

**Fiat Lux**

“I’ve always wanted to get into a fight,” she said, motioning with her fists in the air. “Just a small one—a few punches, a puffy lip, a bloody nose—that kind of thing.”

Zoe was young. She had light brown hair and green eyes and loved the smell of pinesap.

“Well, I’ve always wanted to ride the trains around Europe. So I’ll cut you a deal, kid. We’ll meet up in England. We’ll just hop on any old train we see. We’ll take it as far as it goes. Then, we’ll take it back. I’ll teach you how to fight and we’ll go into an Irish bar and find a lass for you to take on.”

Jason was young. He had dark brown hair, brown eyes, and loved the smell of burning wood.

They were just kids in their twenties. Just two strangers who met by happenstance in the forest—Jason a trail worker, Zoe a hiker with a pack of friends.

“Well, all right, but you’ll get my back and everything, right? I mean, I don’t just want you to dump me off in this Irish bar and hit the road,” said Zoe.

“Nah, nah. Of course I’ll be there to smooth things out. After you throw a few punches, I’ll get everyone in the bar laughing and drinking. I’ve got a way with winning people over,” said Jason.

Rationale dictated that their paths wouldn’t actually cross again. They would never meet in England, never ride trains around Europe, never fight in an Irish bar. But how alluring it was to dwell inside that feeling of hopeful romanticism. Their

tongues crafted sentences comprised of future tenses—verbs set far enough ahead on an imaginary timeline so that the very *idea* of these supposed realities hushed the unlikeliness of them. The dreamers draped suppositions across their hearts as warm quilts of stories stitched together by fireside glances and coy gestures in a most wild place.

Zoe gathered Jason’s memories within the images of logging boots, red suspenders, and his oval belt buckle, its initial a cursive J. His scent was spearmint tobacco chew and honey lip balm. He tilted his head back when he laughed, mouth opening to the sky. His eyes darted from left to right when he joked or lied.

How perfect these details aligned themselves in front of Zoe, teasing her with their fleeting presence. Tomorrow they’d part ways.

Zoe remembered being a young Catholic girl on the day of her First Communion—how Father Simmons had patted her head and told her, “Fiat lux, little child. Let there be light in your life and you shall never walk alone.”

Here’s a portrait of Zoe, 15 years later, watching embers from a fire lift into the air, watching flames flicker upon another’s face, watching as the yellow drifts onto the palms of her own hands.

Here’s a portrait of a common girl looking for a story to believe.

(Word Count: 492)