

The once-white floor was speckled with black and the seats were stained mahogany. Annabel leaned her head against a pole and tried not to look at the few people scattered around her. An old man sat opposite her, his left ankle resting on his right knee, the inside of his calf propping up the Herald Sun he held in front of his face. His grey socks were showing beneath his pants and he had big feet, confined in dull-brown leather shoes. His woolen hat sat tilted on his head.

A young mother sat to the right of the old man, in a booth for six with her baby and little boy. The baby rested comfortably in her arms and the little boy sat opposite her, kneeling up on his seat and peering, bright-eyed, out the window. He was making train noises through his teeth as the train bumped along; he was fascinated by everything and was constantly calling 'look!' and pointing to a tree or a sign or a person standing at one of the stations. The baby whimpered on occasion. It adjusted itself in its mother's arms, yawned, stayed still and settled for a period of time. It was a good baby, Annabel thought, quieter than any she had ever seen before.

Its mother was, maybe, twenty-five, Annabel thought. Twenty-seven at the most. Her unstyled blonde hair fell over her shoulders and her fuchsia lips stayed tight and did not smile. Her eyes were distant, somewhere between their sockets and the crème, linoleum floor of the carriage; they were heavy with thoughts not of her children or her whereabouts or her shopping that sat on the two seats beside her but something more, something deeper, something more difficult.

The beat of loud music sounded through the headphones of a boy sitting to Annabel's left. He sat in another booth for six, facing her, gazing lazily at his shoes propped up on the seats opposite him, his arms and legs spread out and comfortable across three or four seats. All Annabel could see of him was his knees in dark denim, his hooded white jumper, his arms, and his face. He was a fairly good-looking guy with thick, tousled blonde hair and dark eye-

## First Southern Scene Teenage Prize

### *A Story for Annabel*

Amy Han



lashes. He had a small mouth. His headphones kept his head together like solid earmuffs that coiled together around the back of his neck.

He looked up. Annabel, suddenly shy, shifted her gaze towards the floor. She set her eyes on her worn-out Converse sneakers and kept them there, pondering how long she'd had them: three, four years? Ages.

She crossed her right leg over

her left and sat up straight, attempting to look confident in the way that the magazines told her to.

She looked up at the brown leather handles hanging from the bars across the top of the carriage. They swung back and forth with the gentle jerking of the train, as did her backpack, sliding slightly to and away from her ankles. Annabel felt restless. She flicked at her Met card, bored, without purpose, without any useful thought. The boy with the headphones checked his watch. He turned to glance out the window and then sunk back into position.

Annabel checked her own watch: three thirty five p.m. The train was running about ten minutes late. It was a Tuesday afternoon and her mother would be coming home late tonight. She'd gone to visit a friend after work, 'for coffee', and when Annabel's mother went anywhere 'for coffee' she could be gone for hours. Annabel's father worked late on Tuesdays. Her brother, Donovan, was going out who-knows-where but he wouldn't be back, guaranteed, until after midnight. Annabel guessed her parents wouldn't have a clue of their daughter's disappearance until at least nine o'clock.

"Look!" the little boy exclaimed, pressing his forefinger into the glass, pointing to the next station approaching. The old man put down his newspaper to turn the page. Annabel caught a glimpse of his hard face, his thick skin and turned down mouth, his contrasting, gentle eyes. He lifted his paper like a wall, like he was hiding, and then he disappeared, once more, behind the print.

Annabel didn't even need to turn her head to know how close the train was getting to the station. Familiar buildings and graffiti swept past the win-

dows; a subtle curve in the tracks was predicted; a certain length of shrubbery came to an end and the train screeched to an early, startling halt, pushing Annabel far forwards and then back, causing her backpack to slide out from between her feet and down towards the boy with the headphones, now gripping his seat and the window ledge tightly, his eyes wide awake and looking around. The baby awoke and began to wail. Its mother held it more tightly in one arm and held out the other to prevent her son from falling out of his seat. He had gotten a fright. He was also beginning to cry. The old man looked around at Annabel, at the boy, at the mother. He held his seat and he held his hat. The train was still.

Annabel's breath was quick, and her heart was pounding so loud she looked around, wondering if anyone else could hear it. She took a deep breath. Everyone sat still for a moment, besides the little boy, who had gotten out of his seat and now sat close to his mother, burying his face in her side while she wrapped her arm around him and told him it was okay now.

Someone was prying the doors open. A sturdy woman with dark roots in her hair peered in and looked around.

"Is everyone ok?" she asked. Her voice was gentle but her face looked urgent. Nobody answered. The old man looked around at her, perhaps nodding, perhaps just staring at her blankly, in shock, his newspaper scrunched at the edges where his fingers still were.

The young mother looked up, catching the woman's eye. Then she whispered something to her son and ushered him up, opened the baby's pram and gathered her shopping before making her way past the woman and out the door. The old man went out after her, quietly, before turning towards the woman and asking her what happened.

"See for yourself," she replied, sucking in her lips and lowering her head, her features trembling for a moment. She looked up again looking different, Annabel noticed: there was something about the look behind her eyes that gave her away.

The boy with the headphones was looking at the woman standing at the door. Annabel caught his eye as he lowered his headphones from his ears and stood up. He looked at her and stepped over her bag, which now sat in the middle of the walkway. Annabel got up to retrieve it.

"Are you alright?" the woman asked her. Her skin looked so pliable. She had wrinkles around her eyes and her lips were thin. All she wore on her face was mascara. Her breath smelt like Minties.

"I'm ok," replied Annabel, smiling weakly, looking at the thirty-something-year-old woman, and then around at the station. All she saw was paper. Sheets and sheets of paper, everywhere, flying around, blowing around the station like symphonic wings. It was beautiful, Annabel thought. Beautiful, in an eerie kind of way.

There was sheet music everywhere. White paper printed with musical notes swirled around the station; it was pushing along the floor, dancing through the air, slapping into columns, playing around benches and trying to blend into the magazine stands. The wind was undecided, unsettled, blowing in ever-changing directions. It was taking music with it wherever it went.

There was close to no one in the station. It felt haunted, deserted, empty. Empty, besides Annabel and the odd, randomly placed person around the station.

A young Asian couple swept past Annabel, taking with them a swirl of papers. The guy's arm was slung around the girl, the girl's arms were crossed: both of their gazes were stuck to their shoes in a dream. The young mother kept an eye on her quickly recovered son as she pushed the baby's pram through the tunnels. The old man wandered off in another direction. The boy with the headphones was gone forever.

A sheet of music clung to Annabel's back like static. She picked it off and looked at it for a long time, losing herself in the waves of black notes and tight lines, gazing into the music without hearing anything but only seeing it, feeling empty, cold, uncertain of where she was for a moment and not particularly caring.

All she could think about was that she had one sheet of music in her hands. One sheet of several. It had no title, no beginning, no end, but only a middle, a heart, a taste of a song but not nearly enough to be satisfied. She loved music. She loved to play the piano, and this was piano music. Annabel scanned the station with her eyes as though it were possible to see where the rest of the piece was. Because this was only one piece of a piece of unknown music. It was incomplete.

With nothing better to do, Annabel started making her way towards the front of the train. She had looked over in that direction in wonder, thinking about what the woman had said earlier, how her face had looked after she had said it. Annabel was curious: she wanted to see it for herself. She folded the sheet of music carefully and then shoved it into the pocket of her jeans. More sheets swirled around her. Her hair whipped across her face and the wind pressed cold air into her eyes. She squinted.

There was a small crowd at the front of the train: just a few scattered people, intending to pass by, but freezing instead. Their eyes widened when they looked onto the tracks, and then they forced themselves to move on. Annabel noticed the expressions on their faces before they moved on; she noticed the startled expressions at first, the way some would cover their mouths in disbelief and quickly turn their heads and hustle away. They gave Annabel the urge to turn around. Her heart heaved in the other direction but her legs continued to step towards the accident. She made herself stop. Something, or someone had been hit by the train. Someone had somehow fallen, or maybe they had jumped, onto the tracks and Annabel didn't need to see any body to believe it. She felt her heart slow and she contemplated how she could have just realised this tragedy and feel only numbness. She felt no sorrow. She felt nothing at all.

Annabel looked again at the sheet of music in her hands. She listened to the remaining sheets glissading around her, the white and black print streaming past the corners of her eyes in memory of he or she or it who had just died. She could hear sirens in the background. Death hovered in the air. Annabel hurried out of the station as if she had somewhere to go, while sheets and sheets of music still blew around her, following her, whispering through the air like spirits.

Annabel felt strange as she made her way through the tunnels. She felt insignificant. She felt nameless; she was just another body moving through the tunnels, another body of several, with her head low and her mouth shut. She was going no where in particular - just away, away from the tragedy of someone else's life.

It was cold in the tunnels. Annabel was glad to make it through them for even out in the wind it

was not so stone-chilly as it was enclosed in the concrete. Pushing through the gates, Annabel turned the corner and was startled to find herself face to face with the woman who had pried open the doors of the train.

"Sorry," Annabel muttered. The woman looked so much more afraid than before. Her lips trembled; her hands were full of papers and she could not hold them steady. The piano music was scrunched, torn, marked with footprints and dirty little fingers. Annabel glanced at the disheveled collection of sheet music and, avoiding eye contact, quickly made her way around the woman.

"Did you see Charlie?" the woman called. Annabel turned her head.

"Sorry?" she repeated, unsure.

"Charlie." The woman said again, "Did you see my Charlie?"

Annabel didn't know what to say. She didn't know any Charlie.

"He just wanted his music!" the woman screamed at her. Annabel's heart skipped a beat. The world seemed to warp around her; her breath lost its rhythm; she could feel all eyes falling onto the woman, onto her; she had gotten a fright from the sudden outburst but she wanted everyone to know she wasn't afraid. The woman had fallen onto her knees beneath the mouth of the tunnels; her arms hung limp; her hands were drooping, letting the handfuls of messy papers sweep the gum-splattered, concrete floor. She was crying her eyes out. Everyone moved on. Two young children stopped and stared, but their parents ushered them on, both of them keeping their eyes on the floor like all the rest. They left Annabel and this distressed woman like two troubled people that someone else would help.

Annabel breathed deeply. The last sheet of music blew over her head quietly and she reached up to catch it. The woman looked up at her with shiny eyes. Annabel reached into her pocket with her other hand and unfolded the sheet she had picked up earlier. She lay one gently on top of the other, made her way over to the woman and knelt in front of her. She could smell the Minties on her breath. She put the music in her hands, smiled weakly, and left.

Annabel had been keeping that one sheet from its several. It did not belong to her. It belonged with

the rest of its piece, like she belonged with the rest of her family. She sat herself down in the doorstep of a closed bakery and dumped her backpack beside her, leaned her head against the wall, reached for her Met card and looked at it. People were walking by, glancing at the girl belonging to the old sneakers poking out of the doorway. They would slide a glance at her and move on as if today were just another day, another moment of their ordinary lives. But it wasn't. How could it possibly be? Someone had died. Annabel had been on the train that killed a person. A person, like all of these people. A lover of the piano, like her. Just another of several.

Charlie. Was it he who died? Was it he who fell onto the tracks and got himself killed, leaving that woman, perhaps, to pick up all of the pieces? All of his pieces. What would she do with them now?

Annabel rested her eyes for a moment and then opened them to check her watch. It was quarter past four. Her dad would get home from work in about five hours. Her brother wouldn't be home until late,

as would her mother, most likely. No one would ever know about how she'd left home this afternoon, with her backpack full of everything she needed to last her at least a couple of days. Her family would never know about how she'd felt the urge to leave for no explainable reason. She'd just needed to. She had just felt the need, suddenly, to leave, without calling or informing or leaving any kind of Post-it note on the refrigerator. She was bored of daytime television. She was bored of waking up everyday to the same routine and the same dull conversation at the dinner table. So she'd left home on impulse this afternoon and look where that had led her: she'd gotten herself caught in the midst of music, in the rush of someone else's tragedy, in the melodrama of a train station that was usually nothing more than a bleak stop-off to somewhere else. But her family didn't have to know.

Annabel stood up. She swung her backpack over her shoulder and decided to take the bus this time. It was time to go home.



*Dedicated to the families of those that lost their lives in America in the recent tragedy; may God comfort their souls*

'Damn.'

Maelin checked to see if anyone had noticed. He tried again.

'Damn.'

He sighed. Another dreary day; another unheard curse. Maelin was a prisoner, and a human prisoner at that. It wasn't as if this prison was impenetrable—many a person had snuck in, and, realising this was the wrong place, then snuck out again; it was just that no one really cared who was kept in here.

Maelin had no friends, no rights, and no family, having been born in a tank. God, how he hated this cell, with its fluorescent green floor. And all the company he had was built into an incomprehensible talking transcript computer with legs—a nice touch. The stupid thing didn't even speak his language.

'Gleeb t'zuck whap whap t'chuu!'

## Second Southern Scene Teenage Prize

*Horizon*  
Lyndon Benke



Maelin kicked the robot, sighed, and sat down again. He still wasn't exactly sure why he had been sentenced to solitary confinement for 3600 hours. He had tried some rough translation during the TransHearing, and had been able to ascertain it had something to do with befriending too many lemons. He had never been very good at translating nouns. Or verbs, for that matter. Unfortunately, the Trans-

Hearing program was a primitive version and didn't fully translate his language either, converting "I didn't do it I swear" into "I will obliterate your race and feed you to rabid llamas." He prodded the door. It squeaked. These prison guys really had no taste.

'To/o p'whup p'whup io-t. Repsoid? K'lodt!'

The robot rolled into a wall.

The wall shimmered.