

# Wall Street to the Cloisters

by Sara Wesley McBride

Kristen's phone quacked. The text message from her writing partner read, "Plague Rom Com." She gave a short bark of a laugh.

The woman sitting next to her gave a sideways glance. Dressed in a dark pin-striped suit, she had boarded at Wall Street and looked settled in as the A train jolted through Times Square. Pin-stripe suit woman was reading the Wall Street Journal. Very serious.

The woman subtly scanned the subway car for an alternative empty seat.

Rush hour. Standing room only. Stinking armpits bump into faces as everyone holds the overhead rings. *Sorry Miss Pin-Stripe Suit. Embrace your seat and my laugh because my wet hair might be frizzing and invading your space, but at least I don't smell.*

Another quack. Text, "Air quote, Stories are a celebration."

Kristen responded, text, "That's what the Netflix executive said?"

Quack. Text, "We must 'celebrate' the Venetian plague of 1630?"

Kristen texted, "Rom com?"

Quack. Text, "Plague celebration."

Kristen texted, "I thought we were writing about the first official government decision to employ ghost hunters?"

Quack. Text, "We are. Celebrate plagues. Celebrate Venetians. Celebrate ghosts. Write to Celebrate!"

Kristen texted, "Are we writing a historical Rom Com about two Venetian plague survivors? Two ghosts? Two government officials?"

Quack. Text, "Yes! Plague survivor + Ghost = Rom Com and government official is the obstacle. Perfect! You're brilliant! Write to Celebrate. Are you en route?"

Kristen texted, "On the A train at 168th. It's steamy. Five more stops. You there?"

Quack. Text, "At Cloisters. Whisky waiting."

Kristen texted, "A plague rom com feels wrong in so many ways."

Quack. Text, "It's single malt!"

Kristen started to type a response, but Miss Pin-Stripe raised a finger and said, "If that thing quacks one more time, I'm going to throw it out the doors at the next stop."

Kristen put her phone in her backpack and smiled an apology.

Miss Pin-Stripe noisily cracked and flipped her newspaper page. She folded it into a quarter-sized sheet that was convenient to hold, and mumbled, "The utter ridiculousness of why this city spent six hundred million on subway Wi-Fi. To ruin my peace, that's why. I just want to sit here, calmly, quietly, and read my newspaper. But no. I didn't get to read this morning because everyone on the train was conducting a zoom meeting on their inbound commute. Why people simply can't get to their office on time is

a mystery. If someone could solve—”

Kristen mumbled, “London.”

“Excuse me,” Miss Pin-Stripe aimed her pointy nose at Kristen’s dark frizzy hair. “Did you call me a loser?”

Kristen, enunciating clearly, said, “London. I said London. Five-hour time difference. Everyone is still scheduling their international meetings as if they were still working from home. I blame London for ruining your peace. And the new subway Wi-Fi. But I will change my notification tone. You’re absolutely right. That annoying *Ping* of celebration is so much better.”

The subway stopped at 190th Street. The doors opened. Miss Pin-Stripe stood, tucked the Wall Street Journal under her arm, and said, “Originality should not be celebrated.”

“What about a plague rom com?” Kristen shouted to the very serious woman exiting the train. The doors closed with a ding and a swoosh. In Kristen’s imagination, Miss Pin-Stripe turned, opened her mouth to respond, but only black bile emitted from her open maw and blood oozed from her eyes. A newspaper page smacked against the window as the train heaved onward.

Kristen pulled out her phone and texted, “I found our obstructionist government official!”

Quack. Text, “Write to Celebrate!”

End

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