passengers, wondering if anyone else was awake because of him. A man who sat across from us slouched in his seat with his face buried in his hands. A woman who sat directly behind me laid the side of her head against the window, and each time the window frame trembled, her eyes twitched. Jonathan's head sluggishly slid down my shoulder. I tried to push him off by jerking my arm, but he did not budge. I thought about tickling his face with strands of my hair—maybe he would slap himself. I pulled my shoulder abruptly from beneath his head and watched as his own weight brought him down. He woke up and looked at me with his sleepy eyes, and there at the corner of his mouth, I noticed that he was drooling. I turned back to the empty darkness with disgust.

## Firenze

Jonathan and I were in Florence for a day. Red roofs amazed us. We went on a sightseeing tour of the city. We hopped off the tour bus at Piazzale Michelangelo Square, which is on a hillside, offering a panoramic view of the city's fortified walls, the River Arno, the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio and the rounded red dome of the Duomo. We stayed there until the sun drowned in the horizon—*Twilight fell: The sky turned to a light, dusky purple littered with tiny silver stars*<sup>2</sup> as the faded clouds stretched across the sky and the pale moon came into sight. The sunset held the promise of a calm, serene evening, and I missed my boyfriend. I looked at Jonathan as he murmured that he was hungry.

We walked to *La Loggia* Restaurant, across the street from Piazzale Michelangelo Square. The historic restaurant is designed in a neoclassical style with a large panoramic garden, a grand arched terrace, and private rooms. We sat inside. When Jonathan went to the bathroom, I ordered a pasta dish and Sprite. When he came back, he did not order anything, but

stared at me. Before my order came, the server brought two glasses, my Sprite, and slices of bread and cheese. As I began to eat, Jonathan helped himself to my bottle of Sprite, and slices of bread and cheese. I stared at him in annoyance as he ate and drank a cup of my Sprite, leaving half the amount in the bottle for me. Unlike some people, I don't have pet peeves—*I have whole kennels of irritation*<sup>3</sup>. As he ate slices of bread and cheese, I could hear him munching loudly—his mouth wide open. After my food came and I ate, the server brought the check. I looked at Jonathan and he avoided making any eye contact with me. I paid and we left.

We took the tour bus back to Firenze Santa Maria Novella train station. There were many unoccupied seats, but Jonathan chose to sit adjacent to me. My hand luggage stood in front of my feet as I sat by the window, and Jonathan's hand luggage stood in front of him with his oversized backpack seated on top of it—closing me in. He infringed on my personal space. After we got off the bus and were walking toward the station, Jonathan tugged on my red hood and asked if we could go to Burger King. I told him I would wait for him inside the station—I wanted to ditch him. My tolerance level had sunk to an all-time low. Squeezing through the gaps of people, I found a seat near our train's platform. I gazed up at the arrival and departure sign—our train was fifty minutes away. As I started to listen to music to help pass time, a guy came to sit next to me. He kept staring at me.

“Ciao,” he said.

“I don't speak Italian.”

“Ooh, I'm sorry. I speak Italian and German. My English is bad,” he replied, in patches of unsatisfactory English.

“Okay,” I responded nonchalantly, rolling my eyes to the side. I figured he might know what *okay* meant, and did not say anything more. But he kept staring at me, drilling his eyes into my open red trench coat—beneath my blouse. He had a rapist's eyes—very wide, undressing me with every blink. I turned my back toward him. After I turned, I felt one of his arms on my lower back and the other holding my arm—pushing against my breast. I turned around, trying not to cause a scene, and told him to stop—and he smiled unabashedly. As I tried to create distance between us, I noticed an older man eyeing up the situation. In that moment, the creeper got up and walked over to the older man. As they spoke, the older man stared at me over the creeper's shoulder. I could feel my pulse beating in my ears, impeding all other sound except my breath that was jaggedly moving in and out of my mouth at steady, gasping intervals. I could not take my eyes away from his eyes. The connection had to be held; if it broke—I would be kidnapped. I could not control my hands; they were trembling in an odd pulsating rhythm inside my pockets, as my facial ex-

pression became the epitome of weak. I started to panic—where the fuck is Jonathan? Sweat began to form on my nose as I got up and sped across the station. I walked until I found a seat near a couple of old women waiting for their train. I could not call anyone. I had run out of phone credit. I kept an eye out for Jonathan, but I could not find him. When our train arrived, I left.

As the train pulled out of Firenze Santa Maria Novella train station, rolling across the tracks—racing toward Rome, I glanced up at the dusky sky. I was worried about Jonathan. What if something had happened to him? Guilt held me in a stranglehold position as negative thoughts swept through my mind. I could have been kidnapped, and no one would have known where I went. Likewise, thoughts of someone abducting Jonathan surged through my mind. I continued to stare up at the unceasing sky as it grew darker, and silver dots and a pale light appeared. *Relax Sophia, just breathe*, I repeated to myself.

## **Roma**

When I arrived at my hotel in Rome, I had a Facebook message from Jonathan. He had gotten on the wrong train, but made it safely to his hotel. He had booked a different hotel when mine became full. We spent two nights in Rome. While we were there, we did not see each other. I traveled alone. Paved with small square black bricks, the streets were overcrowded with tourists and citizens. Italian musicians played instruments and sang songs along the sidewalks. The day before our departure to Venice, I messaged Jonathan and told him I would meet him at Roma Termini Train Station. He agreed.

The following morning, I waited twenty minutes for Jonathan by our train's platform until our train arrived and people began to board. I thought he probably had gotten on the wrong train again. As I walked toward our train, I felt my body pulled backward and I turned around to see Jonathan.

“Why didn't you look for me?” he yelled. As he spoke, he smacked his lips like someone that had just eaten.

“I didn't know where to look for you. I thought you would be near our train's platform since it makes more sense to meet there than anywhere else in this enormous train station,” I remarked.

“Well, you should have looked around. I saw you and you were not looking for me,” he responded, with his hand luggage and oversized backpack pulling him down. His face grew red, anger radiating from him like a bulb.

A part of me wanted to tell him about what happened to me while I waited for him in Firenze Santa Maria Novella train station, and another

part of me wanted to scream at him and tell him that I was not his mother, but I apologized and boarded the train. As I sat in my seat, looking out the window, I thought about telling him how annoying he was, but I withheld my anger—partially because I knew I needed him, to feel safe. From the corner of my eye, I glanced at him as he lounged in his seat, pouting. The hardest thing was not speaking my mind.

<sup>1</sup>Travel companion

<sup>2</sup>J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

<sup>3</sup>Whoopi Goldberg