VOKLA

ADULT READERS

The Last Train from Lisbon



ENGLISH STORYBOOK / C1

VOKLA Press · Free student edition

Missing the 23:05



Ece Tan had built a career on never being late. A travel writer for a London magazine, she had forty-eight hours to produce a piece entitled “Perfect Porto”, and she had planned every minute of it. What she had not planned for was a taxi driver who took a wrong turn, a closed road and a platform that emptied just as she reached it. Watching the red lights of the last train to Porto disappear into the dark, she felt something close to panic. Her editor, she knew, would not be interested in excuses.

The night porter



The station was almost deserted. Only an elderly man in a navy uniform remained, slowly closing the ticket windows. Seeing her suitcase and her expression, he smiled as if he had seen both many times before. “The next train is at six,” he said in careful English. “Most people who miss the last one go to a hotel. Some stay here and talk to me.” His name was Duarte, and he had been the night porter at the station for almost forty years. From his coat pocket he took a small, worn notebook.

A notebook of strangers



“I write down everyone who misses the last train,” he explained, “and what they decide to do instead.” Ece turned the yellowed pages in disbelief. A student in 1987 who had used the night to finish his novel. A couple who had argued on the platform and, by morning, were engaged. A businessman who had phoned his estranged brother for the first time in twenty years. Not once, Duarte said, had anyone regretted the extra hours, although almost everyone had been furious at the time. It occurred to Ece that this, not Porto, was the story.

Found the story



She spent the night on a wooden bench, interviewing Duarte and filling her own notebook. By the time the six o'clock train arrived, she had abandoned "Perfect Porto" altogether. Her editor was, predictably, unimpressed — until he read the draft. Published as "The Last Train from Lisbon", the article was shared more widely than anything Ece had ever written, and readers sent in their own stories of missed connections. Duarte, she heard later, had started a second notebook. On its first page was a short entry in her handwriting: "Missed the train. Found the story."

AFTER THE STORY

Back to the story

1 **What made Ece decide to abandon her original article?**

2 **What does Duarte's notebook suggest about the way people react to delays?**

YOUR TURN

Describe a time when a plan went wrong but led to something better. Would you have chosen that outcome if you had known about it in advance?

THREE WORDS FROM THE STORY

deserted • with no people in it

estranged • no longer in contact with a family member

abandon • to stop doing or planning something completely