

STALKERS AND STILT- WALKERS



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TRAINS

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The train is dirty brown and cold. The girl and her mother get on and soon are speeding north. Persephone and her mother barely talk, only to pass along food to each other. People chatter noisily outside and the food cart passes by, the delicious aroma makes Persephone wish she were eating that instead. The two eventually finish their meal and they both fall into a doze.

Persephone sleeps fitfully, waking up every few hours to make sure her mother is still there. Persephone knows her mother would rather be anywhere, preferably somewhere where she could smoke her precious opium, although the addictive drug will eventually kill her. Persephone knew that overcoming the addiction would be difficult, more difficult than even getting it for her mother, but she wants to try. Eventually Persephone falls into a dreamless sleep, her mind exhausted from worrying about Delilah. She only wakes when her mother's body shifts from the seat next to her.

"Where are you going?" Persephone asks groggily, rubbing her eyes.

"The powder room." Her mother is unsteady on her feet and looks like a drunken sailor careening slightly.

Persephone slumps back against the seat, the stiff

wood poking her back and her eyes close. A part of her mind tells her she should go to the powder room with her mother, to monitor her, but a bigger part of her mind wants to sleep. *Your mother is a grown woman, she can go by herself, you're not her mother, she'll be fine*, her mind rationalizes and Persephone's eyelids droop closed. She's not sure how much time has passed, when she hears a bloodcurdling scream. It echoes off the other compartments and Persephone's knife is out before she realizes what is happening. She'd taught herself to react to anything and everything. Persephone cocks her head—where was the sound coming from?

"Mother? Did you hear that?" Persephone asks staring out of the compartment. When there is no response Persephone turns around and realizes her mother has not returned. Dread settles in Persephone's stomach as she walks slowly down the corridor. She hears another scream, this one more pitiful sounding, the sound breaking off with a hoarse cry. The powder room comes into focus and Persephone makes her way towards it. She hears a noise, and then a whooshing of air, like somebody opened a window; the noise dies quickly after that. Cut off abruptly.

She forces the door open and is overwhelmed by the blood. It seems to cover the walls, the salty, copper smell perfuming the air. And, in the middle of the carnage is her mother, Delilah; her pale body slumped into an almost unrecognizable heap. Her lustrous black hair is matted against her neck. The wounds are all over her body: stomach, neck, arms and legs. Delilah's skin is gray, the blood pooling around her lifeless body. Persephone slumps down to her knees, a strange numbness entering her body. Her tears drip to the ground, making small puddles of salt water mixing with the blood. Delilah's hand convulses in her palm and that seems to shake Persephone out of her numbness. Suddenly she is

screaming, her throat ripping open with the force of her pain.

"Mother!" She screams with sadness and anger. Her stunned mind tries to wrap itself around the fact that her mother is dead, and fails.

"No, mother!" Persephone sobs; she reaches for her mother, trying to will life into her. She shakes her, the blood splattering onto her hair, the wall, Persephone's clothes.

"Delilah!" Persephone leans her cheek against her mother's breast, but can only feel a thin coldness instead of a heartbeat. Blood streaks Persephone's face as she screams, looking more like a savage than a seventeen-year-old girl.

"Mother!" Tears drip down her cheeks and her eyes are as red as the blood coating the tiny room.

Persephone's tortured sobbing has attracted a gathering of people from the next cars and eventually the conductor arrives, a police officer not far away.

"What happened?" The conductor asks, looking ill. The police officer stands next to him looking serious and grim.

"I..." hiccup... "don't..." hiccup, "know!" Persephone cries barely able to get the words out. She collapses again and police officer bends down and grabs her. She fights him kicking and scratching and biting while still hanging onto her mother's lifeless form. Eventually the officer pries her loose and she stands limply against the door, like an overused rag doll.

"Come on, stand with the conductor." Persephone walks slowly towards the conductor, her tears leaving drops on the floor. She glances back at the bloody scene anger and bile building in her throat.

"Oh you poor dear! Here, give her my handkerchief," a well-dressed woman standing near Persephone says, compassionately. Persephone wipes the blood off her

face, not caring about her appearance. She just wants her mother back.

"Alright, we need to search the train!" The police officer nods to the conductor and they start down the hall, checking compartments and rooms, but it proves ineffective. Persephone knows whoever did this is long gone but she wants to lash out, to hurt somebody, the way they hurt her by taking her mother away from her.

"Okay, Miss, is there anything we can do for you?" The conductor asks, although he is clearly uncomfortable with the whole thing. Persephone continues to cry, not answering, not caring.

"Why don't you go back to your compartment and will send someone to look after you. Do you want some tea? Food?" The conductor asks.

"No." Usually Persephone would jump at the chance for free food, after all she never knew when her next meal would be, but the thought of eating caused her stomach to roil unpleasantly. The conductor asks a young woman from a neighboring compartment to sit with Persephone in her compartment. Persephone ignores the girl's meaningless chatter; probably forced to distract Persephone from her situation. Persephone tunes her out, the strange numbness taking over her body again. She quickly falls into a dreamless sleep, part of her hoping that when she wakes up her mother will be alive, like the fairy stories she used to read. Her life is not a fairy tale and her mother is never coming back.