



Stories for the Train

Tales on the go

0:3:00

Domes

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Ethan stepped onto the railway track and imagined the rails ringing from an approaching train: Get real. The knowledge pods say railways died out over five thousand years ago. 'Yeah, but there are long stretches of metal. The rocks and weeds haven't totally won.' Funny, doesn't look as if others came this way, but I'm going to follow the track.

As he stumbled over sleepers and twisted metal, he drifted back to the decaying books in the library: 'Loved The Illustrated Book of Steam Trains.' But hey, finding the mislaid ring to the restricted section on my thirteenth birthday, what a present that was. Sneaking in to find rows and rows of philosophy books — the arguments of the ancient philosophers — their hypotheses! Their rhetoric!

Ethan shook his head: 'Descartes, Nietzsche, Locke, Schopenhauer. No wonder The Guardians deemed them subversive and locked them away.' Got away with it for months. After work, I must have read hundreds.

When the track climbed, Ethan went over the last month: lost in Locke's eloquence . . . then looking up at seven Enforcers. Seven. For an unarmed reader. Dragged to a cell. Isolation. Waiting. The

process, the protocols, the pretence. Ethan kicked a stone, 'Then the trial. Wasn't allowed to speak until the end. The Guardians. The so-called Guardians.' Outraged at my logical dismantling of the established order. Everyone knew the verdict, and the decision was swift and unanimous. Banished. Counsel making a half-hearted plea for leniency on account of my age, but waved away. Right at the end, The Guardians announcing access to the library would henceforth be restricted to those over three-hundred years old. 'Shouldn't have laughed.' Hauled away. Mother crying. 'Lost us all, now.'

Next light-time, thirteen Enforcers marching me to Hatch 010011010. Pushing me outside. To certain death, they presumed; no-one had ever returned, the astrologers insisted the environment was still poisonous beyond the domes. Then throwing the rucksack out. Hatch hissing shut.

Ethan rounded the curve of a hill to see the track disappearing into a narrow tunnel. While he rubbed his calves, he reckoned it would soon be dark-time, so made camp near the entrance.

Lying in his thermo-bag, he ate a food cube and stared up at the white dots, 'Those must be stars. I read about them in the remnants of that book. Four white letters on the back; NASA.'

Nightmares tormented him: the gavel, banging and banging. Lying on the track as a train steamed towards him, its whistle screaming louder and higher. He coughed himself awake. Ash and smoke stung his eyes.

At light-time, Ethan grabbed the lantern from his rucksack and packed away his things. But hesitated at the entrance.

Holding the lantern in front, he forced himself into the black and tried to keep to the middle, but kept looking back at the shrinking oval. When the lamp faded, blackness slithered over him.

'The rails are ringing! But there's something . . . else.' He turned his head left, then right, 'Definitely. A whistle screaming louder and higher.'

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