

EMPTY TRAIN

The image shows the interior of an empty train carriage. The seats are blue with a white polka-dot pattern. The aisle is carpeted and runs down the center. The ceiling has overhead luggage racks. A door is visible at the end of the carriage. The overall lighting is dim and blue-toned.

**A SHORT STORY FOR ENGLISH
READING AND SPEAKING**

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Introduction

What is a ghost train?

Have you ever been on a completely empty train?

Have you ever had any strange experience on a train?

Is it possible for a large group of people to just disappear?

Empty Train

Georgina got on the train at Bradford.

As the train left the sleepy little town, she gazed out the window and reflected on the weekend she had spent with her parents there.

A comfortable house, home-cooked food. Very different to her life in London.

She lived in a small, cramped room and shared a kitchen with people she barely knew.

Most meals were take-outs.

She stretched her legs out in front of her and stared out the window as the train left the outskirts of the town. Tomorrow morning she would be standing on the Central Line, shoulder to shoulder with people while trying to hold on to the handrail above her head.

Commuting in London was such a drag.

A man came into the carriage and edged past Georgina's big suitcase in the aisle. She got up to lift it to the luggage rack above her seat.

Her mother had packed it full of essentials. Tins of food,

sweaters she had bought in the small local department store, and a collection of books.

Home comfort items.

As Georgina struggled with the heavy suitcase, she raised her head to see if she could spot any man willing to help her.

She loved to be independent. But she also loved the fact that all she had to do was put on the helpless female act and there would always be one guy running to help her.

It gave her a certain amount of comfort that she had this kind of power.

As she looked down the carriage, she noticed everyone was quietly wrapped up in their own world. Every person staring blankly out the window as the train trundled along the tracks.

Even a young boy, no more than nine or ten, with his hands in his lap and staring out the window. Shouldn't he be playing some annoyingly loud game on an iPad right now?

And further down the carriage, a young couple, both of them in the same position as the young boy. Hands in their laps, staring out the window like they were half asleep.

It looked odd.

Georgina sat down and slumped low in her seat.

Usually, if she were on the underground on her way to work, her eyes would be fixed on her phone. But the scenes outside were so pretty. A typical English countryside view.

Green fields, sheep grazing.

It was beautiful.

She would not see this tomorrow morning.

Then a sudden whoosh as the train entered a tunnel, and the whole carriage submerged into darkness.

The sound of the wheels on the tracks much louder inside the small confined space of the tunnel.

A few seconds later and the train was back out into the brilliant sunshine and the green fields again.

Georgina breathed in, soaking up the nature outside.

Her eyes flickered to the aisle, then to the surrounding seats.

The carriage was empty.

Every seat empty. No one around her. Not one single person in the carriage.

Unsure of what was before her eyes, she stood up to get a clearer view.

The entire carriage was empty.

There must have been about twenty people in the carriage

before. Now, not one. Where did they go?

Georgina took a few steps down the carriage. No bags, no luggage, no coats.

No sign of any other life in the carriage at all.

Was this an elaborate practical joke? Did they all get to their feet when the train went into the tunnel and run to the next carriage?

She could think of no other explanation.

Georgina kept walking until she came to the door separating her from the next carriage. The door slid open automatically, and she saw the next carriage.

Also completely empty.

Now, with a larger sense of alarm coursing through her veins, she ran to the next carriage. Empty.

And the next. No one.

There was not one single person on the train.

Panic soured into her brain, and she called out.

Hello? Hello? Anyone here?

She ran full tilt, barging into the empty seats, and slamming through the doors.

Finally, she got to the end of the train. She saw the door in

front of her. Any other time she had been on a train at this end of it, she knew that was where the drivers enter to go into the very front of the train.

The door swung open a little with the motion of the train, then slammed back into place, before swinging open again.

Georgina gripped the headrests of the seats on either side of her. She took the last few steps towards the engine room.

“Is there someone there?” she called out.

No reply. The door swung open again, and she gripped it with her hand. Yanked it open.

There in front of her, two swivel seats, and the controls for the train.

But no drivers. Just two empty seats.

A surreal view from the big window in front of the train of the tracks before her. The hypnotic beat of the railway sleepers as they disappeared from view beneath the train.

And no sign of any other life on the train. Only her.

In front, Georgina saw the outskirts of the next small town as the train hurtled towards it.

And then she let out a scream.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Who is the main person in the story?

Where has she been? Where is she going?

What kind of place does she live in?

What kind of food does she usually eat?

How does she get to work in the morning?

What is in her suitcase?

What other people can Georgina see on the train?

What are they doing?

In London, what does Georgina usually look at when she is travelling to work?

What can she see outside now?

What happens to make the train become dark?

What is different about the carriage when Georgina can see again?

What does she do?

What does she see at the end of the train?

Describe what happens at the end.

Essential Vocabulary

Train	Power	Lift
Town	Scenery	Sweaters
Window	Fields	Department store
Weekend	Sheep	Collection
Parents	Tunnel	Struggled
House	Darkness	Spot
Food	Sunshine	Independent
Different	Alarmed	Act
London	Empty	Wrapped up
Room	Panic	Trundled
Kitchen	Brain	Confined
Meals	Motion	Submerged
Take-outs	Engine room	Brilliant
Stretched	Controls	Soaking up
Legs	Drivers	Flickered

Outskirts	Seats	Coursing
Commuting	Hypnotic	Soured
Carriage	Railway sleepers	Barging
Suitcase	Scream	Slamming
Aisle	Gazed	Gripped
Luggage rack	Reflected	Swivel
Essentials	Cramped	Controls
Comfort	Shoulder to shoulder	Hypnotic
Independent	Edged	Hurtles

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Train – *A series of connected vehicles, typically on tracks, designed for transporting passengers or goods from one place to another, often powered by locomotives or engines.*

Lift – *To raise or move something upwards, often using mechanical assistance; to elevate or hoist.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

The old steam-powered train chugged along the tracks, carrying passengers through picturesque countryside.

The construction workers used a crane to lift heavy steel beams to the top of the building.

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help improve all your English skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Discussion Questions

What happens in this story?

Describe what happens in your own words.

What happened to all the people on the train?

Is it possible for an entire train full of people to just disappear?

What logical explanation could there be?

Did Georgina imagine it all? If so, why?

Have you ever had a strange experience on a train?

What happened?

What is a ghost train?

Do trains often feature in ghost stories or horror stories? Why is this so?

Night Train

This is a group story-telling activity.

Get into groups of three or four students.

In your group, you are going to think of a story. The story should have a ghostly or horror element to it.

The name of the story is Night Train.

Your story can take place anywhere, but it must be on a train and it must take place at night.

You can have one character or two or three. But probably not more than three characters.

In your group, come up with a story.

The ending should be quite shocking and unexpected.

You have 15 minutes to think of a story!

When you are ready, choose one person to tell the story to the class.

Ask your classmates and teacher for feedback.

Role Play

This is a role play activity.

There are two people in this role play.

Georgina

A Police Officer

The Situation

In the story above, Georgina is on a train all alone. It goes through a town and she passes out.

Emergency services stop the train, and they take Georgina to a hospital.

Now the police need to talk to her about what happened.

Georgina gives her side of the events. She tells the police what happened.

One minute there were people on the train. The next minute, they all disappeared.

The police find this very hard to believe and continue asking her

questions.

Maybe they think Georgina stole the train...

Maybe they think she did something to the driver and his assistant...

But Georgina is not crazy. She knows what she saw. And she sticks to her story.

Try to find a good ending to the role play.

What can the police officer do?

What can Georgina do?

Get into pairs and prepare your role play.

When you are ready, show the class.

Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

Read the story at the beginning again.

Now try to write the next part. Look at the following questions below.

- *What happens next?*
- *Did Georgina imagine what she saw?*
- *If so, why and how?*
- *But maybe there is a perfectly reasonable explanation for what she saw.*
- *If so, what could it be?*
- *Think of a good reason why she saw what she did.*

Now write the next part of the story.

It is your story, so anything can happen. It is up to you how the story develops.

When you have finished your story, read it out loud in front of the class.

Ask your classmates and teacher for feedback.

Credits

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