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Doors Opening

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Author Bio

Annika Jensen '18 is an English major with a Writing Concentration and has minors in Civil War Era Studies and Middle East and Islamic Studies. She loves goats, yoga, and destroying the patriarchy. Danny DeVito is her inspiration.

Doors Opening

Upon taking your seat to my right you acknowledged me in the most curious way,
breaking in affirmative rebellion every silent declaration of DC transit:
an unabashed smile reserved for ancient women with foreign minds and homely bodies.

The other passengers, blurs on an old tintype,
melted away toward Brookland and Tacoma and trickled down hill and stone stair to homes in
passionate, violent suburbs or sidewalk mattress fortifications;
they left no poems in their seats, but you remained beside me.

You and I will always carry in the skin about our neatly groomed eyebrows
some portion of the same worry when we board the train car—

Written in the name of Adam,
the first man,
by whom the course of blame would never divert,
not by the efforts of my prophets or yours—

We will carry gentle imprints on our fingers where we reached inside our purses
to clutch
a travel-size can of pepper spray when the men with the briefcases
and unknotted neckties pace
just close enough to trigger the preemptive flash of potential headlines:

Woman murdered, raped, accosted, harassed, stared at on DC metro, red line
Woman uses mace to fend off attacker on DC metro, red line

they will dust for thumb prints and find a worried mother's gift
to her only daughter and an insistence to keep it on her person at all times, and

“Call me when you get there!”

I guess that's why you chose the seat beside me.

I'm glad you did. I'm glad you smiled, a shallow smile,
visceral, though lacking no genuine hello
I'm glad you smiled of your own will and not that of a bitter man's teeth,
a bitter man's mind that passed a note down his bloodstream saying,
“It would be a good idea if you told her she'd be prettier—
her brown skin would be brighter—
if only she'd smile.”
I'm glad you're brave enough to show me that you have a place beyond

the metro chair, the dentist's chair,
and that I am welcome to guide myself around the map of all your chairs in
wonder.

Why do I study America and not the way you've shaped it?
Why am I not stopping strange high heels outside of Chinatown and asking if
they find it funny
to see your Armani bag begin at the end of your skirt?

I admire the memory of you and the box of masks that you lent me
to dress you up in voices and auras and neatly scripted character trains from my
sixth grade notebook.

I can draw you in a spaceship or in a pregnant belly.
I can reconstruct the eyes that fall like lead rain upon your smile.
I can scribble out the male gaze that you and I,

Two smiling women, strangers, beside each other on a subway,
wear as outdated perfume.

You said goodbye at Tacoma Park, an echo of your earlier affability:

Braces in middle school, lost children's teeth, a ghost of bushy eyebrows
crinkling that have since been severed from brown pores.

You said goodbye and walked off with your mother to a home, perhaps,
where the Armani bag would blend in with cream carpets and gold detailing;
or maybe a home ravaged by hate so loud its very spirit lay shattered and piled
up
in corners of rubble and jetsam,
a word I learned in fourth grade.