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The Golden Spiral

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The Golden Spiral

Author Bio

Peter Rosenberger is a senior English and Philosophy double major with a Writing minor from Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. Peter works as an RA and a tour guide on campus. He sings in the Gettysburg College Choir and performs in GBurg SMuT shows. He is a lover of rap, film, video games, the NFL, and bland food.

The Golden Spiral

Peter Rosenberger

I take a deep breath and settle into the wooden bench against the wall of the train station. The station itself is locked and empty, which is odd because it's ten in the morning. Maybe it's closed because it's a weekend. My big suitcase, my small suitcase, and my backpack look like black Tetris blocks that fell onto the cobblestone floor from the ceiling of incandescent light. I quickly shrug my shoulders twice, slide my hands through my hair, and let them rest on the back of my neck as I take another breath. This hands-through-hair/deep breath ritual is a standard for me.

The mixture of artificial light from the station ceiling and natural light from the sun as it peaks over the stone fades. Bath Spa Station, its stone and metal walls that don't quite match, and the scurrying people disappear too, and I'm back standing a few yards from the line of people waiting at a ticket counter in Paddington Station, London.

"What are you doing?"

"It's just a habit," I said with a faint smile. My young interviewer escaped from her mother for a moment.

"I was watching you for a while," the girl replied. She must have been six or seven. "You did it like five times."

"I'm just checking my pockets. I don't wanna lose anything." I looked back up at the board of scrolling red and green train times and scanned frantically. The lines of locations and times are bleeding into each other like a digital jumble of polygraph readouts. I shrug my shoulders and tap two of my canine teeth together. *This little girl is probably better at catching a train than I am.*

The girl's mother located her daughter, scooped her up, and apologized. I gave a quick nod and smiled before looking back up at the big board. I finally caught the ticker line for Bath Spa and saw 5 MIN scrolling after it.

Before heading to the open ticket booth, I touched my right hand to my right hip, my fingers pointed down, and, with my pinky, I felt for my wallet in my back pocket, and, with my thumb, I felt for my phone in my front pocket. I did the same thing with my left hand, touch it to my left hip, and felt for my keys in my front pocket with my thumb. *Phone, keys, wallet? Check.* I stepped up to the counter.

Back in the maw of Bath Spa Station, an inky black, dime-sized fly

crawls between two chipping cobblestones on the pillar in front of me. I blink, and the light from the ceiling and the sun reenters my world. My hands fall into my lap. *Fuck*. No phone.

I spring up from the bench, abandoning my belongings as I bound back onto the train, my feet moving faster than my thoughts. I turn left. Two children sit in a family section with a tired father across from them. A twenty something woman with mocha skin and a maroon hijab bobs her head to her music across the aisle. *Not familiar*.

I swing around and jump through the small open room between the train cars. Two men. They look surprisingly alike. They didn't say a word to each other on the two-hour ride from London. I swing around again to face the man who replaced me in the corner window seat at the back of the car.

"Is there a phone here?" I get out between rapid inhales and exhales. The man wordlessly pats the crease between his seat and the wall, finds my phone, and hands it up to me. "Oh God thank you." A robotic voice comes over the train intercom, and I brace for the train to start moving.

I turn back and stumble into the exit car. "Can I still get off the train?" I ask to no one in particular. I start clawing at the door, but the button I find just causes a slight release of air, like a short sigh, and the door doesn't budge.

The man who took my seat appears behind me. "It's on the other side," he says as he reaches through the small window in the door and pulls the latch on side of the door facing my luggage. The door springs open, and I jump out. I can't even thank the man before the train lurches and starts rumbling toward Bristol.

My heart is pounding its way out of my chest like a drummer stomping on a bass drum. I walk the few paces back to my luggage and sink to the floor. The sound of my breathing drowns out the rush of the River Avon around the corner.

A few hours later, my knee taps as I sit and look at my luggage now piled on the twin bed in my new bedroom. The bed sits in the back corner of the lofted half of the room across from the three stairs that lead up to the elevated section. The mismatched tan nightstand and chocolate-colored dresser, both of synthetic wood, angle out, and the black, three-layered desk sits angled awkwardly away from the bed. *They couldn't have bought matching furniture?* My other knee starts bouncing up and down.

A vision of throwing my luggage on the ground and hiding beneath the yellowing comforter flashes into my mind, but it isn't even noon, and the jet lag will only be worse if I give in now. I grit my teeth and feel pres-

sure surge from my jaw up my cheeks to my temples. *I need coffee.* My college instincts kick in.

Alice, the assistant who helped me to my flat, made sure to point out the hole-in-the-wall coffee shop we passed on the way from the train station. Although the abroad program I'm doing in Bath is just a short summer session, apparently it's demanding enough that Alice needed to make sure I knew where to get a good caffeine fix.

On my way out of the flat, I pass the two bathrooms, the short hallway that leads to the kitchen and dining room, and the bedroom where two of my roommates will stay. The rooms spin haphazardly off of the cramped hallway like twisted, broken spokes on a bicycle tire. I check my pockets twice. *Phone, keys, wallet. No more fuck-ups today.* I tumble down the two flights to the lobby and walk into the midday sun.

Every corner looks unfamiliar to me, but I eventually find the long street that leads back to the train station and start down it. The chaotic sea of differently sized buildings is dizzying. I crack my knuckles one at a time as I glance up at the sand-colored buildings, all marked with patches of dark gray stains along their stone gutters. The buildings used to be so white that the sun reflecting off of them would hurt your eyes. When the city was just built, Bath must have looked like a shimmering pearl in a nest of green countryside. Now, the city is like a brown and beige jigsaw puzzle of all slightly misshapen pieces that someone glued together carelessly. *Where is this damn coffee shop?*

Each alley I look down bends in a different direction at a different angle, leaking and spilling into the city center and the looming abbey. The abbey's tower peaks over the rooftops, its brown spikes like the wings of a bat hanging lopsidedly on with twisting, crooked talons. I grind my teeth and continue down the street.

The smell of coffee hits my nostrils, and I stop. The coffee shop, in a building wedged perfectly between two others, is on my left. The Golden Spiral. *An odd name for a coffee shop.* I climb the four steps and enter the shop.

The smell and the warmth embrace me, and I let out a sigh. The shop is empty, except for the lone barista behind the counter. A thin, fraying hemp carpet is rolled out from the entrance to the counter. The barista is a tall, lean teenager with a strong jaw and a pronounced Adam's apple. He stands in the middle of the counter, in front of the till. A chalkboard runs the length of the wall behind him. The board is split into three even sections, a grid of coffees, teas, and treats, at least twenty options in each category, and before the barista can ask to help, I tell him I am going to need a minute.

On my right, a faded, red couch sits against the far wall. A long glass coffee table with white birch trunks for legs rests in front of the sofa. A few armchairs sit with small tables in a little circle around the couch. The left side of the room has the exact same furniture in the exact same alignment. Two displays of Golden Spiral ground beans in bright, metallic packages stand like suits of armor guarding the front of the store. If you had a picture of the inside of the shop and you folded it right down the middle, along the blue and red carpet, the two halves would be identical.

“Take your time,” the barista says. I look back up at the heavenly menu. *Tea would be the appropriate choice.* Too tired to be adventurous, I order a large black coffee. I barely have my wallet back in my pocket before my coffee is ready. I take it, head directly to the sofa on my right and collapse into its leathery middle cushion. I sip my too-hot coffee and close my eyes.

The little bell on the coffee shop door jingles, and I look up to see a girl my age walk into the shop. She is skinny, maybe five and half feet tall, with long, dark hair. She takes one step and bends to tie the laces of one of her worn, black boots. Her acid-wash skinny jeans are tucked into her boots, and her baggy, battleship gray sweater hangs inches past her waist. She pulls her right hand away from her shoe to slide a section of her hair behind her ear. It hangs only a few inches off the ground, and it reunites with the perfect current of hair that reaches down her back.

She gets up, walks to the counter and orders her drink. The barista, again with impressive speed, takes her money and makes her drink. With her cup in hand, she walks to the left side of the room and glides into the middle cushion of the sofa that parallels mine. Realizing that I have been staring, I return to my coffee, but after just an instant I look back up.

She is looking at me. I’ve never seen a more symmetrical face. I freeze and can’t help myself from smiling. She smiles back. I stare down into the warm well of my coffee and wonder about my time in this new city. My coffee is the same color as her hair. Her eyes are waiting for mine when I look back at her, and she is still smiling.