

LE TRAIN À GRANDE VITESSE

R. A. Christmas

... we are passengers on the train of the Church... the luxury of getting on and off the train as we please is fading. The speed of the train is increasing. The woods are getting much too dangerous, and the fog and darkness are moving in. —Glenn L. Pace

I

Where the *hell* was Kitty?

Elder and Sister Robinson were standing on a platform at the Geneva, Switzerland train station with their luggage, waiting for Kitty to arrive and accompany them to Paris on their way home to the United States. The train was leaving in ten minutes, and Kitty was nowhere in sight. Elder Robinson could feel his exasperation—and probably his blood pressure—rising. It was another of those awful moments in Europe he tried to avoid. But he knew he should have expected it, knowing Kitty. The girl was impossible. Where *was* she?

He knew his companion was also concerned, but only about Kitty. Something had gone wrong because, as he often pointed out, things always went wrong with Kitty. His wife, he knew, didn't care a fig about going to Paris. She was interested only in people, especially people who needed help, like Kitty, the most difficult Church member they'd worked with during their mission. They were going to Paris simply because Sister Robinson thought he wanted—no, needed—to go to Paris because he'd never been there, and because he was a former college professor and a poet, and that's what she thought such people did. Attending to people's needs was what she did, and she did it well.

Elder Robinson knew that getting him to Paris was his wife's way of rewarding him for eighteen "beardless" months of sacrificial service, mostly on her behalf. For her "stuck-in-the-sixties" former "Jack Mormon" husband, it hadn't been easy.

Fidgeting beside her, he also knew she'd be saying a silent prayer for them all, especially Kitty. He was anxious to get on the train; but he'd heard—and believed—so many horror stories about rude waiters, the confusing Metro, tourist jams at the Louvre, high prices, that he'd refused to go to Paris without a guide. Kitty had volunteered, and his wife had accepted, in spite of his misgivings.

Kitty was Chinese, but she was qualified. She spoke fluent French (she'd had a disastrous marriage to a Frenchman). She'd been to Paris several times, and for the most part Sister Robinson could manage her. So Elder R. let himself be persuaded. Besides, Kitty knew where the budget hotels were and made their reservations. But now, standing in befuddlement, all of his initial fears, which were legion, returned, amplified. Something had to be done, and fast. They had airline reservations from Charles de Gaulle to Salt Lake City in three days. If his companion was praying hard, he was worrying even harder.

The TGV, *le train à grande vitesse*, the high-speed train to Paris, stretched in front of them, left and right, and, having no experience with European trains—they'd driven a VW during their mission—the Robinsons didn't know where to board. Elder R. was clutching three second-class tickets for *Voiture 17*, but they were opposite car 1430. And he pointed out that if they took off in the wrong direction they could be in big trouble. Sister R. replied that she was prepared to board the car directly in front of them and let the train-people sort things out, and she added that she wouldn't board at all if the Spirit told her Kitty needed help.

"Why don't you ask somebody?" Sister Robinson said—what she always said in situations like this because she didn't speak French. Elder R. did speak French, but poorly.

There were a few people nearby. It was a weekday afternoon. Travel was light. But to Elder Robinson they all looked unapproachable. Asking, even in his hesitant French, was a simple thing, but it was always agony. He'd freeze. If only Kitty would come bounding up the stairs and put an end to this!

"What did she say when you called her?" he asked his wife.

"She said she was about to leave," Sister Robinson said, re-dialing.

"No answer," she added after a pause.

"Big surprise," he sighed. "She probably went back to sleep. I'd better go down and take a look."

"Maybe you'd better," Sister Robinson said.

"I'll have to come back through Control," he said.

"You have your passport," she said.

"I know, I know."

Elder R. took off into the terminal. Going by the checkpoint he saw no line—great, no delay coming back. He went quickly through the corridors, half-jogging, pretty good for an out-of-shape sixty-five-year-old. Thank God for those Saturday tennis matches with the branch president! He skipped stairs down the escalator, scanned the restaurants, shops, ticket counters, even dashed out front for a few seconds, where the tram stops were. Still no sign of the girl.

What a catastrophe! Her round-trip ticket, totally wasted! As he scurried back, a vision of Kitty's missed appointments, lame excuses, and emotional melt-downs flashed through his mind. What possessed people like her to join the Church in the first place? OK, he wasn't thinking like a missionary. But Paris without her couldn't be worse than this.

As he went through Control he calmed down enough to ask the officer, "*Avez-vous vu une Chinoise?*" His vocabulary was good. He knew the French for "Chinese woman." The man shook his head.

Elder Robinson had less than three minutes, by his Timex. He decided to risk one last look around. But before he reached the bottom of the

ramp, Kitty came around the corner in her red beret, boots, and trench coat, dragging a carry-on, her straight black hair flying.

“Sorry late!” she exclaimed. “Car don’t start. Bus very slow. Life so crazy. Ha ha!”

“That’s OK,” he said. “We’ve got to hurry.”

“Where Sister Robinson?”

“Up top, waiting. Let’s go!”

They got through Control and up the stairs. And his wife had the answer: second-class was to the left, toward the engine—which seemed nuts, but he went with it. Sister R. gave Kitty a quick hug, and they hustled forward with their luggage, Kitty helping, and after they’d passed a few cars the numbers began to make sense. At last, and with less than no time remaining, they reached *Voiture 17*, clambered aboard, and stowed their bags. The car contained only a few travelers to witness the stumbling arrival of these two older, and obvious, Americans, in dark suit, blouse, and dress, with black-and-white nametags, and their incongruous companion. They were choosing their seats when the TGV began to move.

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The car was divided into restaurant-like booths, facing bench-seats with small tables in the middle. This coach was practically empty: two gentlemen up ahead, in the center, on the opposite side, and a handful of travelers at the far end. The ladies chose the first available booth, and Elder R., at his wife’s suggestion, the next one forward, all to himself.

After they visited the nearby *toilette*, he slid across his seat to the window with his back to the girls so he could watch the passing scene in the afternoon light. Soon he could hear Sister Robinson and Kitty deciding that if he didn’t partake of a sandwich immediately, he would starve, so away they went on an expedition to the snack car, somewhere in the middle of the train.

Elder Robinson found himself suddenly blessed with the prospect of a half-hour alone—so suddenly blessed that at first, he didn't know what to do with it except to sit watching an increasingly lovely landscape glide by.

Geneva had a big name, but it was compact, wedged between two low mountain ranges and a river at the south end of Europe's largest lake. When you left the city, in any direction, you plunged at once into a green world of trees, fields, and family farms. A bonus for the Elder at this moment was that the westward track out of Geneva ran parallel to the Rhone, bluish-brown and widening, seeming not to be moving at all, but in fact spilling out of Switzerland into the south of France, taking aim at Marseilles. There were memorable snapshots, combinations of foliage, river, outcroppings, and light—and Elder Robinson, weary after the stress of boarding, was soothed, hypnotized. He removed his suit coat and laid it on the seat opposite.

It was refreshing to be alone for a change. Mormon missionaries, by rule, weren't supposed to be out of sight of each other, which made sitting alone on a train in the middle of Europe and sight-seeing unusual—*risqué*. But he was enjoying it.

It wasn't that he and Sister Robinson hadn't been apart during their mission. Elder Robinson always took his morning walk alone, which ended with a visit to a *tabac*, where he'd purchase his *International Herald Tribune* and a stop at a tea room, where he'd have a *Coca-Cola light* (unbeknownst to Sister R., who would have disapproved) along with his daily *pain aux raisins* while he read his paper, especially the US sports news, and then a chapter in his French Bible—his attempt to repent of all this guilty pleasure. In addition, as he strolled through nearby sunflower fields, he'd say his prayers, aloud, in his almost-French. Piety and practice, as well as piety and pleasure, in the tea-room were thus blended. After that, Elder R. would rejoin his wife in their apartment, where he'd find her at her own guilty pleasure, writing e-mails

to children, grandchildren, and friends in the States. He'd be back in an hour and their day as an LDS missionary couple would begin.

When they first arrived at their apartment in Ferney-Voltaire, Elder R. found a list, left by the couple they were replacing, of "members who need love." Kitty's name was at the top of that list.

III

While Elder Robinson was sightseeing, the train arrived at Bellegarde, just across the Swiss border in France, and Kitty and his wife came back.

They brought muffins, yogurts, salads, Perrier, and a large *jambon* baguette for Elder R., and dessert too—*éclairs*. They laid it out on their table, and Sister Robinson passed the sandwich and a bottle of Perrier to her husband to the tune of Kitty's chatter, which was giddy because it was about food.

"This all terrible food. Next time I make spring-roll for you," Kitty was saying, her voice like the chirp of a five-year-old. "Spring-roll and dumpling I going to make today, but I have no time. Brain not working. You should hear what I say to that bus driver. Going so slow, like snail. Faster, faster, I shouting, like crazy person. I report you. Here, I give you twenty Euro. Now go fast. (Hee hee haw haw). Finally made it. Don't know how."

"We're very happy you made it," Sister Robinson said. "Aren't we, sweetheart?"

"We certainly are," Elder R. said obediently.

"But you shouldn't have made such a fuss with the bus driver," Sister R. continued. "They can only go so fast."

"He make me mad," Kitty half-shouted. "He threaten throw me off bus. I say, 'You just try. Go faster, I shut up. Go slow, I make bigger noise.' Everybody on bus scream at him too."

Elder R. was imagining how that must have been for the other passengers. Kitty was oblivious when she went ballistic. Inappropriate French

just exploded from her mouth, which might come in handy at some ugly moment in Paris. But taking her along was like packing a grenade.

Kitty kept going on, through mouthfuls of salad, about that “stupid, stupid” bus driver. And Sister Robinson, as usual, kept trying to calm her, teach her some emotional control, help her understand that her anger wasn’t compatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He’d overheard this conversation a hundred times, without result. But Sister R. never gave up. Which amazed him; she never gave up on anybody, including himself.

Halfway through their mission, Elder Robinson had been the target of one of Kitty’s rages, and he wasn’t over it. For four months, Kitty had refused to speak to them, or to answer Sister Robinson’s e-mails or his forced apologies on her voice mail, nothing. Kitty had left off attending church; she wouldn’t even talk to their bishop, who was dragged into the middle of it by—guess? His wife.

Elder R. had written Kitty off as irredeemably insane. And the members didn’t care; they’d had enough of her outbursts before the Robinsons arrived. Only the by-now-famous Sister Robinson, who made soup every Sunday at the ward for the hungry and homeless, only Sister R. kept calling, e-mailing, praying, until with the help of the bishop and some ex-pats who’d known Kitty for years, she came around. And that had been only two months before the Robinsons were headed home.

This outrage was too recent and terrible for Elder Robinson to get over. He was still where he was *before* it happened, trying to figure out why Kitty was such a space-case, without even liking her, much less loving her. How could you? She was so hysterical!

What happened was this (and the cause was incomprehensible compared to the uproar that resulted): One Sunday, while Sister Robinson was busy with her soup, the young sister missionaries had asked him to baptize two huge Nigerians (drug dealers, it turned out, who ended up in prison). In the process, he forgot to pick Kitty up for church at the Ferney round-point in France—a necessity because her car, with its

Singer sewing machine motor, was so small she couldn't legally drive it into Switzerland.

Earlier that morning, he'd called Kitty to remind her about the pickup. She'd groaned and mumbled about feeling sick, which made it sound like she wasn't going. So they went to church, and he forgot about her. But his companion didn't. After sacrament meeting, Sister R. reminded him to call to see if Kitty wanted to come to the baptism. But when he did she didn't answer, and he figured—wrongly, it turned out—that Kitty had turned off her phone and was asleep. After all, she'd done it before; in fact, several times he'd waited at the round-point and she hadn't showed up. And not only that, she'd never apologized for not showing up, just waved it off with her "Sorry about that. Too tired. Brain not working." So he wasn't prepared for what happened after the baptism.

Sister Robinson caught up with him in the hall, when he was headed back to the chapel.

"I wish you'd gone to pick up Kitty at the round-point," she said.

"I called her, but she didn't answer. I figured she was asleep."

"I guess not," his wife said. "You better watch out. She came screaming into the kitchen about how you didn't pick her up. She started walking until some lady gave her a ride. I had to drag her into the bathroom and tell her to stay there and wait for me, she was making so much noise. I thought you might try to pick her up after priesthood."

"We had to practice," Elder Robinson said.

Both Africans were over six feet and two-hundred pounds, and even after he'd shown them the hand-holds and how to bend their legs, they'd almost taken him under, twice.

"She'll be looking for you," Sister Robinson warned.

"Oh, great."

"I'll try to keep her in there until it's over," she said.

But that was the best she could do. Coming out of the chapel, he ran into Kitty in the foyer.

"You lie to me!" she shouted. "You promise pick me up. You not there!"

“You said you were sick,” he countered.

“I said I *resting!*” she yelled. “Come later! You suppose pick me up. Like always. You lie to me!”

“I called you, Kitty. You didn’t answer. I had no idea.”

“I no want talk to you. You bad missionary! You lie to me!”

And on and on, with the members milling around, looking the other way, and Kitty screeching, “You bad missionary! You lie to me!” over and over, in front of God and everybody, chasing him down the hall like a harpy after his moment of triumph, baptizing two Nigerians as big as NFL linebackers.

Elder Robinson knew he was a bad missionary. He hadn’t served a mission when he was young, though he could have. And he hadn’t taught and baptized anyone as a senior missionary. And none of his seven children from two previous marriages were “active” members. In fact, he hadn’t been much of a Mormon himself until he’d married Sister R. He knew he was the epitome of a “bad missionary.” He just didn’t want it announced in church.

Finally, Kitty stomped off to the cultural hall, where she continued her tirade, mostly in Mandarin, thank heaven, to any Chinese member within earshot. He felt like killing her. She was such a twerp, a hopeless case. What a crock a mission could be sometimes.

The whole sorry business proved what Elder Robinson had read somewhere: A senior mission is how Mormon masochists go on vacation.

Fortunately, Sister Robinson got the expat Hendersons to take Kitty home to France. Elder R. could hear her ranting about his wickedness out the door. But Ben and Sue already knew about that, and understood, and forgave. They were from San Francisco, and Sue had spotted him for a beardless “beatnik” the moment she’d first laid eyes on him.

IV

It wasn’t long—Elder R. was still munching away—before Sister Robinson had Kitty involved in one of her “tapping” sessions, a technique she’d

come across on the internet for getting rid of destructive emotions by repeating, “Even though I (insert ‘don’t like to fly,’ or ‘feel like killing my husband,’)” and then add, “I deeply love and appreciate myself,” while tapping one’s head, face, chest, and side with the fingers.

It was called EFT, Emotional Freedom Technique, and it had worked wonders for Sister R. when she’d fallen into a deep depression at the beginning of their mission. So, in addition to teaching the gospel basics and loving and strengthening the members and investigators (*amis*), she recommended EFT and taught the technique to the willing (usually women, Elder R. noted) at every opportunity.

Kitty was willing, so while Elder R. was chewing at his window, Sister Robinson began using EFT to “deconstruct” Kitty’s episode on the bus, one disgusting emotion at a time.

“Even though I felt like killing that stupid bus driver, I still deeply love and appreciate myself.” Sister R. supplied the phrasing with variations, which Kitty repeated as they faced each other across the table, both of them “tapping,” like in a mirror.

Elder Robinson had been persuaded to tap a few times, but he couldn’t do it with a straight face. “Even though I’m a serial killer” was the sort of thing that would run through his mind while his wife was helping him lower his blood pressure. (It worked, by the way.)

But listening to a reluctantly contrite Kitty repeat out-of-character statements while she prodded herself, Elder R. couldn’t help smiling. He did attempt to “deeply love and appreciate himself,” at least a little, without losing an eye. And he admired and appreciated his companion because she *could* help it. Elder R. knew that without his wife’s willingness to dig deep, to cut close to spiritual bone and artery, their mission would have been a formality. Sister Robinson wasn’t exactly “sweet,” like the other senior sisters they knew in the mission. She didn’t have a plastered-on *smile* or a “take a backseat” approach to her priesthood-toting husband. She could be overbearing and was always relentless. If *amis* were still drinking, or needed to get married; she called them to

repentance. She got results in cases where other missionaries gave up. And the members loved her because they knew she loved them, particularly the weird, the less-actives, the shunned.

If Elder Robinson entered any room in the church alone, chances were the first thing he'd hear was, "Where's Sister Robinson?"

Now they were doing the "reversal process," starting with negatives and turning them, by repetition, into positives. "Hate the bus driver, hate myself, hate people yelling at me. Late. Miss train. Tap it out, get rid of it. Tap it away. Always on time. No problem. Bus driver a good man. He try hard, make money for his family. Forgive everybody. Love other people. Forgive everybody. Love myself. No reason to worry about anything." And so on. It was self-hypnosis, Elder R. suspected, knowing his wife didn't care, as long as it worked.

He polished off his sandwich. Then he must have dozed, because he was startled by Sister Robinson, who suddenly slipped in beside him and took his arm.

V

"Where's Kitty?" he said, glancing at the empty booth behind them.

"I sent her to the bathroom to cool off," his wife said. "She got upset when I told her she'd have to stop arguing with Howard about money."

Big surprise. Howard was Kitty's latest internet boyfriend. She'd met him on some LDS singles website. He lived in Michigan, and Kitty had flown over to visit him and his teenage boys. And while she was there, for some inexplicable reason, the man had proposed. But Howard turned out to be miserly. And Kitty was a spendthrift. And the boys, apparently, were couch-potato video game addicts. Obviously, it wasn't going to work.

"Let's hope you can tap it out," Elder Robinson said.

"I'll try when she calms down and comes back."

"If she comes back," he said mordantly.

“She will. She’s doing better. Now I can spend some quality time with my husband,” Sister R. said, laying her head against his shoulder.

“Don’t make her *too* angry,” he whispered. The prospect of being dumped in Paris without knowing how to get to their hotel was not pleasant.

“She can’t jump off,” his companion laughed, which caused Elder Robinson to shift his awareness to the sway and speed of the train. It didn’t seem like they were going very fast, but he knew they were. The cars they passed on the highways were creeping.

“Just be careful,” he said. In three days, he wouldn’t care what happened to her. But he didn’t dare say it.

“That’s your job,” his wife was saying.

Well, somebody has to make sure the trains run on time.

“What would you like to do when we get home?” she went on. He knew she was changing the subject because he was peevish.

“I don’t know. I haven’t really thought about it.”

“C’mon. Wouldn’t you like to play golf every day? Shall we go on a cruise?”

A cruise? Trapped on a floating hotel with boring rich old white people? Where all you could do was eat and play shuffleboard and watch bad entertainment and stop at tourist-trap ports and buy overpriced trinkets—while forbidden, of course, to smoke or drink alcohol? And probably get food poisoning besides? Whole shiploads were barfing and crapping their guts out. He’d read about it in the *IHT*.

“Sounds OK,” he said. And golf—imagine hacking around with geezers in Ben Hogan hats with faces like the bottoms of dry lakes, in \$10,000 golf-carts with Mercedes-Benz grills and American flags fluttering. A summer of that and he’d be shooting 150, and himself.

“Once a month would be fine,” he added.

“What’s wrong with once a week?”

“Nothing. I need some new clubs. We’ll see how it goes.”

He might play golf a little more when they got home; and who knows, his wife could probably drag him on a short cruise. But what would probably happen is they'd go back to selling real estate, having Church callings, and "family life," one crisis after another.

"I know what you're afraid of," Sister Robinson said, with that frightening intuition of hers. "The grandkids! You're afraid you'll get smothered."

Well, that was a concern. Not his grandkids, who were scattered all over. He seldom heard from them, or their parents. But all of hers lived close by and were everlastingly needy. How many thousand hours had he gotten stuck playing cars with Brian? And now there was little Glenn and his Lincoln Logs to contend with. And April over every other night, telling him she wouldn't go to bed. And the new baby that was driving their daughter-in-law crazy. What were they supposed to do, raise it?

"I guess," was all he could manage.

"I'll protect you. You can have as much free time as you want."

"I know."

"You know what I want to do?" she went on. "First, I want you to help me get started on my genealogy. And then I want us to write a book about senior couples going on missions. I think we ought to tell the members what it's like and encourage them to go. We could speak at firesides. You're such a good writer. I think it's time to use your talent to do something for the Church."

Hearing this, Elder Robinson cringed. Doing her genealogy he could handle; he'd done some of his, and she didn't have the patience, or computer skills, to do hers. It would be a sacrifice, but he could do it. But writing a book? Some pasteurized tract put out by, say, Bookcraft? He was insulted she would even ask.

"We'll call it *Senior Moments*," she said.

"I think *you're* having a senior moment," he said right back.

His heart had practically stopped. His wife's idea of good writing was something she might come across at Deseret Book while shopping

for drippy pictures of Jesus for the grandkids' bedroom walls. The idea of writing a book for someone else went against his Flaubertian principles and sensitivities, the cobweb he'd been spinning for fifty years.

"I think it would be better," he ventured (he'd have to tread gingerly here), "if you wrote that sort of thing yourself."

"You know I can't write," she fired back. "But it'd be easy for you."

"It's never easy," he went on, carefully, "to write something that's not natural for you to write. You're the one who knows the most about going on a senior mission. I'm just your 'designated driver.' If you'll just write your thoughts down, I'd be happy to polish them up. I'll be your editor."

"What if I just tell you what to say? Why don't we just talk about it, and then you write the book? You know I have no talent as a writer. I think that's the way we'll do it."

"But I'm not a ghostwriter," he said, as firmly as he dared. "I'd be happy to help you organize your ideas, and I'll contribute what I can. But I don't write books for other people."

As soon as that last sentence was out of his mouth, Elder Robinson knew he'd crossed the line. He didn't know what was coming, but it would be bad.

"I'm not *other people*," she said. "I'm your wife."

"I'm aware of that."

"I appreciate knowing where I stand."

"Good grief," he sighed. "I was just trying to explain. I didn't mean it that way."

"What good is your talent," Sister Robinson said, "if nobody understands what you write? Or they're shocked by it? Or if nobody publishes it?"

"I don't know," was all he could say. He was aching for this to be over. But he'd take his punishment.

"Couldn't you spare a little time," she went on, "to help me tell seniors what it's *really like* to go on a mission?"

"I'm sure our run-ins with the mission president would be welcome news," he countered drily.

"I don't know why I talk to you about these things," his wife said. "I just wish that for once you'd say, 'Yes, sweetheart, I'd be happy to write your book,' instead of making excuses. It makes me feel like you don't love me."

"All I'm asking for is a rough draft. I need something to start with, that's all."

"What's wrong with me telling you what to say?"

It was so like her—to talk him into writing the whole thing. No matter what, he wouldn't get talked into that.

"I'll help you write your book," he said.

"I'll write it myself," his wife said. "I wish I'd never brought it up."

In the midst of these sad exchanges, Kitty had quietly crept back. Sister Robinson gave Elder Robinson a peck on his cheek and slid out of his booth.

"I love you anyway," she said.

VI

He doubted it. How could anyone love the jerk he'd been during the last few minutes?

Now he was depressed. What a way to start a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Paris, arguing about something that wouldn't happen if he hadn't made a fuss. Back in the States she'd get caught up with kids and grandkids, church, and real estate, and that would be the end of it. She'd be too distracted to write a pamphlet, much less a book. Now for sure he'd get finagled into writing it, which was more depressing because it seemed inevitable.

Elder Robinson stared out of his almost-dark window. All he could see whipping by was an expiring twilight of trees, lights here and

there, and low buildings, industrial parks. They were in eastern France, somewhere.

Behind him, Sister Robinson was preparing Kitty to tap out her rage at Howard's miserliness and her blindness to her own spend-thriftiness, if that was a word. Elder Robinson could see that Sister R. wasn't about to let Kitty blow a chance to marry an elders quorum president in Michigan. If Howard wouldn't, or couldn't, change—well, Kitty must, and fast!

But at least Kitty was honest. She blurted her feelings right out, whereas he resented silently, secretly. He wouldn't sacrifice his sacred talent, not even for his wife, much less for his Savior. He was worse than Kitty because he knew better.

Maybe, he thought, I still have too much James Joyce in me, like some callow undergrad. He had to admit that he still lusted to be an Olympian author, revered by adoring readers, aloof and “paring his fingernails.”

At that reflective moment, on the bullet train to Paris, Elder Robinson might have expected a Joycean “epiphany,” a profound artistic awareness of the meaning, or meaninglessness, of his life. But it didn't come. All he saw was the bland interior of a hurtling high-tech European railroad car, all he felt was its speeding sway, all he heard was his wife and Kitty, tapping.

Listening to the ladies, he was reminded, comically, of Edgar Allan Poe's Raven, the bird that came “tapping” at midnight on a poet's door, while he was grieving over the loss of some woman (Lenore—that was her name) and then leaving the poor slob, mystified as ever, with only an enigmatic “quoth”: *Nevermore!*

That was more Elder R.'s style, the sort of message that left you worse off than before. He was amused by the absurdity of his situation (his entire life, actually); but at the same time, he knew full well that behind him, his “third-time's-a-charm” wife was striving with all her might, mind, and strength to rescue Kitty's soul. The stark contrast between himself and his missionary companion was suddenly so obvi-

ous, and so troubling, that he felt—unexpectedly—contrite. In short, it broke his heart.

He'd forgotten that Kitty was worth saving, that she had no reason to feel bad about herself, no reason to keep repeating, "No time," "Brain not working," or "I'm a crazy person." He had no reason to feel bad about himself either. So what if he sucked down two Diet Cokes a day, fed the young elders forbidden sports news from the States, and was half in love with a Filipina convert? Probably wrong, true; less than perfect, certainly. But what right did that give him to mope around, like Kitty, saying, "I'm a bad person" and to feel like a loser? Or to hate Kitty because she couldn't help it? Or to resent his wife because she needed help writing a book that would encourage Mormon seniors to go on missions?

Behind him, he could hear Sister Robinson and Kitty doing the reversal process again. They were repeating, "There's plenty of money . . . enough for Howard . . . enough for me . . . enough for food . . . no need to worry or argue about money any more . . . there's enough and to spare . . . tap it out, reverse it . . . tap it all away."

What Elder Robinson was repeating (to himself) was, "Repent—and fast. Start enjoying this trip, even with Kitty in tow. And when you get home, write that book, or something, for your companion. The results won't be perfect. Kitty might come unglued on the Metro, and what you write probably won't satisfy your wife or her sisters in Relief Society. There will be surprises and setbacks, but make a start. You're in too much pain not to. Oh, and almost forgot, say a prayer that Kitty and Howard can overcome their differences and maybe even get married. Who knows? With God all marriages are possible (even mine and Sister R's!)."

But at the same time, the thought of having to poke his body morning and night for who-knows-how-long made Elder R. feel tired—very tired.

He needed a catnap to gather strength for all this before they arrived, so he stretched out in his booth and curled up his legs, while Sister Claire J. Robinson and their friend Kitty Wu went on talking, and tapping, and laughing.

Outside, *le train à grande vitesse* had reached the main line from Lyon to Paris, had swung to the northwest, and was now at maximum speed—close to 300 kilometers per hour—as it barreled through the blackness toward the so-called City of Light.

VII

Hello dear Sister Claire

Howard and me have a most wonderful wedding in the Church last week. I cook a lot of Chinese food. Egg roll, dumpling, another thing.

The wedding is so beautiful. The member here they plan every thing for us. Howard's father walk me in the chaple. We have opening hyem and pray. And best friend of Howard, well also a member, give a talk about marriage. And he did a very good job. After the Choir sing for us, and a sister sing solo of "Marriage Pray". Really very beautiful. After the singing have our wedding. President Stone host the wedding. We sign the marriage document. After President Stone give a talk. After is closing song and pray.

We took some photo after we came out of Chaple. Member here help me decorated the gyme two day before. I took some photo. But the most of the photo still at one brother home. He going to make the photo in to a CD-Rom. After most of the sister help me put the food on the table. And after a pray. We have a very nice lunch. Every one like the food. But I think I cook too much. Haha. But every enjoy it.

Howard's mother May buy a very nice wedding cake. So we have a nice sweet after food. I didn't sleep before the wedding. I am too busy to cook and nervous. So I just eat very little food. After the lunch there a lot of member helping cleaning every thing. And that is wonderful. I just don't know we can do this with out the church member help. Every thing going well. After we have a lot of sleep. I didn't make it to the church the second day. haha. Feeling sorry. But I am too tired. I was fall to sleep on the sofa of the church when I finish cleaning. Haha. I don't even know how I came back home. Too tired.

But the good thing is every is done. So now I feeling much more relaxe. haha. We going to seal at Temple next year. I think now I more know about Howard. I love him more now. Now I don't feeling the money is any problem. He give all the wedding money to me. And it is a lot. haha. But we also have gift but not too much. Tomorrow I going have my Braital shower. Sister Lou Ann make this shower for me. She is so nice. I can't believe just a few week. I making so many friend here. And we going have a Relief Society with the General R.S. Broadcast at this Saturday. That is really nice to be a member. The church everything is the same. Only the people there is not the same but with same faith and love. That really touch me a lot.

I just doing fine. I am very happy here. I doing the right choose. Because Howard don't have a lot of money. But he love me very much. He is very gentle to me. And I love him too.

Take care

Love you

Kitty