missed connections

Seth Cable

Nick was in a taxi, on his way to work, reading a review of Syriana in an old, worn out magazine he had taken from a waiting room somewhere. The beaten, wrinkled pages were held open to the review by the stub left from a subscription card.

For the past twenty minutes or so, a young woman had been sitting next to him. He smiled at her intermittently, and she smiled at him. She looked to be in her mid twenties. She was wearing a loose grey top with black yoga pants. Nick was wearing cargo shorts and a t-shirt. He was conscious of how sloppy he must have looked, and was more than a little anxious about it.

The young woman seemed to be working at many random things taken from the bag in her lap. Whenever Nick happened to look over, though, she was invariably putting whatever it was back into her bag. At one point, Nick realized that he hadn’t actually ever seen her hands. He glanced over looking for them, but saw that she was at that moment sitting on them. Surely, though, they were there, and were entirely conventional in appearance.

While Nick was lost in reverie over the fullness of George Clooney’s beard, the woman began speaking, presumably to him, though she seemed mostly to be addressing his shoulder.

- If I actually was born, which has yet to be satisfactorily proven, then I was born into a loving and supportive family, who I most certainly did not murder from fear they were poisoning my vision, and whose remains I most certainly did not feast upon in an effort to prevent their corpses from rising against me.

- Oh, hi. I’m Louis.

Nick wasn’t entirely sure why he used a fake name, exactly. But, now that he had, there was no choice but to stick with it. It felt as if the taxicab were speeding up.

- Louis is your name? Nicole is mine. Were you in this taxi before me? Or, did I get in after you?

- After me. No, wait. I’m... Huh, I’m not entirely sure. I think you were actually driving earlier.

Nick was definitely now regretting having given a fake name. It would have been a cute moment to point out the coincidental similarities of their names. Now, though, that would be impossible.

What was he going to do? Explain that he had given a fake name earlier?

- Actually, I just gave you a fake name. My name isn’t really Louis. It’s Nick. You know, short for Nicolemar. Kinda funny, huh?

- “-mar” is a masculine suffix. So, your name is just the male version of Nicole? You know, it would have been more coincidental if your name actually was Nicole, though, wouldn’t it? My brother’s name was Nicolemar. Isn’t Nicolemar. My brother. His name is Nicolemar.
Nick looked outside. The taxi had definitely been speeding up, and now was soaring down the narrow canal street they had previously been navigating at a meticulous crawl. On his side of the car, the close brick wall that framed the street was a blur inches from his door. On her side of the car, the road dropped off just beyond the cab’s tires, so that the only thing visible through her window was the broad black waters of the central canal. The road soon became undulating, with steep dips and rises following the contours of some ancient furrows, perhaps made by the canal builders themselves. With each dip, Nicolemar’s stomach lurched, and he felt a tickle in the back of his throat.

The weather was overcast, and the light outside was steely and blue. In an instant that unwrapped into minutes, the ancient cobbled canal road twisted to the right, while a narrow archway spanning the canal twisted left. Nick, who was now driving, decided too late to veer right, and the cab flew into the space between the brick spandrels, hitting the water with a smack that compressed his spine painfully. Though Nick had often heard that the canals of the Old City were only about ten feet deep, the cab plunged far and fast. Nick was surprised to find that the water - which appeared so black and viscous on the surface - was crystal clear underneath. He could see details in the brick of the retaining wall, which vanished into a horizon point far below them. There were the outlines of ancient windows, now bricked up, repeating into infinity.

Nick feebly attempted opening the car doors, but the pressure was already too great. Nicole was no longer in the back of the car. Maybe she wasn’t even there. Maybe that was a different cab, on some different occasion. The radio was on. It was on the whole time, actually, come to think of it. It had been playing that song, about the little old man in the derby that waves to you from his house. Though there’s different regional versions of the lyrics, the melody is always the same. It was the first thing that Nicole ever learned to play on the keyboard.

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