

Natália Bodnárová

## Metro Society

Last Thursday, I was about to meet my friend at *Malostranská* in front of the St. Nicholas Church. I was already at the *Budějovická* metro station and was walking down the stairs to the platform, when I started to feel a very odd sensation...

Since most of the time I have to take a bus, it becomes kind of a special occasion for me to go somewhere by metro. Recently I figured out, that as soon as I step inside the metro building, I always tend to get a feeling of complete loneliness among the other people. The metro hall may be filled with hundreds of strangers – rushing to work, waiting for their loved ones or heading home, however their absolute anonymity will forever make me feel like there is no one else, besides me. This revelation made me wonder why is it so. I thought that maybe, it is the journey to the metro itself that makes me feel this bizarre. As soon as I step on the escalators, I realize that above me instead of clear sky, are panels stacked into an arc shape, reminiscent of an apparatus for MRI. This whole idea sends a cold shiver down my spine and that is why I have decided to play a game. A game in which I try to get more familiar with the faces passing by me to get rid of this fear and once again feel better.

On my left was a lady with long winter coat reaching down to her ankles, her hair tightly tied into a long ponytail and with hands hidden in her pockets she swiftly walked past me leaving a trail of a very heavy scent. I could feel her feminine fragrance piercing the drab air, however her presence to me still remained negligible. The metro had just arrived and after the doors opened and people stepped out of the wagon I went inside and found an empty seat. The doors closed and the monotone ride was about to begin.

I was basically locked in a room with fifty other people for next minute or two. In this time, I was determined to find out as much as possible about the strangers around me, as the idea of anonymity in public transports seemed to fascinate me. *14:43 Budějovická*. Next to me sat a man probably in his late thirties. With his dry hands he held bunch of papers and a red ink pen. He concentrated on what he read and time to time he circled something with the red ink. After each side he licked his finger and turned the page. I was more than sure that he was a teacher. I presumed history as from the books in his bag and a very strict look on his face. In ten years he most likely will be grumpy and old with... *14:45 Pankrác*. He suddenly reinserted all the papers into his bag without paying much attention to them and quickly left the wagon. I highly doubted that I would ever see this man again. Was it worth it to focus on one stranger, who in two minutes will be gone? Absolutely.

I knew about myself that I was choosy, however the fact that I was choosy even when it came to picking a stranger that I will try to analyse in under two minutes, made me giggle. As I chuckled I spotted a small girl staring at me. She was the one.

Blonde hair, sweet looking lips and a pervasive look in her eyes. She had her hand around one of the rods and with slight tilting from trying to balance out the speed, she glared at me with absolute absorption. How old could she possibly be? Eight, nine? I wasn't sure. Future model? Maybe. Future actress? Possible as well. As from what I could see, she wasn't ashamed of anything. *14:47 Pražského povstání*. I expected her to leave, but she stayed still

with hand around the pole and straight look into my eyes. Was she trying to figure me out as well? Or did she just play the staring contest? I didn't know. But I was determined to win. 14:48 *Vyšehrad*. Her ambiguity seemed to distress me. I was looking for at least a single sign that wouldn't be just a guess. Possibly a cup from Starbucks or a necklace with her name on it? Or at least a keychain with the starting letter? Nothing. She was a complete mystery. 14:50 *I. P. Pavlova*. I was ready to engage my intuition as there was no possible clue that would help me.

Name? Laura. Age? Nine. Hobbies? Ballet and staring at people – obviously. Smart and pretty – egoistic. Soft pink dress and white fur coat – girly... I wish I had a fur coat like that when I was seven, I mean nine... she looks so young...am I really competing against a nine-year-old? Of course I am!

14:52 *Muzeum*. After creating a fake identity of this little girl, I realized that I need to know much more than I know now. Her past couldn't be very comprehensive; therefore, I chose to find out everything about her future. What is this little girl going to be like in for example ten years? 14:54 *Hlavní nádraží*. I decided to go for the model career.

I Imagined walking into a news stand with her face on each front page, seeing her fearless look on every billboard and recognizing her in TV commercials and celebrity talk shows. Laura – the social media star. 14:55 *Florenc*. Paparazzi watching her steps and informing us about what she eats, wears and where does she go to party. In her twenties, she finally will find a famous partner, with whom she will be longer than half a year. Everyone will believe that he is the one and be very surprised after she will reveal, that it all was just a marketing gimmick. After her first fashion week in Paris will come a drug scandal and later on she will launch her own fashion line, which will have nothing to do with her designing skills. Oh how I love celebrity mores. 14:57 *Vltavská*.

We were staring at each other for quite some time and I could see that her eyes all of a sudden started to glisten. What a cool trick for pictures... photographers will kill for this girl. 14:59 *Nádraží Holešovice*. I forgot about her life in ten years and even about how all the girls must envy the white fur coat she is wearing. I just watched her eyes glimmer and she watched mine. 15:02 *Kobylisy*. I no longer felt the odd feeling of loneliness, instead I could sense jealousy intertwining with peculiar pity for this little girl. 15:04 *Ládví*. She was so beautiful... Then all at once, she looked up at a man standing next to her and I realized that it was me who won the game. She asked the man something that I couldn't understand and then started to walk out of the metro. As she struggled her way out, she looked at me once again with a small teardrop rolling down and leaving a small wet spot on her dress.

Wait... *Ládví*? I completely forgot that I was supposed to go to *Malostranská*. I quickly went out, and as I ran to the metro going the opposite side, I could spot the little girl once more. She had her wrist tightly grabbed by the man's hand and with her small feet she pattered after him, as if he was a business man rushing, not to miss his flight...and she was his take on board luggage. It all started to make perfect sense. She wasn't playing a game. She was begging me for help...