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Traincar Sentimentalists

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Foreword (not to be read to the audience):

"Every person carries within his heart a blueprint of the one he loves. What seems to be 'love at first sight' is actually the fulfillment of desire, the realization of a dream."

~ Venerable Fulton J. Sheen

Traincar Sentimentalists

By Jonathan S. Coppe

(The 1950s. A train car on a train bound for a few hours journey between cities. A young lady, JEAN, mid-twenties, enters from up the car a little ways, looking for a seat. She is middle-class, but well-dressed, friendly, and spirited. When she enters, she glances around quickly and notices a man, RICK, sitting by himself in a pair of facing seats with a table between them. He is three or four years older than she. He is absorbed in his newspaper. She sits across from him.)

Jean Excuse me, is this the train to Detroit?

(He glances at her with only his eyes, his head still angled at the paper.)

Rick Yes.

Jean *(Pause.)* You're quite sure of that, right?

Rick *(again only glancing)* Yes.

Jean *(attempting to continue the conversation)* Well, do you think we should check with the conductor? Have you asked him?

Rick *(this time moving his head)* I've been on this train a few times before. It's the right one. *(He goes back to his paper.)*

Jean *(after pausing a moment)* Well you certainly don't make it easy for a girl to talk to you!

Rick *(looking up, laughing)* Oh, is that what you wanted to do? You needn't have been so sly about it. I'm charmed that a pretty young lady like yourself should want to talk to me.

Jean And why not? You're a tolerably handsome fellow. *(She grins playfully.)*

Rick *(Laughs)* Well, thank you. I'm Richard, Richard Morrissey. My friends call me Rick.

Jean Pleased to meet you. I'm Jean, Jean O'Brien.

Rick The pleasure's all mine. What brings you to the city?

Jean You mean the one we are going to or the one we're leaving?

Rick The one we're leaving, although now that you mention it I admit that I'm curious about both.

Jean I was here seeing an old girl friend of mine from college. I haven't seen her in a while but I like to stay close if I can. Now I'm on my way back home.

Rick How nice.

Jean And how about yourself, Richard Morrissey?

Rick *(Laughs)* I came out here for a work, so I imagine it's not quite as interesting as your trip.

Jean Nonsense! What do you do?

Rick I'm an architect. I design buildings in a number of cities - It's a job you can do from your desk most of the time, but I occasionally have to come out someplace like this to meet with construction companies, contractors - I'm sure you get the idea.

Jean Why that's a grand job! I'm always amazed when I come to cities like New York, and see those skyscrapers. When you stand up on top of those giant things, it makes you feel like you could just grab the whole world for yourself. It's just wonderful!

Rick I guess it is, isn't it? *(Beat.)* And what do you do for a living?

Jean Me? Well, I-

(She is cut off as the conductor enters)

Conductor Tickets, please!

(They fumble around for their tickets and then hand them to him.)

Rick Here!

Jean Here!

Conductor *(taking them)* Thank you.

Rick Say, are there drinks on board?

Conductor Yes. They're right nearby, so you might as well just tell me what you want and I'll grab it for you. No sense in waiting for the attendant or making you get up.

Rick Why that's right kind of you. Thanks. Jean, can I get you anything?

Jean Do you have any sherry?

Conductor Sweet or dry?

Jean Sweet, please.

Rick Excellent. And I'll have a scotch, please. *(He hands the conductor a few bills. The conductor looks at them, nods, and goes off.)* Thanks again!

Jean What do I owe you?

Rick Nothing. I'm happy to buy it for you.

Jean Oh, thank you! Gee, now I'm quite glad I sat down next to you.

Rick You weren't before?

Jean Oh, I was, but now I've gotten a free drink from it as well. *(They laugh.)* I do love coming out to different cities from time to time. They let you see all sorts of new things, taste all sorts of new food, meet all sorts of new people. Do you like wine?

Rick Yes! I collect it, actually.

Jean Well how perfectly stuffy of you! Wine, good sir, was made for drinking, not for looking at.

Rick *(Laughs.)* I suppose you're right. I ought to learn to live a little.

(The conductor returns and hands them their drinks. They thank him. He exits.)

Jean Well then, to life!

Rick To life! *(They drink.)* Say, what ever inspired you to come sit down next to a stuffy looking fellow like myself, with his head buried in a newspaper?

Jean Well, you know, when I get up in the morning, I go to my window, and I look out at the city, and from up on the 14th floor I can see all these people walking to and fro. And every day I look at them, and I think, "Jean, down there there are a million faces, a million stories, a million lives that are full of wonderful, fascinating things. Now you can't meet all of them, or learn all their stories - you just don't have the time for that - but if you keep your mind and heart adventurous, maybe you'll get a chance to learn just a few of those wonderful things." Because I like people, and I want to be part of people's lives. So I look for chances to do that, for people whose lives I can be part of. So when I see a fellow all alone on a train I think of it as a grand opportunity. And then any nervousy I would have goes away, and I can chat away with whomever I like.

Rick Hmm. *(Beat.)* I wish I were more like that - free-spirited.

Jean Then maybe I'll have to give you lessons sometime.

Rick Maybe you will!

Jean Like, for instance, don't bury your head in some half-rate journal article when there's a young lady talking to you!

Rick Half-rate?? Why that was a Fulton Sheen column I was reading! Why, I - *(She looks at him in teasing amusement. He realizes his foolishness.)* Yes, I suppose you're right. Gee, I suppose it's harder to be free-spirited than I thought it would be. *(Beat.)* I think if I could do it all over I would be an actor.

Jean And I would be an architect! Say, now here's a question I've been meaning to ask you.

Rick Hmm?

Jean You said you were surprised a "pretty young lady like me" would want to talk to you. Why would you think like that? You're not old.

Rick Hmm. Well, you're right. But I sometimes feel much older than I am. I'm only 30; I know I'm young, but I can't quite shake the feeling that I'm just getting very old somehow, that I'm 50 or something, that life has flown past me already and I haven't found that magical something to be passionate about, to live for. I guess that's why I love the theatre. It's the one place I can go where everything seems so real. When I see those actors all lit up on stage, it's like a new world has opened up in front of me. And it's such a full world. It has its comedies and tragedies, its missteps and its triumphs, its errors and its successes, its heroes and its villains. When I'm there, peering in on that world, I suddenly forget all about myself, and my heart is alive again caring about other people - the people up on the stage. Sort of like you said you do just now with real people - being part of their lives, caring about them. Like that show I saw a couple of weeks ago-*Half Past France*. That was marvelous. My heart was just broken for the female lead by the end. I left and I was still teary eyed thinking about it. I would love to meet that actress, to tell her what a grand job I thought she did. *(He notices that Jean is blushing a little.)* Well, gee, what's the matter? Did I say something too sentimental? I know I probably shouldn't have started up like-

Jean I suppose I never got around to telling you what I do for work.

Rick Well, no, we rather skipped over that bit. Wait, why are you mentioning it?

Jean I think now is the time to tell you.

Rick Then go on.

Jean I work in the Fisher Theatre, on the corner of Grand and Second.

Rick (*Realizes.*) You don't mean—

Jean Yes, I do. I'm an actress, and I currently play the lead in—

Rick A heart-wrenching tragedy called *Half Past France*. I see it so clearly now. It's a wonder I didn't recognize you before.

Jean It's probably good you didn't. Fans never sound half as sincere as you did just now. It was really rather sweet.

Rick (*embarrassed suddenly*) Well... uh... the pleasure's all mine.

Jean Yes. (*Beat.*) Say, about wine — what are you doing this evening?

Rick I'm having dinner tonight with my gal.

Jean (*disappointed by this*) Oh. How nice. Have you been going steady with her for a while?

Rick About six months. I don't think she's the gal for me, though. That's why I'm seeing her tonight. I'm going to break it off.

Jean (*excited by this and hopeful*) Well, that's a shame...

Rick I suppose. Say, if you really do like wine, there's a convention in town the next few days.

Jean I was just about to mention it.

Rick Then I suppose you wouldn't mind going with me, and maybe getting some dinner afterward?

Jean I think that would be lovely.

SCENE