

Siren Song of the Train

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Lying in the dark, windows cracked, covers pulled up and tucked under feet, electric blanket low. Cool, spring night. Ceaseless city din...

And every few hours train horns.

Faint at first. Miles away. Three blasts—two long, one short—when approaching street crossings: Madison, Artesian, Bayer, Junction, Clay, Pioneer, Summit, Kilbourn, Timber. Louder. Louder! Until just yards away, vibrating windows...and then fainter, fainter, fainter, gone.

For high school senior Susan, they were diverting, soothing sounds; ways to forget by concentrating on the chugging locomotive and squealing, under-lubricated steel against steel that sliced the night.

The tracks were only a quarter mile or so away from her parents home. As a youngster, she and her friends sometimes put pennies on a rail, waiting for a train to flatten them paper thin. They'd look up smiling at the friendly engineer who probably saw plenty of kids performing the same experiment.

Now her thoughts were adult, self-focused, and the train took on a different meaning. It was a powerful transporter.

And she needed to go somewhere. Life where she was, was a challenge she no longer felt equipped to meet. A siren song lured her before and now one tempted her again.

The honking, screeching, clanking train gave her a way, and she thought thoughts that had never occurred to her before. But now went from murmurs to klaxons that matched blaring train horns.

One evening, in the wee hours, she slipped out of bed, threw on a long coat, and quietly made her way down the stairs and out the patio door. She hurried through the night with the horn sounding several crossings to the east. Lying on the track with her head on a rail, she waited...until the horn sounded louder than ever. In a trash receptacle several blocks away a positive home pregnancy test would go unnoticed.

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