

MidlandMainline

Author:

Calandra Keck



Calandra is addicted to crossword puzzles. She's also a senior in the Edward R. Murrow School of Communication. This May, she will graduate with an emphasis in advertising and a minor in English. After graduation, Calandra plans to study graphic design at the School of Visual Concepts in Seattle. Calandra was born and raised on Whidbey Island, Wash.

(Read more of Calandra's work on pg. 31.)

Doncaster 18:50

Rain hammered Ema's face, pushing her bangs into her eyes. Her shirt stuck to her shoulder blades as she ran towards the station. Only the boy at the coffee stand noticed the tattoo showing through her now drenched shirt.

What was it? he wondered. It looked like a star but not quite. Maybe a Celtic or tribal design. Either way, it was quite large for a girl. True, some have many tattoos, but this girl didn't look the type. Her hair had come undone as she hurried to make her train, but the rest of her clothes looked more like she should be working in an office. Probably something she did when she was younger and now regrets, he thought, rubbing the slight bulge of scar tissue by his eyebrow.

Sheffield 19:27

Ema noticed the man get on at Sheffield. It was hard not to notice him – he stumbled into a man carrying a baby. The little one started screaming – first, a gurgle, then working its way up an octave to a full England-just-won-the-World-Cup scream. Quite impressive for something so small it could almost be zipped inside his daddy's jacket.

I bet he's a tequila man, Ema thought. I've seen that stumble before.

Sara and Katherine were sleeping leaned up against each other, and Linda was glad. She didn't want her girls to see the tramp sitting ahead of them. Don't young ladies have any respect for themselves anymore? she thought. When she was going to school, a girl would have been severely punished for wearing clothes like that. She's probably a working girl, Linda thought. There's no way she works in an office because her lipstick's too bright, her skirt's too short and her heels are too high. If either of my girls came home wearing anything like that, I'd slap the smirk right off their face.

Chesterfield 19:39

The man dug in his pocket and pulled out a small pill bottle. He emptied the contents into his left hand before Ema could see what it was, and pulled out a small flask. He tossed the pills into his mouth, glanced around quickly and drained the flask. He put the empty containers in his sweatshirt pocket, rested his head against the window and closed his eyes.

She's a heartbreaker, Geoff thought, just like Lydia. The war and all those memories were in the distant past, but it's hard to forget your first love. The brunette has the same look in her eye that he first fell in love with when he and Lydia were dating, and it wasn't till he came home and she was in love with another soldier that he realized what that look was. Geoff had seen the same look with some of his friend's girls, and lo and behold, those were the ones that broke hearts. Time had been good to Geoff, but he warned his boys and their boys about girls like that.

Derby 20:02

Ema watched the words on his shirt rise and fall as he slept. He had the hood pulled up over his eyes as if he was trying to hide. His lower lip had a ring through it at the left edge, and she thought she could see the silver of a labret stud peeking through his dark goatee. He had his beard shaved into a thin strip that ran from his goatee along his jawline and under his hood.

The train jostled on a corner, and the man stirred from his sleep. Ema quickly looked out the window, and when she glanced back, he was taking off his sweatshirt. He had turned partially towards the window, so he pulled it over his head and Ema saw a bit of dark ink on his back. He rolled the sweatshirt into a loose ball, placed it against the window and settled back down to sleep. When he reached up to smooth a wayward curl behind his ear, Ema noticed a spider tattooed on his forearm. She smiled.

Tattoos make the man, she thought, or at least the criminal. Every one she knew had a couple, well, except for that one girl who went after lonely businessmen. She'd get them drunk, go back to their place and, after they passed out, would steal everything she could take. She liked to tie them up, which, of course, the guys went along with since they thought she was going to sleep with them, and that's about when the roofies would kick in. By the time the guys woke up the next day and managed to get untied, she would be eating breakfast in some other town. They'd realize later their bank account was considerably lighter and their credit cards were maxed out.

Isn't the Internet great?

Loughborough 20:18

Selling candy to tourists and commuters was only a

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summer job for Jimmy, or at least he hoped. Being polite all the time was starting to wear very thin, especially with the American tourists. Earlier, he'd seen a group of students get on and the lady in charge, who looked like she never missed a meal, was wearing a photographer's vest and actually had a plastic fork where there should have been a pen. That was a new low, even for Americans.

He preferred to work morning shifts so that he could go out at night, but he'd been called to fill in tonight. He was out of cigarettes and out of money and still had three hours of work. At least there was a cute brunette in the next car. He wondered if he could bum a smoke from her and then talk to her for a bit, although she had been staring at the guy in the red sweatshirt ever since he fell asleep. Not just watching, but blatantly staring.

Strange. I wonder how she knows him?

Leicester 20:29

The bit of tattoo Ema had seen on his back looked like flames and she wondered what the rest of it was. I bet he has his whole back covered, she thought. He probably started small and then added to it. She knew a guy who started with a snake and later added a whole zoo worth of creatures around it. When she asked him about it, he said that every time he should have been arrested or dead, he added something – a bear for the Russian job, a fox for something in Munich, eels for New York. She loved to run her finger around the outlines of the animals and imagine what happened. Every little bit of ink made him sexier. He was trouble and she loved it.

"Hey, Jimmy, check out this girl."

Jimmy looked up from counting money to study the paper in front of his face. It was one of those have-you-seen-me papers they circulate occasionally. The girl was blond and looked pretty, but the picture had been blown up too much and it was tough to see her face.

"What'd she do?" he asked, going back to counting.

"Something in York. Don't say what. Don't say she's dangerous or nuthin'. They're offering a reward. A real big one."

Bedford 21:10

Ema loved cops. They were so incompetent; they were hilarious to watch. At the last station, they seemed to be bumbling about like a bunch of blind penguins, hither and thither as if they were doing something important. She often watched the news to see what the idiots were doing, only to

end up rolling on the floor in fits of laughter after learning that they were looking in Nottingham for some crook who robbed a bloke in York. It's a wonder they still get paid, she thought – they always look in the wrong place.

Luton 21:26

On the way to the loo, Ema noticed a run in her nylons that started at the top of her boots. Rats, she thought, I should have figured this might happen. The boots were new and the seam by the zipper was a little rough, but she didn't think anything of it when she got them.

Ema remembered her mother lecturing her about what a proper lady should do when situations like this came up. A little dab of clear nail polish would do the trick to stop the run, her mum told her once when she was little. When her mum pulled the bottle of nail polish out of her big purse, Ema wondered what else she carried around with her. Later at home, Ema dumped it out on the kitchen floor and played with all the makeup, stacked the pill bottles and read every piece of paper she could figure out. They were mostly phone numbers, and she didn't recognize any of the names so she asked her father when he came home. He got really quiet. He only got quiet when he was really mad.

After that, Ema was sent to boarding school and only saw her father occasionally. It had been years since she had talked to her mother.

Returning to her seat, she saw some teenagers had taken her place. She took an empty seat across the aisle from the man. It was harder to see him from here, but there were no other seats.

Jimmy did a double take. The brown-haired girl from the middle car had changed completely from office cute to punk sexy. At least, he thought it was the same girl. She was sitting in about the same place, but her hair was now kinda spiked out sideways and she was wearing a pink blazer. She had the same black skirt, but now, she was wearing tall boots and pink tights, instead of nylons and pumps. Everything was different, even the way she carried her messenger bag across her chest instead over one shoulder.

Damn, he thought, if she hadn't sat in the same place, I wouldn't have recognized her.

London St. Pancras 21:52

Thoughts of today's practice kept running through Jason's mind as he dozed with his head against the train window. He hoped his ankle wasn't hurt too badly. He could

The man got up and walked towards the lady. Easy mark, Ema thought, noticing the lady's jewelry. I bet he's done it before – pretend to help her out, then snatch her purse and run . . .

tape it for the game on Saturday and it would be fine. He felt the train slowing and started to open his eyes. Staring at the reflection in the window, he realized that he could see the woman sitting across the aisle from him quite well. She had unruly brown hair, light skin, and the longer he looked, the more it seemed like she was watching him. I wonder how long she's been there, he thought. He couldn't quite remember if she was there when he got on, but then he was distracted by his foot. She had a crazy kind of look to her, he thought, smirking, but that can be a good thing.

As the train rattled to a halt, the man stirred and slowly sat up. He pulled his sweatshirt over his head and rubbed his eyes.

A short, old lady slowly made her way to the door, but was having considerable trouble with her rolling bag catching on things. The man got up and walked towards the lady. Easy mark, Ema thought, noticing the lady's jewelry. I bet he's done it before – pretend to help her out, then snatch her purse and run into the crowd or jump onto another train. There seemed to be extra police at the station today; he'd be pretty gutsy to try it now, she thought.

Ema gathered her jacket and followed the two. Indeed, the man did ask the old lady if he could help and she seemed grateful. As they moved along the car, Ema noticed a group of officers moving toward the door. I knew it, she thought, he is a thief. She'd seen cops meet people at the station before, but it was usually if the person had done something on that trip. Maybe someone recognized him from something else. Since he was helping with the bag, the man didn't appear to have noticed the police. This was going to be exciting, she thought. I wonder if he'll put up a big fuss when they try to arrest him.

The old lady stepped off the train and the cops moved back to let her through. The man followed close by her side, and Ema noticed him limping as he walked. Weird, Ema thought, maybe they want to get a good look at him just to make sure they have the right guy. As she started down the platform, one of the cops stepped in front of her.

"Ema Radcliff?" a tall officer asked as another grabbed her wrist. "You're under arrest." |