

Suburbia.

Would I ever really know? The truth, I mean.

Her face - the look - glimpsed in the flurry of seconds it took us to pass, now seared into my brain.

Gone, but never gone.

Fixed - like a fly in amber.

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I'm on a train. It's a winter's evening, cold and dark. Rain streaks the windows. I press my brow to the cool glass. I'm far away.

Row upon row of houses, a century old or more, their lukewarm lights seeping between half-drawn curtains or bleeding through broken blinds. The arcs of car headlamps search the sky while brake lights punctuate the darkness like crimson commas: on - off – on. I shiver, pull in my collar and stare blankly at the passing scene.

Home soon.

The scrape of brakes. We judder, slow down; and then I see her.

And she sees me.

Framed by the harsh light of a single, hanging, bulb she's leaning forward, her palms pressed hard against the window. She is young, no more than a girl; her hair is scraped back, just the hint of a ponytail. She looks tired. But it's dark and wet, so who can say? Who can be sure? Her mouth appears to be open wide. I think there may be mist upon the windowpane, but can't be certain. Is she shouting, or screaming? Or playing a game? Children play games, don't they ... pulling faces at the passing trains?

The high-pitched whine of the engine and we start to accelerate away. I half stand and turn my head, straining to see as the rectangle of light, her face, becomes smaller and smaller, until finally vanishing from view. The man opposite looks up, coughs, then returns to reading his paper.

The train speeds through the final tunnel and soon we're at my station. I step off and tip my hat to the man at the barrier. My wife is waiting. A peck on the cheek, then the short drive home.

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And would I really want to know?

The truth.

Isn't it sometimes easier to forget, than live with the pain of knowing?

350 words