

writenow! competition 2009

Year 7 – Winner
Claire Armstrong
St Leo's

Story starter by Isobelle Carmody

The Last Supper

“You will have to leave the train. You do not have a visa.”

She could hardly believe it and at the same time she had expected it. Something in her was always prepared for disaster when she travelled. When it came to these official places like airports, and borders and customs, she couldn't help thinking of all the movies she had seen where people had got shot or discovered carrying drugs someone had planted on them.

Jack was arguing with the guard, ignoring the gun hanging heavily at the other man's hip.

“It's no good” she said, standing in the aisle and touching his arm.

“You stay on the train. I'll get the next train back. I can get a visa and come after you tomorrow”. She felt so tired she was light-headed, but that might be hypothermia. The train had been under-heated but outside it would be colder.

“I'm not letting you get off alone! Are you crazy?” Jack said.

They climbed down onto the platform. It was ice-cold outside and deeply dark. The border guard breathed out puffs of smoke as they all stood there and watched the train pull away. She couldn't quite believe they were not on it. When it had whistled away into the blackness the guard walked away down the platform, seeming to

have no more interest in them. All around lay the vast snowy forest. They both shivered.

It was deeply silent after the train disappeared into the darkness. Claire and Jack looked at each other. Claire fought to stop tears spilling down her cheeks. "I'm so tired and cold! What will we do? I can't see a single light anywhere! We'll have to sleep here!"

Jack looked for the guard but he had vanished into the dark night. "Don't worry" he said "we'll be OK. We might be cold, but we will be OK. We'll have another interesting story to tell our friends when we get back"

Claire relaxed – as long as she was with Jack things would be fine. After all, wasn't this what travel was all about? Getting lost, missing trains, unexpected events.....

She must have dozed off on the cold seat on the platform. Jack was shaking her.

"Look! I can see a light on the tracks – there IS another train tonight!" He said.

They both peered into the darkness, at the small light, which grew steadily larger. Then they heard the rumble of wheels and something else they did not expect. There was a sudden piercing shriek as the steam whistle of the train blew, and the train rolled to a stop.

It was a magnificent train. The engine was dark red with gold trim. The carriages were old-fashioned, with red velvet cushion seats. Golden light came from every window. Nearly every seat was taken.

A guard leaned out and asked them to come aboard.

Jack and Claire looked at each other. The train from which they had been removed was an old smelly diesel. Things were really looking up if they could travel in this beautiful train.

“See – told you we’d be fine” said Jack. They hurried on board.

A man in a white jacket welcomed them. “Will you be joining us for dinner tonight?” he asked. Jack and Claire were cold and hungry, so they agreed immediately. They were ushered through to a sumptuous dining car. Crisp white cloths were on the table. Candlelight gleamed on silver cutlery, shining glasses and plates. There was just one large table, around which were ten other people all looking at them.

This group was very well dressed. The men wore evening suits and the ladies long dresses. There were only two odd things. One was that no matter how long you looked at them, you couldn’t quite work out if they were old or young. And they all had very large pale blue eyes.

“ Please join us” said a man sitting at the head of the table. It seemed rude to refuse and they were hungry, so they sat down in the two empty seats.

A servant came in with a large bowl of soup. It smelt delicious – like the best chicken soup ever. Claire thought it was the best thing she had ever tasted – warm and creamy and spicy.

She thought she better be polite and say something. “ What good luck this train turned up – we were very cold and miserable. Where is this train going?”

The group just smiled. She looked at Jack with slight alarm, but he just smiled back at her and started to drink some very dark red wine from his glass. To give her something to do, she took a sip from her glass – it smelt faintly of roses.

A plate of beef appeared in front of her, with roast potatoes, broccoli and sweet potato. Claire groaned to herself – she didn't like beef. However, the smell was delicious and she thought she should be polite. She glanced at Jack – he was wolfing the food down – and the wine.

She tried again “ Are you all related? “

This time the man at the head of the table answered “ Yes – we are now all family”

This seemed a slightly odd answer to Claire so she said “and do you often travel together?”

“Always” the man said.

The train rattled on. A huge red jelly came in for dessert with cream and custard and tiny strawberries.

The man at the head of the table said “who could ask for more – such comfort, such peace, such company”.

Claire and Jack nodded politely.

“Don’t you find the world a cold cruel place?” he said “so many poor souls lost and abandoned”

“This is a lovely trip though” said Jack “ I had no idea that steam trains still ran in these parts”

The dessert finished, the waiter poured tiny glasses of pale blue liquid and placed them in front of each person.

“ Yes – interesting isn’t it” said the man. We simply travel, collecting souls as we find them. We find most prefer the train to the alternative.”

“What is the alternative?” said Claire

“Well for you my dear, and you Jack, the alternative was freezing to death on that platform. Your bodies are still there frozen. They will find you next week when the next train comes through. And your souls will be lost in the forest. Whereas here – you are still travellers, travelling forever... with us”.

Claire opened her mouth to scream. She looked at Jack and with horror looked at his pale pale blue eyes and the empty glass in front of him.