

to check out, Carl had sleepily started telling her about the conclusions he'd reached in the night, that as they moved further east the crowds were likely to only grow stingier, and that maybe they needed to retreat back to Boston and work some more on their material. Agatha had just looked forward, though, stern and unreachable, staring into the rushing morning crowds in the station. "I won't put up with what happened last night," Carl wanted to tell her. "I won't put up with that again." But the moment he thought of saying this, the cold grip of a homesick loneliness clutched at him, and the only warmth in all of Europe, he knew, was with Agatha.

The train pulled out through the high-rise settlements on Berlin's eastern edge, then progressed through wasted industry. Around one of the bends in the track, the stone carved head of a pig stared down

"The night before had been the first, since they had arrived in Europe, that Carl and Agatha had not had enough money for even the dingiest hostel."

at them from the top of the gothic-arched gate to what must once have been a slaughterhouse. A bit further on, yellowing weeds grew thick in the gravel yard of what looked to have once been a factory. "Don't happy," someone had spray painted on one of its gray concrete walls, "be worry." In the compartment, the skinny girl with the perm watched them sheepishly. Carl guessed she'd probably been traveling alone a long time.

"Hey," she ventured finally, giving a submissive, shy smile. "My name is Skylar. Are you guys from the States?"

"Oh, fucking Christ," Agatha mumbled.

"Yeah," Carl attempted. "We're from Boston." But Agatha's words had done their work. The girl, Skylar, turned and stared big-eyed out the window.

Once the train had sped up in the flat, sandy fields outside of the city, Agatha took a crumpled soft pack from her bag and lit a cigarette. The cigarette was old, stale, and foul-smelling, like a thick-burning rubbish fire. Skylar, after a lot of uncomfortable twitching, got up and started to fuss with the window. It was the kind that had spring-loaded latches you needed to retract with your fingers. The latches must have been stuck, though, or rusty, because Skylar couldn't budge them. As the train took a bend, she stumbled back into her seat, almost winded from her efforts.

The train stopped at Slubice, just over the border in Poland, and two men in green fatigues walked the corridors, machine guns suspended from straps at their chests.

Relentlessly, they slid open the door to each compartment, examining passports. A red-haired, bushy-mustached conductor followed behind them, asking for tickets in Polish. Carl fished the passports and tickets, both his and Agatha's, from the jacket pocket where he kept them, on the left side of his chest. He watched Skylar searching, ever more frantically, through the messy inside of her backpack, jumbled with books, clothes, and tupperwares, coming up with the ticket, but not the passport.

"I thought you didn't need a passport, anymore, to get from Germany to Poland?" Carl whispered to Agatha. But Agatha raised a strict, calloused finger — its nail chipped from plucking — to her lips.

When the men with machine guns reached the compartment, they asked Skylar three times, in Polish, for her passport, and she told them three times, in English, that she

didn't seem to have it. Then one of the guards made a commanding, upward-thrusting, open-palmed gesture with the hand not resting on his gun stock. Skylar stood up and zipped her backpack. The border guard used the same hand to point her out. While all of this was happening, the conductor lingered just outside the doorway, humming gently to himself. Once first Skylar, and then the men in fatigues had pushed past him, the conductor stepped forward and validated Carl and Agatha's tickets with two quick pops of his hole punch.

"Is it possible to open the window in here?" Agatha asked him as he handed the tickets back to Carl.

The conductor jerked his head up quickly, like a pointer catching a scent, then plodded forward to the window and forced his stocky thumbs into the latches. The window went up with a screech.

"Everything is possible," he announced proudly, in English, and bowed slightly towards Agatha. Then he left the compartment.

Agatha leaned back and propped her feet up on the seat across from hers, where Skylar had been. She slid over and rested her head, snuggling in, on Carl's shoulder. "Just let us give it till Moscow."

New Releases

Swansea Terminal

Robert Lewis
Serpent's Tail

Robert Lewis' *Swansea Terminal* provides a wonderfully dark sequel to his previous crime novel. Narrated by the classic Lewis protagonist, the curmudgeonly, introspective, gloomy yet notoriously sharp Robin Llewellyn, this novel is the work of a writer more than capable of mining the hardboiled crime genre for all it is worth. Comparisons with Malcolm Pryce would not go amiss and there are times when Lewis excels himself with the tone and shrewd, acerbic asides.

Robin Llewellyn is unemployed, homeless, a chronic alcoholic seeking to live out his drink-sodden days with a concern only for his next place to sleep and the next spirit he can obtain. After his financial deception of Brenda Blethyn, a mentally disturbed woman with delusionary tendencies, Llewellyn finds himself in hock to her criminal family, the outcome to be determined by whether he can keep his wits and his sobriety about him.

Martyn Colebrook

The Quiet Girl

Peter Høeg
Harville Secker

The main character of *The Quiet Girl* is world-renowned circus clown, Kasper Krone who has a unique gift. He is able to know where someone is, who they're with and even what they're feeling just by listening to their breath through a telephone. Krone is not a character that's easy to like. He's full of lies and performances that should be kept in the circus; he has a large amount of debt and is wanted for tax evasion. This however is just the beginning, a meeting with The Quiet Girl, a group of children with mystical abilities and a mysterious order of nuns leads him on a journey where he realizes that not everything is as it seems and even with his ability he cannot predict the future or fully understand the past.

Danish writer Peter Høeg has created a novel filled with spirituality and music. *The Quiet Girl's* narrative jumps through different events in Kasper Krone's life developing an unlikely hero and an intricate plot which is at times bewildering, but never fails to surprise and enchant.

Louise Sanders

