



Remembering Mona Daniella

In her own voice

The Lady Who Slept in My Bed3

How to Get a Seat on the Subway11

The Lady Who Slept in My Bed

I.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed.

II.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed. I didn't know why she was sleeping in my bed or who she was, but I knew she wasn't homeless—my mom locks the doors at night, and the doorman always buzzes visitors, so somebody had to approve her before she could come up the elevator.

III.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed. Her eyes were large and mostly empty, curiously devoid of compassion or sadness. Her nose was long and thin, but it softened at the tip, as if to save her from a life of sarcasm and terse replies that usually come with the territory of looking small but tough. When she spoke, her thin scarlet lips lacked the ability to effectively censor themselves. Her ears were noticeably pierced, with holes shaped more like teardrops than circles, though I never saw her with earrings. She didn't wear jewelry often. Aside from a cold jade bracelet that her father had brought back from a trip to Beijing, her wrists were adorned only with clean, fading scars. She looked young for her age everywhere but around her hands. They were the kind of hands that obviously hid a story. It was easy to tell by the oddly-shaped scars and newly wrinkled skin.

She was small, and her wiry dark hair reached her bony, aging shoulders when it wasn't up in a loose bun. She fantasized about being different, but in terms of appearance, at least, she looked like any other middle-aged Swiss horse-psychologist. She wore lots of solid black boat-necked tops (or did she simply never change?) over bleached eighties-style jeans that crawled up her torso to the middle of her waist. I don't remember her shoes, but that's because she almost never wore them. To wear shoes in the winter, one must almost always

have socks on, and hers were hung about my room like surviving leaves in late autumn instead of fitted snugly about her narrow, pointed feet.

IV.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed. Her name was Karine and she came from Switzerland. She offered no clarification as to why she was here, so I moved on from the guest to my mother, who I figured would surely have a good explanation for the stranger now spraying her sour perfume about my room. Karine, as it turns out, was a friend of my mother's from her summers with my great-grandparents in Switzerland and Turkey. Karine loved horses and had taught my mother to ride.

"Cool," I replied, "but what's she doing in my bed?" Karine came to the states to visit her sister, got into an argument with her, and since she was staying at her house, promptly found herself alone and without a home in New York City. My mother has always had the utmost respect for anyone who displayed the slightest bit of kindness to her when she was young, so when Karine called her, panicked, she didn't think twice about lending her my room for a couple of days. I was away on a school trip, anyway, so I wouldn't notice until I came home. She had intended to tell me when I got back from the trip, but when I asked her, "What's new?" as she drove me home, she must have either believed that the guest was insignificant or she simply forgot.

V.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed. Her two-day stay turned into four, then six, and then, when her flight was just a week away, she asked my mother for another month. Meanwhile, I was sleeping in my brother's room.

This was not a satisfactory arrangement. Even the term "fight to the death" did not apply to us, for we continued to fight even after we probably should have been dead. Or dead-tired. Either way, we wore each other down to the brink of decomposition.

Karine may have been sweet once, but now, she was selfish, bothersome and reeked of that stupid perfume. But worst of all, she was bored. Her stay continued over to spring break

and every chance she'd get, she'd follow me around to amuse herself. If I was doing homework, she would talk about her school; if I was watching "Jimmy Neutron," she would sit and watch beside me; when I went out, she would offer to watch me so she would never miss a moment of being with me.

Because she never had children of her own, she never learned the art of censorship and in just a couple of days, I went from being her main source of entertainment to her shrink. She told me all about how she tried to commit suicide because her parents, who worked in the clock industry, did not want her to become an artist, and how she was a horse-psychologist and sometimes she thought that horses understood her better than humans did. She liked to paint "in the modern style" and had some serious mental illness that she refused to name. Over the commercials between Rugrats and Rocket Power, Karine told me all about how she couldn't live in a world where she could not pursue her passions, and life is nothing but one long pursuit of happiness. She still regretted that she did not succeed in her attempts to end it. At least she was honest about it. Aloysius, her maid, had found her and called an ambulance. Her mistake was that she had forgotten to lock the door—Aloysius was cleaning and thought no one was inside. Had Karine locked it, Aloysius would have stayed out. No one would have noticed her and she would have succeeded. Karine was *very* lucky because I was different from other twelve year olds, and so, after getting this bit of information, I did not run from her, screaming, as perhaps Karine herself might have done as a child.

VI.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed. She didn't always sleep, though. Sometimes, she stayed up even later than I did, sitting in the living room, chatting with my mother. One night, I had trouble sleeping, so I decided to listen through a wall that the hallway shared with the room they were sitting in to entertain myself. "Patrick was positively *handsome*, in all ways." I was just in time for another of Karine's wild stories. I crept closer to the living room entrance so I could hear her better.

“He had a certain fire that got him into trouble at school but made dinners with him so lively, and I believe it’s this fire, his vibrant personality that allowed me to fall for him. We didn’t kiss that night because that wasn’t the kind of girl I was, but on our third date, we finally did, just a few blocks from my house as he walked me home. I couldn’t kiss him outside my house like in American movies because my parents would have *killed* him.” It was quiet for a moment. I thought that my mother had heard me (she always got quiet when she noticed me out after bedtime) but then I heard Karine release a short sound, something between a hiccup and a sob, and my mother gently coaxed her into telling the rest of the story. “But we were happy just the same, two or three blocks away.” Then, she mumbled something about feeling exhausted and I ran on my tip-toes back to my brother’s room. I think that my mother knew that I was there because she checked on me soon after, but she didn’t ask me if I was awake, like she usually did. She merely opened the door, peeked in, and left as quietly as she had come.

VII.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed. I had to wake up extra early to get ready for school when she was there. I wasn’t sleeping in my room but I hadn’t moved out, either. I still had my clothes there, I did my homework there—in short, it was still my bedroom, except that I didn’t use the bed.

School started at eight o’clock. In order to get there on time, I usually woke up at 7:40am. It gave me just enough time to throw on some clothes and brush my teeth and hair. But when Karine was there, my routine couldn’t work. Aside from simply inhabiting my room, she made it extraordinarily messy. She threw her clothes onto my desk, left her luggage strewn about the floor, and I could never ask her to clean up because *she was the guest*, my mother always reminded me. So every morning, I’d open the door slightly (Karine was still asleep) and push the luggage out from behind the doorway.

Then, once I was actually inside, I’d choose my clothes and gather my books. If I was extra quiet, Karine wouldn’t wake up. But sometimes, even if I tip-toed as lightly as I possibly could, Karine would open her eyes, then open her mouth. She liked to talk. Too

polite to just sneer and leave, I'd listen to her, for a few minutes at least, tell me about her latest dream or event on her mind.

Once, she dreamed that she was recovering from liposuction, and all she could eat was chocolate pudding, so when she fully got better, she looked no different than she had before. Another time, she was a princess, terrified and quiet, forced to watch her seven children being eaten alive. The dragon was hungry because the soldiers of the land had chained and starved him. I imagine that she must not have eaten before bed, because nearly every dream of hers involved eating the wrong food or not eating at all. It was strange because she was so skinny; I never would have expected her to be so preoccupied with food (at least at night).

When she didn't talk about her dreams, she'd tell me what she had been thinking about. Sometimes, she'd get into heated debates with herself. Most often, she'd tell me what she was thinking at the time about God. When she was feeling happy, God would be good, and she'd thank him for all the good she'd ever had. But when she was feeling depressed, which was usually the case, God was miserably *evil*. Instead of being good, she'd tell me, God was just probability. With blind eyes, he pointed to the earth and, after selecting the odds of a specific event occurring, he randomly chose someone to experience it. Sometimes, it was good, she said, like giving a homeless man a winning lottery ticket, but more often than not, God spread misery like cancer, installing it in one area of the earth and letting it spread quickly and ruthlessly, destroying everything in its path like a twister. She could have been a writer, with all of her stories; she was certainly a storyteller, at least...

Her stories were much more entertaining than homeroom, so even though I'd later jeer at her when telling my friends at school about Karine's latest saga, I'd lose track of time when I listened to her. Had my mother not come in to remind me that I had to go, I would have been late every day.

VIII.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed. Long after she finally went back to Switzerland, her perfume still lingered in the air. I don't see how it couldn't, with Karine

jumping on every chance to spray it. To this day, I still don't understand her obsession with perfume, especially that one. It smelled like the older tenants of my building in the elevator. It was suffocating, like her.

As always during the winter, I had a cold when I first met her, so the spraying didn't really bother me when it was done at some distance. The perfume reached my mouth when it was sprayed too close to me and every breath I tried to take tightened my lungs until all I could do was cough. It was only after all the Sudafed I had been taking started to work that, strangely, I began to wish for my cold back. It was as though no matter where I went, I couldn't escape the smell. It was everywhere. My room, of course, was drenched in her poison and when I left, her perfume clung to my hair and pencils so even at school I caught whiffs of it. I have a very sensitive sense of smell and annoyingly persistent gag reflexes; pair that with my fear of nausea and it's easy to understand why I wanted her gone so badly. When she first arrived, I tried to count the days down to her departure, but as I soon found out, this wouldn't be possible, for she didn't actually have a ticket home. My mother believed it would be impolite to ask when she planned on going home, so it took a while before Karine got around to purchasing her way out of my room.

IX.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed. First for a day, then for a week, but right before it could turn into a month, her flight came and she left with it. For years, I referred to her as "the crazy old lady who slept in my bed," and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't understand how on earth my mother ever let her watch me.

Five years later, during dinner one night, followed by lots of other "remember when's," Karine's tale came up. As my brother and I cracked jokes about the many unbelievable things Karine said and did, my mother tried to defend her. Apparently, there was more to the story than Karine had told us and after hearing it, we realized that we were quite mistaken in thinking that she lacked the ability to keep her own secrets.

My mother told me that years ago, when Karine was young, she had fallen in love with a man who was wealthy, but did not come from a “good family” as she did. They loved each other very much, but when it came down to asking for her hand in marriage, it seemed that the decision was ultimately left up to her parents, who, upon discovering that his roots were less than noble, quickly rejected him.

Devastated, they were determined as ever to stay together and before she knew it, Karine was pregnant. She wanted to keep the baby, but her parents adamantly refused and forced her to have a secret abortion in Turkey. The surgeon’s knife cut something it shouldn’t have and she almost died. After days in the intensive care unit, Karine awoke to discover that she would never get pregnant again.

The boy who loved her married someone else and had lots of children. They are still together and happy today. Karine’s situation, however, did not improve.

Physically and psychologically torn, she sought something to fill the void. She would have turned to her art but her parents were unsupportive of her passions and threatened to disown her if she did (she was too conservative and financially dependent on them to risk that) and drugs were simply out of the question.

One night, she filled her bathtub to the brim and brought her sharpened kitchen knives. She went away to a mental hospital for a while, and eventually, she did get better, but she was never the same again.

X.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed. I haven’t seen her since, but every now and then, a whiff of perfume will bring her back, recalling the beige straw cowboy hat she wore around the house and how she was the only one who walked around my house barefoot. My brother and I wore socks because they made it easier to slide across the long hallway in between the bedrooms, and my parents wore slippers. I remember how she bought her own cheese and jelly because she didn’t like ours, and how right before she left, she gave her

leftover jelly to my mother with pride in her eyes, as though she were bestowing my mother with something *magical*. I never liked jelly.

I remember how my mother said she knew a different Karine once. The Karine she knew was meticulous. Whenever her friends would come to ride horses with her, she'd make them brush the horses seven times, all with different brushes, before mounting them. Once, my mother had tried to convince Karine that it would be a better idea to brush the horse *after* riding and only once. It didn't go over well. And now, it seemed, she had become the polar opposite of who she once was. This story was told to me after I had hinted (a little too subtly) to Karine that I like my room better when I could see the floor. My mother had told me this story with the intention of showing me a different side of Karine. Instead, the story only supported my image of Karine as a helpless head case.

I remember how my mother grew sad as she told me Karine's real story, how even after I had heard the worst of it, I was still laughing from the crazy Karine I knew. As I tried unsuccessfully to suppress my giggles, my mother suppressed her tears. She doesn't cry easily, but she miscarried a few times before she had me, so she knows what it's like to lose a baby against her will. Had Karine given birth to her baby, she would have been the proud mother of a thirty-year old boy the year she came to visit.

XI.

There once was a lady who slept in my bed.

[This original short story was published in national media.](#)

How to Get a Seat on the Subway

Desperate times call for desperate measures. And rush hour in New York City? Well, that's the most desperate time of all. Thousands of people cram themselves into the subway and hope for just a tiny bit of standing room. If they get to stand near a pole so they don't get crushed by their fellow commuters, they're more than satisfied. It makes their day.

Of course, they don't know how to work New York. The city can be a great place if you know how to manipulate it. I know how to manipulate it. And so, I do not accept the meager half square foot given to me by my fellow workers struggling to get home after a long day at work. I strive for the *seat*.

Most people who want to sit on their way home from work simply drive or take a cab. The problem with driving, however, is that parking spaces are even rarer than seats on the subway, and with cabs, you never know what kind of driver you're going to get, and it's much scarier to be alone with a shady taxi driver than to be squeezed between two people, even shady people, because at least on the subway, there are witnesses. In cabs, you're on your own. So if your friendly neighborhood taxi driver, Boris, tells you all about how he incorporates a quart of vodka into his breakfast every morning as you're crossing the park, all you can really do is pray. That should be fine with Boris, because he loves God. He's told you so several times. He even carries a foot-long metal cross to prove it (never mind that you're Jewish). I'm sure you're all for religion and even if you're not, you definitely believe in the phrase "to each his own," so the cross-and-steering-wheel combination shouldn't scare you as much as the black leather gloves in July. Drawing images of O.J. Simpson as Boris "accidentally" takes an unfamiliar route, you'll *wish* you took the subway. Well, you would have taken the subway, had it not been for the seat problem, which today, you're going to learn how to *solve*.

The seat is an impossible thing to obtain. Unless you are exceedingly old or young, or homeless and drunk, don't expect to sit on your ride home. People will not only sneer at you

(not that it matters if they sneer anyway, we New Yorkers don't care), but they will literally lift you out of the seat and give it to someone who they believe needs it more. I've seen it happen. And most of the time, no matter what you do, there is *always* someone who needs it more.

This unwritten rule is held in high regard by all New Yorkers alike. Pick any subway, any track, and you'll see this rule in effect from three in the afternoon until seven at night. This rule is tough. It is so tough, in fact, that there is only one exception. Every rule has an exception, but the percentage of people who lie in the exception is so slim that most people never come to face it in their entire lives.

So what's the exception? *Insanity*. Every crazy person gets a seat on the subway. And, not only do they get one seat, but they get *three* (unless you're on one of those trains with lots of two seaters, in which case you'll have to be satisfied with two seats. Of course, it doesn't really matter if you get two or three seats, because you're only using one). One to the left of them, one to the right, and of course, one to actually sit in. Nobody wants to sit next to the lunatic. So what's the smart thing to do? Fake insanity and get a seat on the subway. And that's exactly what I do.

I used to be a regular commuter like you, just a typical accountant named Jennifer who let people cut me in line at the bank, but that all changed on one very busy afternoon. I saw a man come in, act like he was crazy, and sure enough, he got a seat. He probably was insane, but that wasn't what intrigued me. That incident made me realize that if I was insane, I, too, could get a seat on the subway. If I *can* get a seat on the subway, then why *shouldn't* I?

It isn't hard to do. You need to watch out for your wailing, though. It has to sound like you don't know how to talk. You have to swerve as you wail, for if you don't, people might think you're trying to entertain them. Some of them have weird tastes. Wailing takes practice, so do it in front of the mirror at home before you go out and try it on the subway. First, take a deep breath, because it always sounds better when it's longer. Then, make deep low noises and rise in pitch and volume until you're shrieking at the top of your lungs. Then go lower, then higher, then lower, and so on until the kids in your car begin to stare.

Once you have your wailing down and have a little more standing space, it's time to scare the passenger. Don't worry, it may attract attention but it won't attract police. It's really nothing to worry about, considering that you'd never really hurt any of them, because, of course, you're not really crazy. Or at least I hope you aren't crazy. But then, if you truly were insane, you wouldn't need instructions, would you? So, to scare the passengers, you must make conversation. Conversation is a useful tool in building relationships between humans, but it is equally useful in destroying them. You don't need friendships on the train, anyway.

Talk to them loudly, and remember: never make conversation with those bigger than you. They could get annoyed and get physical. They usually don't, but if they say not to come near them, and you talk to them anyway, you could very well end up in the tracks. Eight years ago, I came up to a male ballerina, thinking he'd avoid trouble and just stay back, but instead, he picked me up and threw me across the tracks at the next stop. I narrowly missed getting run over thanks to the violinist who saw the entire thing. I was only feigning mental illness, but there was definitely something wrong with that ballerina. Use your common sense. Stay away from body builders and ballerinas. Choose a nice looking girl in her early thirties and talk (loudly!) about how if she doesn't own a grocery store, then she has no reason to exist. Talk about any subject as if you've studied it, but give it a philosophical twist, even if it doesn't make any sense that way. Especially if it doesn't make any sense that way. Don't forget to speak loudly, by the way. You want other people to hear you so they'll move away.

By this point, you should have a quarter of the car largely to yourself. People haven't given up their seats yet, but you can see it in their eyes that they're just hoping you won't come near them. Here's a word of advice before you do anything rash: don't bother the children. They did nothing to you, and approaching them will make them cry and the other passengers angry. You don't want to anger them; you just want them to want to stay as far away as possible from you. They won't do that if they get angry.

Now you take out your secret weapon: the gleaming eye of insanity. It is vital that you practice this before you get on a train. You must perfect your wild look or else people will realize you're acting and they'll either call security or pick a fight with you.

Imagine your face elongating and widen your eyes. Sway your head back and forth a couple of times for extra measure if you feel that it is necessary. Stumble towards the seats and bother the seated passengers enough to take off their headphones. If your show doesn't faze them so far, talk to your imaginary friend, Clyde, and you should be okay. Clyde likes racing ferrets, so that's always a good subject to talk about with him.

By now, somebody should get up for you. Once you sit down, the people next to you should get up as well. Nobody wants to sit next to the insane on the subway (unless, of course, they're insane themselves, in which case you might want to move).

It seems I have completely forgotten to discuss the specifics of faking certain illnesses for a seat on the subway with you. Some say that it isn't morally correct to fake real illnesses and you always run the risk of being potentially offensive, but I think it's okay, as long as you don't imitate anyone you actually know. Once in a while, it's fun to play the schizophrenic, or the person with multiple personalities. Hallucinations are always exciting to have, and I think everyone should become obsessive compulsive at least once in their lives. There's nothing more enjoyable than playing someone who compulsively sprays glass cleaner everywhere. It's especially useful to do this when the car smell is less than pleasant. Use your illness for good!

Don't tell too many people about our little secret, by the way. If everybody faked insanity, then there would be complete and utter chaos on the subways. They'd have to eventually shut down, and then nobody would get the seat. I hope you understand me when I speak so highly of the seat. The warm citrus colors are so enthralling that I'd be doing it a disservice by not doing everything I could for it. Plus, it's completely unattainable, and the thrill of finally getting to sit down after a long day at work is completely worth the effort. You'll understand when you try it.

Think of what you're doing as a service to humanity. They get a story to tell during dinner that night, and you get to save yourself from standing up for 40 minutes without rest. What would the subway be without your local crazy person professing the end of the world? Nothing. The world is nothing without us. Remember my words, and please, if you ever

decide to pass this on, don't forget to give me credit. I wish you the best of luck on your future endeavors and I hope that when you think about this on the subway tonight, it's from a seat. Oh, and by the way, I take the one local uptown. Don't take the one.

[This original short story was published in national media.](#)

A gentle spirit with a megawatt smile,
Her compassion and wisdom, her mark,
Her honesty, loyalty, and humor her path,
Her writings a window to her kind hearted soul.
Mona Daniella, you will live in our hearts forever.