

*To the question, "How's it going?" the French sigh and respond: Metro (Train), Boulot (Job), Dodo (Beddy Bye), which is simply their way of saying, "Same old, same old . . ."*

There he was! Ponytail Man. Melie spotted him through the window as she was running across the New Rochelle platform to the Metro North train.

The good thing about being a klutz, or at least a bit off balance, was that she didn't have to fake falling into his lap.

"Sorry. Sorry!" she said as she scrambled into the seat opposite his.

She had never been this close to him before—the lacquered nails, the pointy Italian leather shoes, the beautifully tailored suit that fit his tall, lean muscular frame like a second skin. And of course the dirty blond hair, luxuriant, swept into a thick ponytail. He looked to be in his late forties—he had a faint scent of the sixties, the strange and the hippie. Her type.

She'd been watching him for over a year. Now was her chance.

"What do you think of the book?" Melie, queen of pickup lines, asked. She smiled sweetly and tried not to let her chin tremble too much when she spoke.

"Oh, this? Piece of crap!"

Succinct. A man of few words. The strong, silent type.

"I kinda liked it," she ventured.

"Deviant. Dangerous. Dreadful."

Alliterative critique. He must be bright. She stared at his forehead, longing to reach out to smooth the stray blond hairs from his perfect brow. She watched as he pushed the hair back himself, catching the telltale glint on his finger. Oh no!

Wedding rings on the train always struck her as a personal affront. They hurt her eyes—solid gold bands, so boring really, thrust into her line of vision, folding the Times, whipping out the commuter ticket at the conductor's voice, popping out of leather gloves like maladroit rabbits just when you least expected it, like a slap of cold water in the face.

"You're not wanted here," they seemed to scream out at her, a sound like spoons striking the sides of a stack of wineglasses:

We don't want you.  
We don't need you.  
You're not wanted here.  
DING.

The Ponytail Man seemed to register the change in the weather. He took a long look—she fidgeted. He leaned in so she did too.

“You know, you’re not a bad-looking chick. What did you say your name was?”

“Melanie . . . Melie.”

“Seriously, Mel, the book is well crafted. It held my interest. But those sex scenes, huh? Not too likely. Not many girls will do those things—without being paid.” He chuckled to himself. Then, leaning in even closer (she could smell his cologne), he whispered, “Would you?”

Hmm. Yep. You bet. Can’t wait. Have been waiting so long. Too long. Forever. I could cry. . .

She backed up, grabbed her coat, scarf, hat, gloves.

“My stop! Bye now.”

Exiting, she knew she’d just have to wait for the next train. She was one stop short. If he’d ever even noticed her before, he’d know she got off at Grand Central Station, the same as everybody.

She walked to a bench and sat on the edge, miles away from a bleary-eyed drunk.

“You’re so pretty.”

“Oh, shoot me now,” she muttered to herself as she glared down the tracks, willing the next train to appear.