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The Miracle

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The Miracle

Abstract

Simon Mannheim, world-renowned mentalist, is livid. His show has just ended, and in his hotel room he watches an exposé on cable news decrying his craft as a hoax— timed, no doubt, to follow his recent pay-per-view spectacular. He watches clips of himself explaining that all things are connected, his power a simple matter of harnessing the natural electrochemical energy of the brain and projecting it outward, touching the aura of objects, people, even the very air, and gently pushing until they conform to his will. The segment edits in the phrase “conform to my will” five different times, as if to make him look like a madman. Then, a lengthy narrative on a twenty-year-old University of Minnesota student who was killed attempting Mannheim’s “train trick” just after his St. Paul show.

Keywords

magic, science, publicity, shows, tour



October 26, 2012

The Miracle

A Short Story by William Jablonsky

Simon Mannheim, world-renowned mentalist, is livid. His show has just ended, and in his hotel room he watches an exposé on cable news decrying his craft as a hoax—timed, no doubt, to follow his recent pay-per-view spectacular. He watches clips of himself explaining that all things are connected, his power a simple matter of harnessing the natural electrochemical energy of the brain and projecting it outward, touching the aura of objects, people, even the very air, and gently pushing until they conform to his will. The segment edits in the phrase “conform to my will” five different times, as if to make him look like a madman. Then, a lengthy narrative on a twenty-year-old University of Minnesota student who was killed attempting Mannheim’s “train trick” just after his St. Paul show.

Mannheim’s abilities, says the investigative journalist, on leave from catching reckless pedophiles, are illusions, easily explainable: the pencil rolled across the table by quiet breath, the spoon bent by a strong thumb, the door opened and closed with fishing line invisible to the camera, the freight train braking with the help of transparent netting.

Mannheim watches and drinks. He knows he should not, as the consequences could be quite grave. Mannheim does not care.

When the host starts comparing him to Rasputin and David Koresh, Mannheim turns off the TV, slams another three fingers of Wild Turkey, peels off his tuxedo in the dark.

All they saw were parlor tricks, he thinks, as he lies atop the comforter in his bikini-briefs and black socks, concentrating on a tiny spider skittering across the ceiling. *They didn't listen to a word I said.*

Mannheim calls Marty, his agent, asks why he was not allowed to respond to these charges. Marty tries to assuage him: any publicity is good publicity, it means he's made it. And that stupid kid would've found some other way to take himself out anyway.

The windows begin to rattle.

"You're fired, Marty," Mannheim says, and hangs up before Marty can finish shouting, "Go fuck yourself." He calls the escort service and cancels the call-girl, then lies on the hotel bed in complete silence. He has never felt more alone in his life.

In the morning he makes some calls, fires everyone, cancels the rest of his tour. Then he goes on the Internet, posts something on the social networking sites. It is long and rambling—Marty was the one with the gift for words. The last thing he writes before clicking "Share" is a date and an address, and "Join me."

He shuts down his laptop, lays his head on the pillow, and for the first time in a week he sleeps easily.

Day 1

They come—sixty in all, gathered within the dingy white plaster walls of what was once Irving's Mattress Superstore, in a quiet north-Chicago suburb near the lake. Mannheim bought it two years before, in the hope of one day creating his own auditorium, but the insurance costs were too high. Outside, the ground and everything up to the lakeshore is covered in pristine snow, broken only by the railroad tracks that run in front of the old warehouse. Inside it is cold and dim, the fading sunlight and a pair of generator-powered space heaters providing lukewarm heat.

They are mostly college students or recent graduates, though there are a few silvery heads among them. They sit cross-legged on blankets, tattooed and pierced youngsters next to manicured business-suited men and women old enough to be their parents. An icy draft pricks at their skin, but they do not mind, because *he* is here.

Mannheim comes downstairs from his quarters in the old manager's office on the second floor, wire-rimmed spectacles teetering on the edge of his nose. He is neither sleek nor polished: his shaggy reddish-brown hair falls over his eyes, and a coarse, prickly beard obscures his face. In place of his customary tuxedo is a black turtleneck,

black chinos, black wingtips, a blue plaid scarf wrapped round his neck and tossed over his left shoulder. The crowd applauds.

Mannheim wanders to the middle of the warehouse floor and sits down.

“Hello,” he says. “Thank you for coming.”

They respond in kind, almost in unison. Just for a moment, he nearly tears up.

He recovers, smiles serenely. “You’re all here because you sense there’s something more than *this*...” He pinches the flesh of his forearm. “You sense it, but you can’t see it or touch it. Not yet. It took me years to grasp it.” He smiles again. “If you stay, I’ll teach you to sense it, harness it, and use it.”

One young woman in particular, a reed-thin ginger girl named Alison Finkel, weeps at his words as he explains the principles of what he calls “The Miracle”: sensing, touching, moving. This, she instantly decides, is the greatest moment of her life; she is face-to-face with a visionary on the order of Benjamin Franklin, Roentgen, even Einstein.

“I don’t want you to think this will be easy,” Mannheim concludes. “Some of you will get frustrated and leave.” He shoots an accusing glance across the room, and each person instantly resolves that it will be someone else who fails. “But for those who stick it out, the rewards are extraordinary.” He closes his eyes, inhales deeply, and suddenly an intricate web of Christmas lights on wires, strung all along the walls, blinks to life, and the warehouse is cast in brilliant blue and gold.

They gasp. Tears stream from Alison’s eyes.

“Do the train trick!” someone shouts.

Mannheim glares at him. “No more parlor tricks,” he says. “We’re here to learn.” He smiles again. “Let’s begin.”

Day 3

Despite the space-heaters and cots and blankets, the warehouse is cold, the windows covered in thick frost. Mannheim’s pupils sit cross-legged in heavy moving blankets next to their cots, awaiting the day’s lesson. Two slipped out during the night, their cots conspicuously empty in the middle of the warehouse floor. Their names were Ted and Jamie, Alison thinks, and from overhearing their conversations she could tell they had only come to learn the Jedi mind trick, presumably as a precursor to date-rape. Once

she explained to them the difference between telepathy and telekinesis, they left. No one misses them.

There is a black van parked across the street outside, which Alison noticed the night they all arrived—meant to be inconspicuous, she is sure, but as they filed in she noticed a cameraman and a reporter in a long trenchcoat climb out and film something. Their intentions, no doubt, are to further besmirch Mannheim's honor.

Mannheim, in a long gray Army surplus coat, wanders across the floor carrying an aluminum tea tray in one hand, an apple at its center.

“Let's start again,” he says. “Before you can even think about moving the apple with your mind, you have to sense it—to be aware of the apple and the space around it, to understand its basic apple-ness.”

Their eyes focus on the Braeburn, pale red with a thin swath of green running down one side. Alison does not know what it means to sense its “appleness,” but she is determined to try.

Five minutes into the exercise, a fat middle-aged man in a yellow cardigan asks, “When are we going to move it?”

Mannheim looks annoyed. “When you understand it,” he says.

After some awkward grumbling and a few unkind stares, the man reddens, sits down. Alison pities him.

“Tell me about the apple,” he says.

“Sweet,” says a young man of about twenty, with thick glasses and unkempt black hair falling over one eye.

“And a little tart,” says an old woman.

Mannheim nods: finally, he thinks, they might be starting to get it. “What else?”

“Firm,” someone else says.

Mannheim nods. “What else?” Alison thinks hard, concentrates so hard on the apple that her forehead hurts, but nothing comes.

“There’s a little worm inside it,” says a girl of nineteen or twenty with a bleached pageboy-cut, wearing a tight black camisole and thin sweatpants despite the cold. Her name is Mandy, and Alison already dislikes her.

Mannheim smiles, closes his eyes tight. “Yes,” he says. “Very good.”

The pupils start to grumble.

“It’s all right,” he says to them. “You just need time and patience.”

Alison is devastated, but resolves that next time she will be the one to sense the worm or whatever. Next time.

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The Miracle

Day 7

Mannheim has no idea why this is not working.

People are beginning to get impatient. Thirteen more have left; some slid off their cots and slipped out during the night, while one married couple called him a snake-oil salesman to his face before storming out. Mannheim forgets them instantly—they were only there to learn cocktail party tricks. Those who remain understand he is getting at something greater. Still, a week of staring at apples, carnations, and cacti may be wearing thin. He decides it is time to try moving a few small objects. Most will fail—but a few, particularly Mandy, by far the most receptive, might manage a dramatic wobble.

He tiptoes through the maze of snoring people to her cot. Mandy is awake, smiles when she sees him.

“You’re almost there,” he whispers. “Would you like a little more practice?”

“Sure,” she says sweetly.

He takes her hand and leads her quietly upstairs to his quarters. There, he motions for her to sit on the edge of the rollaway bed and bids her to focus on a paperclip he has placed on the TV tray at his bedside. “Just concentrate on moving that,” he says.

He lets his mind wash over her as she squints at the paperclip, senses her soft curves under her sweater, tensing with the effort.

“It’s not working,” she says, trembling from intense concentration.

“Just give it time,” he says. He sits close behind her, takes her right arm and extends her hand toward the paperclip. “Focus.”

Another minute or two goes by, and his hand is still on her arm, steadying it. He smells her vanilla-and-lilac body spray over the faint traces of concrete dust.

Mannheim decides to cheat, just a little—without a slight boost in confidence she might give up. He stares at the paperclip, winks his eye; it wobbles, slides a half-inch toward them.

“There,” he says, smiling. “You did it.”

Mandy throws her arms around him. “I did it! I really did it!”

“Well done,” Mannheim says. “I knew you’d get it.”

“Thank you so much!” she says, then kisses Mannheim hard enough to make his teeth hurt. He knows he should pull away, send her back to her cot. But his room is stark and lonely, the eggshell walls so dull they numb his brain. He should at least have had the contractors paint, but at the time he fancied himself in simple, unadorned quarters like a Zen master. He feels Mandy’s body heat radiating into him. Her skin is soft, touchable. He kisses the back of her neck.

He knows he shouldn’t do this. But his erection is stiff and painful, and before he knows what is happening he is on top of her, peeling off her sweater and bra, cupping her pert breasts, his tongue sliding over her firm, pink nipple.

Mannheim reaches up, turns out the light.

On her cot on the warehouse floor, Alison watches until the lights go out, balling up the corners of her fleece blanket in tight fists. She tries to reach up with her mind, up the concrete steps and through the steel door to where they are, but it’s no use. She wonders if there have already been others, if Mannheim has been calling them in the night, his will pulling them up the concrete stairs to his room. And if so, she wonders why she has yet to hear it.

Just after three, Mandy tiptoes down the stairs and across the concrete to her cot, smelling faintly of sweat. As she passes, Alison whispers, “*Whore,*” and glares in the dark.

But Mandy is in her own world, and does not seem to notice.

Day 9

Three times, Alison has taken her turn on the warehouse floor and, with Mannheim watching, has stared intensely at a paper clip, then a plastic spoon, then a pencil. Concentrating until the muscles in her forehead ached from the strain, she focused on each object, touched it with her thoughts, willed it to move across the coffee table, certain that this time she would finally do it. She swears the pencil wobbled once, but Mannheim failed to see it.

“Keep trying,” Mannheim reassures her. “It will come.”

She watches others fail after her. The young man with the glasses and shaggy black hair begins to cry after his third attempt, falls weeping into the fat man’s arms. Alison allows herself a tiny smirk when Mandy also fails, though the bleached whore seems remarkably unconcerned.

The last to try the pencil is a thick, hairy young man with a jutting brow—Brody, she thinks. She watches, dispirited, until Brody squints hard, purses his lips, and the pencil rolls across the tabletop and onto the concrete floor. It takes a minute to sink in, but when it does she feels herself leaving her cot, her hands clapping of their own volition, so hard they hurt. The others follow suit.

Then Mannheim glares, raises his right hand high in the air. The pupils fall silent, as if he has reached out with his mind and sealed their lips shut.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he says to Brody.

“I did it,” the young man says, discomfort evident in his smile. “Just like you wanted.” He takes a cautious backward step.

Untouched, the table turns over with such force that it echoes like a gunshot.

“Are you mocking me?” Mannheim’s voice is low, threatening. “You blew that pencil off the table. You think this is all about sideshow tricks?”

“Um...no?” Brody says, his voice high and cracking.

Mannheim sighs, long and loud, and stares at the cowering young man, and Alison is sure that he is about to squeeze Brody’s head until it caves in like a beer can—he has said in interviews that he could kill a man with his power if he wished, but has chosen never to so abuse it.

“Get out,” Mannheim snarls.

“But Mr. Mannheim....” Brody pleads.

“*Out.*”

Brody runs to his cot, gathers up his coat and backpack, and smashes through the steel doors into the snow.

Mannheim glares at the remaining crowd. “Anyone else want to try something cute?” Alison feels crushed by the force of his voice, and wonders what would happen if he were truly enraged. Though she is not to blame, she feels a terrible pang of shame run through her, as if Brody’s deceit is her own.

Then the freight train rolls past, breaking the silence. The windows rattle. Mannheim turns away.

“We’re done for the day,” he says, heading for the steps to his room. “I’ll order pizza. Eat. Rest. We’ll try again in the morning.”

When the pizzas come, Alison is famished, as are the rest of the students. As they gorge themselves straight out of the boxes on the buffet table, she notices Mandy slinking quietly up the stairs, two plates in hand, and suddenly she loses her appetite.

Day 10

It is early morning, the sun not yet up. Mandy is asleep on Mannheim’s cot, and from his wicker chair he watches her soft flat belly rise and fall, rise and fall. She is naked, the blanket pulled up just past her waist, her right arm draped over her eyes.

He gently pokes her arm.

Mandy opens her eyes and smiles. “Hi,” she says.

“I think you should go back downstairs,” he whispers. “Before anyone notices.”

She runs her hand down his bare arm. “They already know.”

He clears his throat. “What I mean is, I don’t think we should do this anymore. It’s distracting me. I think that’s why I haven’t gotten through yet. Maybe afterwards....”

“Oh,” she says, sitting up in bed and pulling the sheet over her bare torso. “I see. I guess I’ll be going, then.”

Mannheim feels a wave of guilt, something he is unused to. “Of course I want you to stay....” he says.

Mandy gets up, throws her clothes on in the darkened office. “Sorry,” she says. “I never really bought into this. I was just here for you.”

“I thought you believed,” he says. “What about the worm in the apple?”

He cannot tell if the look she gives him is one of sadness or pity. “Lucky guess.” She slides her stockings and shoes on. “Can you call me a cab? It’s freezing out there.”

“I don’t want you to go.”

She giggles sharply, and it hurts him. “Not much to stay for, is there?” She heads for the steps down to the warehouse floor. Mannheim drapes his coat over his bare shoulders and follows her down in his flannel pajama bottoms.

“You don’t have to do this,” he whispers, just loud enough to be heard above the snoring.

“Yeah, I do,” she says, and gathers up the duffel bag beside her empty cot. She swings open the steel door and heads off into the heavy, wet lake-effect snow. He follows her, the fresh sharp crystals stinging his bare feet; she stops less than a yard from the black van.

“Go back inside,” she says. “You’ll get frostbite. Or pneumonia.”

“I don’t care,” Mannheim says, his voice quivering.

She shuffles toward him through the fresh snow, reaches for his coat lapel, pulls him down to her height and kisses him softly. “It was fun,” she says. “I hope you can teach them what you know.” Then she turns and walks away from him, across the train tracks and toward the glow of streetlights.

Mannheim turns toward the van. The orange light from the streetlamp is shining on the tinted windshield, just enough for him to make out a man holding a camera, pointing it right at him. He presses his face up to the driver’s-side window.

“Did you get that?” he says, and trudges away.

Someone gets out of the passenger side—a young man with white-blond hair in a black off-the-rack suit. He is holding a microphone. “Mr. Mannheim!” he says, breathless. “Daniel Toovey, TV-6 news. Mind if I ask you a few questions?”

Mannheim does not stop or look back.

The reporter follows. Mannheim lifts his hand, raises his index finger in the air; Toovey feels something tug at his ankles and finally falls face-first into the snow.

Everyone is awake when Mannheim trudges in. They rush to his aid like parents racing toward an injured child. “It’s okay,” he says.

Alison peels off his coat, wraps her blanket around him. She is enraptured, seized by electric joy. “Here,” she says. “You’ll catch your death.” She hugs him tight as the others watch, wishing they could be so bold. “I’m so sorry,” she tells him, though she doesn’t mean it.

“Thank you,” he says.

Alison knows this is her moment. “Let’s get you to your room.”

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She helps him out of his wet pajama bottoms and into a red striped two-piece with button-up top. He falls into the wicker chair, saying nothing, occasionally looking up at her like a lost child. She does up his buttons, her knuckles gently brushing the soft down of his chest. Her heart races.

She helps him into bed. “Do you want me to stay?” she asks.

Mannheim nods.

She begins to crawl into bed beside him, but he raises a hand, shakes his head. Instead he takes her hand in his, holds it tight. Her elation quickly turns into a sour feeling in her stomach, but she stays until her hand hurts and she can see the edge of the sun just beneath the windowsill. Then, when he begins to snore, she tiptoes downstairs.

Everyone is watching when she comes down.

“Well?” asks the spectacled young man, whose name she has learned is Randy.

“He’ll be all right,” she says.

When Mannheim awakens, just after eleven, he comes down the stairs in his bathrobe. “No exercises today,” he says. “Go out, take the day off, do laundry, whatever.” He goes back upstairs, slides the Johnny Walker Blue out from under the bed, pulls out the

cork stopper, lifts the bottle to his lips. The burn is good.

Day 12

Mannheim drinks.

When he has finished off the Scotch and burgundy in his room, just after noon, he sends Randy on a liquor run, then drinks some more. Down below, on the warehouse floor, the pupils hear an occasional grumbled “Bitch,” or, “Fucking groupie.” They are frightened—at any moment, the glass window could shatter and rain jagged shards on them. Or perhaps the roof will cave in. Some consider leaving while it is still safe, but no one does. They are awaiting something spectacular, even terrifying, though they do not know what.

Alison looks to Mannheim’s window for any sign of movement: curtains jostling, books and papers flying about. At the first sign of tumult she will march up the stairs, brave the debris, hold him until his tormented brain is at peace.

Then, just before sunset, he comes downstairs, dark circles under his eyes, hair flat and lifeless.

“I’m sorry, everyone,” he says. “I’m okay. Tomorrow, we’ll get back to work.”

Mannheim’s students stand at their cots and applaud, because they feel they should.

Day 13

Mannheim’s new theory, which came in an epiphany while he showered, is that their innate telekinesis will be activated by sudden danger; their sleeping brains will need to be jumpstarted by a sense of imminent physical harm. This, he explains, is how he stopped the eighteen-wheeler on the interstate last Christmas, and the train just a few weeks ago.

“It’s simple,” he tells them. “Focus on what’s coming toward you, and concentrate all your will on it.” He is animated, alive. “Then you put out your hand, like so....” He extends his right hand like a policeman halting traffic. “...and push with your mind, hard as you can. That should be enough to stop just about anything.”

“Can you stop bullets?” asks a pudgy, pimply, spectacled college-aged boy in a Superman T-shirt.

“I suppose you could,” Mannheim says. “With enough concentration.” He isn’t entirely sure; he always wanted to try it, but Marty would never let him.

“Cool,” another boy says. “Can you do the trick where you stop a truck?”

Mannheim raises an eyebrow. “I told you, no parlor tricks. This isn’t a show.” He smiles devilishly. “So who’s first?”

Randy gets up from the floor. “I’ll go,” he says.

Mannheim instructs Randy to stand still and close his eyes while he picks up a metal folding chair stacked against the wall. “No peeking.”

Randy shuts his eyes tight.

“You can look now,” Mannheim says, and swings the chair at Randy’s face.

For a second Randy’s eyes go wide and white in his head, and before the chair connects, he ducks.

“Sorry,” he says. “Reflex.”

Mannheim sighs. “I understand. We’ll try again later. Next?”

The pimply boy gets up, assumes his position. Mannheim swings the chair. The boy’s hands come up and stop the chair mid-swing.

Mannheim glares, but recovers himself. “You’re not focusing on the chair.” He sends the boy back to the floor. “Anyone else?”

Alison gets up. This is her moment. Mannheim rests a hand on her shoulder; it feels warm, forceful. Good.

“Are you ready?” he asks her. “Focus on the chair.”

She nods.

Mannheim backs up, raises the chair, swings it.

The next fraction of a second goes by like slo-mo on a DVD player. Alison sees the metal chair coming toward her and reaches out with her mind, all her thoughts on the chair, the air swirling in its wake, her own distorted reflection in the dull metal. She focuses all her will on it, extends both arms like a Tai-Chi instructor, preparing to make the chair recoil in Mannheim's hands as if it's struck a wall.

The chair hits her flush in the forehead with a crash, loud as a snare-drum hit. For a minute everything goes black, then Randy and a few others are standing over her, dabbing at her face with toilet paper. Something feels warm and wet under her nose.

Alison hears Mannheim's disembodied voice above the ringing in her ears. "Oh, Jesus, I'm sorry. I really thought you were going to stop it." Though her vision is blurred and wobbly, she looks long and hard into Mannheim's face, and for the first time she notices acne scars on his cheeks, his uneven stubble, the split ends in his hair. So ordinary.

Murmured voices break the silence: "Well, I'm done here," someone says. Someone else whispers, "Waste of time." And a fat middle-aged man says, "I can't believe I left my wife for this."

Alison lifts her head to see Mannheim staring daggers across the room. "Nobody asked you to."

Randy starts to say, "Um, actually...." But Mannheim silences him with a glance.

The fat man reaches under his cot and gathers up his rucksack and a small Freshmate cooler. "This is bullshit," he grumbles. "I'm catching the next bus out of here. Anyone care to join me?"

One or two begin to follow him, sweeping their belongings into backpacks and suitcases, then several more.

Mannheim's irritation turns to alarm. "Wait," he says. "Just wait." He considers sealing the doors shut, but this would be well over the line—no one is a prisoner here. "Please. I want you all to stay."

"Why?" the fat man says. "Everything you're telling us is a lie."

Everyone grumbles in agreement; Mannheim feels the heavy weight of despair in his gut. "Go, then," he says. "I won't stop you. But I'm no phony."

Alison picks herself up off the floor, holds a wad of tissues against her bleeding nose.

“Prove it,” she says through blood and spittle.

Mannheim turns around, winces at the blood on Alison’s face. A broad purple bruise is already forming on her pale forehead. “I said no parlor tricks,” he insists, though his authority has long since faded. “That’s not what this is about.”

The fat man interrupts. “You prove you’re not a fake and we’ll stay. Am I right?” The rest nod.

Mannheim’s shoulders sag. “Fine. What do you want me to do? Knock over this chair?” He waves a hand; a folding chair in the corner falls to the floor with a clack. “The cot?” He snaps his fingers and an empty cot tips over.

“Not good enough,” says the fat man. “You could have had that set up from the start.”

“Show us a miracle,” Alison whispers, but everyone hears, and when they do the whole room erupts into cheers.

“Name it,” Mannheim says flatly.

“The train trick,” the fat man says, and the room falls silent.

Mannheim nods.

The next train is due in twenty minutes, and they come like clockwork; Mannheim steps outside into the snow, his Army trench billowing behind him like a cape. This is how he has appeared in Alison’s dreams since the first time she saw him on *The Late Show*, years ago, when she was a teenager.

“Don’t follow me,” Mannheim says, and steps onto the tracks. They hear the roar of train wheels against the track, the warning bells as the wooden barricades come down at the crossings. Soon, they see it.

Alison’s nose has stopped bleeding, and she can almost feel her face again, and for just a minute she considers jumping up on the tracks with him, telling him he doesn’t have to do this, not really. Then her forehead starts to throb, and she thinks, yes, he does.

The train nears Mannheim on the tracks; the engineer sounds his horn in three quick bursts.

Too late to stop.

Mannheim raises his right hand, palm out. There is still time to walk away. Maybe he should. But this will convince them beyond doubt. He notices the black van's doors opening, the reporter and cameraman scrambling out. He senses the train, feels its metal contours, its wheels, its pumping pistons, the rush of air in its wake. He pushes.

The screeching is tremendous; Alison covers her ears and turns away—this is the end of him, she cannot watch. When she turns back, everything is sparks and smoke and noise; the train's gears and wheels are spinning in place on the rails. And there, silhouetted in smoke and close enough to reach out and touch the engine, is Mannheim, expressionless, face glistening with sweat.

The pupils' jaws drop. Even the fat man can only stare and mouth, "I'll be goddamned."

Mannheim stares back at them. The expressions on their faces are the same.

Disbelief.

He sighs, lets his arm fall to his side, steps off the track. The train rolls on.

Alison breaks away from the crowd as the train passes; her bloody tissue falls to the ground and she runs toward the tracks, ecstasy in her heart. It is real—the miracle is real!—and when she reaches Mannheim she will throw herself at his feet and promise she will never doubt him again. But when the train has passed, he is gone.

She runs toward the buildings across the field, searching for footprints, but finds no sign of him. She stops, closes her eyes, reaches out as she's been taught—she feels him, close but quickly moving beyond her reach. But no matter how hard she concentrates she cannot quite pin him down. She only knows he is running to some other place, and that he is going there alone.

William Jablonsky teaches fiction writing at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. He is the author of *The Indestructible Man: Stories* (Livingston Press, 2005) and the novel *The Clockwork Man* (Medallion, 2010). His stories have recently appeared in *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, the *New Plains Review*, the *Florida Review*, and *Shimmer*.

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