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Self-Discovery through the Personal Essay

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Presenter Information

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Scott Sanders
Creative Non-fiction
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Red String

In the morning I struggle to get out of bed. The covers feel like dirt on top of my coffin. Every attempt to get out puts me further underground, and I know that this is how my life is meant to play out. When my mother calls looking to see if I'm awake for class I say to her, between sleepy voice cracks and morning tears, *mom I can't get out of bed. I can't do it. There's nothing out there for me.* God dammit every time I expect her to put on that soothing mother voice she used to talk in when I was a baby, she just scoffs: *go to class or I'm not paying for your college anymore.* So, I sit there, so I start my morning as a burden to my mother. To get out of that house each morning is to be reborn, only to be killed when I go back.

Walking to the train station, the sun hasn't risen, and I can pretend. I can fantasize that I was made the right way. I am not a girl going to class, but rather a man going to his dream job. The cold air seeps into my bones forcing me awake. It gives me something to focus on rather than my mindset. Sitting on the train my mother's disappointment creeps up my body like a viper moving in for the kill. My throat swells shut with the desperation to be someone different. The train doors open, a goddess from another realm walks in and stands feet away from me. My heart stutters, nearly skipping a beat, this goddess is the same as me. She too is changing her body to be what she was meant to, the difference between us is that she's alive and thriving. I'm barely breathing.

Her fingernails are shaped like claws, they're painted a festive shade of gold. I imagine her painting them this morning, I imagine her having the courage to go out into the world as her true self. I wonder if I'll ever have that courage. I want to speak to her. To tell her she's beautiful, that she looks like the greatest woman I have ever seen, but the train doors open and I have to leave. Running to the next train. I'm hoping no one notices me, I'm hoping I'll blend in. The train is more crowded than an overfed gut. One last person bumps into me before the doors close and I find myself hoping I'll be digested before this ride is over. When I look up, she's there next to me. She's taller than me. Seeing her eases my shaking bones, she has headphones in. I'm trying to hear what she's listening to in hopes that if I listen to the same music she does, I'll be confident too.

"Hey! I love your sweater." Her voice carries itself like faeries dancing in the wind, it catches me off guard. *She's not talking to me. No one would want to talk to me.* And then her hand touches my shoulder. Looking up we make eye contact. Warmth spreads through my body, like a race car rearing to go.

"Uh ththank you! I love your outfit!" My voice comes out higher than a scared mouse, I hate it. The vocal chords in me always give me away, they have something against me I know it. She smiles. Her eyes glitter in the dim light of the train, they're the color of warm sand. When she speaks her voice is lower than mine and I can tell. There's a type of recognition between us.

The kind that allows your brain to realize someone is the same as you. In the moment there's an electric buzz between us. There's a feeling in the air telling us: *You're one in the same, both of you are trying to be someone new.*

“My name's Kimora. What's yours, honey?” *Kimora* The name of my goddess, the name of the woman who doesn't know she just convinced me life is worth the pain. Her lips are painted pink, mine are stained red from blood, I barely choke out my name,

“Kai. My name's Kai, it's really nice to meet you.” Her lips curl up, mine find themselves doing the same, yet this time the cracked skin on my lips doesn't hurt. The train jerks to a stop. *Kimora* looks at me, her eyes tell me what I want to say to her. *Don't leave.* And yet I have to, I have to leave in order to get to class. I have to do something that justifies my parents paying my tuition. When my feet hit the platform, heat climbs up my back, I turn to see *Kimora*. Her eyes are looking into mine, as if she can see the urges in me that are ripping me apart, I can almost see hers too. She grabs my hand. For a split second I feel like a boy on his first day of school. Too scared to let go of my mother's hand. For just a moment I feel loved.

“Hey Kai? Good luck with everything okay? Have a great day.” My mouth is dry, by the time I go to say *you too Kimora* the train doors are closed and she is on her way. I walk to the last train of my commute with glee filling my chest, I almost feel like drowning in this joyful moment. When I sit down an elderly woman asks for my seat *excuse me young man. Can I sit here?* I nod and smile, not trusting my voice. So as the train continues to move forward, I can finally grasp a truth that has eluded me for five years.

I deserve to live as a man, just as anyone else deserves to live.