

Human Beings Have Met to Suture the Wounds the Railroads Have Made Across This Country

“Let’s say it was one of those windfall nights in July when four friends sit mostly sitting and not speaking around a campfire illuminating their faces in a pattern whose unpredictability, at that hour and depth of saturation, if the data could be harvested and charted, would show clusterpoints—that was term that came to mind—*trends* which would certainly reveal something about the implicit mathematics of the universe like the stars alternately concealed and disembarked upon by the clouds moving coldly in tatters like the thoughts of the world not helping anyone just above their heads. The hour is the one with the curve in its back, booze in its belly, blood in its cheeks and one of the friends saying, almost involuntarily, in part revelation and part considered admission, that she wishes she had married someone who could play the piano. She is a lab technician, let’s say, which means that earlier tonight she relieved her scalp of the gentle ache the bun of her hair makes and the campfire light in her loosed hair plays like young cats in the sand as the four friends mutually witness this unmolested true sentence just spoken hanging before them as the fire bites and crackles away at it and one of them says, *Mhmm*; and the four produce the laughs they are inclined or accustomed to do on such a windfall night in July. It’s late, and human beings have met to suture the wounds the railroads have made across this country bled for centuries of ore and oil and timber and flesh and precious metals in a manner reported by the poor swollen news networks—miasmatic with commercials selling the exhausting obligation of happiness—as a national railroad shut down. That was the phrase, *shut down*. *St. John’s Newfoundland running low on propane in one of the coldest winters in its history* declares the italicized preface to an article commissioned by a media corporation funded, in large part, by the very oil corporation to which our prominent economists apply the verb haemorrhaging—as in the phrase *haemorrhaging capital*—unironically. And what would John the Apostle say of the matter except that propane had no business in his namesake to begin with? And what was propane? But—St. John fathoming propane—would you say that we have strayed from our subject? No one of the friends wants to say a word or shift their seat around the campfire for fear that it might precipitate the thoughts of the morning and the children whose bellies they are responsible for settling with orange juice and eggs and toast into whose peanut-buttered surface a knife is drawn in the shape of a heart like the stencils we have made on cawalls and gravestones for hundreds of thousands of years—a species preparing our little ones for the day stretching uncomprehending before them in the sun which shone, as Beckett would have it, upon the nothing new. What could children know of the provinces and jurisdictions we have devised criss-crossed with bulk freight they’d identify, parked before a train crossing, as *choo-choo’s*? And how, in good conscience, to slip the paperback, perfect-bound workbook with the harmonious drawings of the eco-system into the glittering pink and blue Dora the Explorer backpack after the six-year-old has carefully nibbled around the edge of the heart drawn in the peanut butter so that the toast is the shape of a heart, her baby teeth having near-perfectly defined its edge? And what to do but lift this child and kiss her inconsolably? And when the bus pulls from the waving place on the corner, what to do but return to the nook to pick up, with two fingers, the plastic cup she emptied of concentrated orange juice and the plate, stippled with crumbs and flecks of peanut butter, and bring them to the sink and convince your scalp into its professional bun and stand with your throat in your hands wondering what in the world is coming next?”

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