

## Last Stop

For whatever reason, we were giving each other the silent treatment on the subway. We weren't smiling, and we hardly looked at one another. I was being mean to her because she was being mean to me. She probably felt the same, but she was wrong. She was wrong to probably feel that way.

I thought about what I'd say if she asked me why I wasn't saying anything. I thought maybe I'd tell her I was about to ask her the same thing, but then thought, no, better to remind her I hadn't had my morning coffee yet. Remind her, though I hadn't told her before. Remind her because she just should've known.

But she didn't ask. And, as she continued not to ask, I changed my mind and thought that maybe telling her I hadn't had my morning coffee yet would be in a way making light of a situation or circumstance or equilibrium I more truthfully wished to maintain that could very easily get out of hand if nothing changed. I wanted an apology and so I continued to wait for one.

But of course she was probably doing the same, waiting for me. We think in ways that are so opposite, they're really similar: similar as peanut butter and jelly, or as hot and cold, or as boy and girl, or as yes and no. I thought that maybe this standoff – this fear of miscommunication – would go on forever for us. I thought maybe I'd never see her again and there would be nothing I could do.

The stops went by. She sat. There was an empty seat beside her, but I kept standing. Facing the window – its blackness, its emptiness, my reflection – I didn't see my reflection. I saw only through my reflection and into the nothingness.

Ours was the next and last stop. The longer we went without speaking, the angrier with each other we became, it seemed. There were two seats open on her bench now, one next to her and one two away.

But there was nothing, really truly definitively nothing to be angry about. It was as if we were both angry in self-defense but with nothing –

no anger attacking – against which to defend. As if in our silences, we were regenerating the anger we had expended all weekend long, just conversing, having scheduled conversations all weekend long.

So I took the seat next to her, leaving the seat two away from her open. I imagined that if others on this mildly crowded subway had been paying attention to one or both of us before, they must now have found it odd that I sat down next to her instead of leaving a seat open between us, because, as it is well known, perfect strangers leave empty seats between one another when they can, and we, surely, it seemed to me, would have appeared to them all, all this time, to be just that, perfect strangers, nothing more, nothing less.

She kept staring straight ahead, as if she never knew me, out into the nothingness of the bright subway car crowded with true strangers, truly unfamiliar faces. I looked around and imagined the others on this subway hadn't had their morning coffees yet either and that they must have all thought this very odd that I sat down next to this strange woman, imagining, of course, that they had indeed been paying attention to us before I sat down. And then I thought: how could they have been paying attention to us before, before having their morning coffees?

The seat beside me remained open even as people continued to stand on the subway as if there were no open seats. My wife was staring straight ahead, still, or at the floor, or into that bright subway nothingness I imagined resembled the darkness I saw through my reflection, her head facing forwards and she not having said a word.

Other people were looking at us and the empty seat beside me. Why aren't I in that empty seat? They were all thinking of me, if not looking at me directly. Why don't I and that empty seat beside me switch places, so that this strange woman with her left thigh pressed to my right can have her space?

I laughed silently, without smiling, at what the others on this subway must have been thinking about me. To them, my wife and I were just two strangers, an elegant lady and a creepy young man.

I put my head down on my wife's shoulder, but still these strangers would not stir. My wife also did not stir. To her, in some sense, I would always be a stranger.

The intercom announced the next and last stop.

But I couldn't accept this. How could I? I turned my head inward, away from everyone, and sunk my teeth lovingly into her neck.