

ON A LONG TRAIN JOURNEY FROM SYDNEY TO MELBOURNE



My dearest W,

I write this on my journey from Sydney to Melbourne, I will tell you everything that happens on the way. I hope you will receive my letter on Friday.

I boarded the train at 8:58am. There're three young men on the seat behind me talking a lot and loudly. I can tell they have American and English accents. They wear very short haircuts and earrings on one ear, and have a not very clean appearance. Their language is unacceptable; four-letter-words are used in almost every sentence. I have a bit of a headache; I have not taken my tablets yet because my tummy is empty.

I can hear the train talking to the track: "I see nothing but the forest". The sun is not shining, so I feel a bit cooler than yesterday. It would be nice if the three young men got off at the next stop, but I don't think so, because they're backpackers and must be travelling to Melbourne. I am sitting in the last



carriage, which gives me a chance to view the whole train turning at the bends. The train is like a giant snake that slithers smoothly along the iron road. Sometimes there's a train on the opposite side of the railway proceeding towards Sydney, making a very loud noise as if saying hello to ours.



I see a lonesome house in the bush. It looks lonely, so lonely. Oh! And there's a meadow, a dirt road and now some very nice and tidy house along the road near the railway. The name of the town I do not know. Now bushes appear again. There is a pond on the left with a very calm blue surface. The landscapes are beautiful, very green

everywhere. Lots of white flowers within the bush that I cannot reach. The three people at the back have gone for a walk and I have a little time in peace – thanks very much to the call of nature.

It is 9:50. The train is running at a speed of 160km/h, but it doesn't seem to go that fast. The announcer has just said the train will stop at Moss Vale in 1 minute. Good, I can go to the Buffet, Car C, which supplies beverages, without being tossed to and fro. But I change my mind. There is an old couple that's just boarded the train. He looks weak and she doesn't look any better. They sit opposite me. They're very quiet, I can only hear the rustle of paper as they unwrap their food and eat.



Looking out of the window I can see the cows in black and yellow, and the green, green grass that comes up to the horizon. There is narrow river with such clear water that I can see the bottom – it's not too deep. The willow trees are washing their hair in the river; the green hair reflected in the water becomes the double image of the willow's, like the hair of women blowing in the sunshine. There's some soft sunlight illuminating the water, as the river keeps running alongside the railway track. Next stop is Goulburn, the announcer says. I will look up the name of the river near Goulburn when I get back home.



The train leaves Goulburn at 10:50am. The people at the back of my seat go for a cigarette and come back with their breath smelling of smoke. I go to the Buffet and get a sandwich, a fruit salad and a cup of hot Milo, which costs \$7.50 all together – not too bad. It's 11:25am.

The three young men are asleep. Now I can enjoy the silence of noon in the rambling train. This is the first time I am going interstate by rail.

Through the window it looks like the bushes are running backwards. I think I may have a little rest now. I've finished my food and have just taken my tablets. Lunch should be at 12:15pm, but I guess I won't



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have it, since I've had the sandwich and it has filled me up.

Yass Junction is the next stop. There are many roses on both sides of the platform at the station. Some dahlias are planted in between the roses, but they're not in bloom yet. The hills have no bushes. The sun is getting stronger, but I do not feel heat, since we have the air-conditioner on. You have to book a seat in this train beforehand, so it's not messy like the suburban trains in Sydney. I have just got back from the ladies' room. Guess what? Firstly, I didn't know how to open the W.C. door; secondly, I went into the men's W.C!

It is 12:15pm. It's lunch time for those who've ordered their lunch. The boys at the back have woken up and started to talk again. They make my journey less comfortable by half. Next stop is Harden. It is a very small country town. I can see tiny cottages in the far distance. The train leaves after a two minutes stop. I am reading the booklet of XPT. It says: "This is country XPT, it's air-conditioned throughout and, therefore, all windows and external doors must be kept closed while the train is moving. However, the internal doors operate automatically, so people can walk between cars without having to open any door. In the W.C. the flushing mechanism is activated by a foot pedal and the toilet may be used while the train is stationary."

Next stop is Cootamundra and the old couple gets off here. Five more hours to Melbourne. I have mosquito bites on my face from being here. Junee is the next stop. It is 2:15pm. Then comes Wagga Wagga, a very nice town. The houses here have a better appearance and the station looks clean, like in Sydney. It's very quiet at 2:26pm at The Rock, since it's a small place. At 2:55pm we are at Henty, a very small

station. From the train I can see Henty District Hospital on the right-hand side, while the station platform is on the left-hand side. Culcairn at 3:05pm and this station looks like Wagga Wagga station. We will be in Benalla at 4:30pm.

I go to the Buffet and get myself a pie and an ice-cream. I finish my snack at 4:50pm. Dinner will be at 5:15pm. The Buffet will be closed in



about 15 minutes. I am at the outskirts of Melbourne and it is 6:00pm.
The train reaches Spencer Street Station at 6:30pm. I am very tired!

Dã-Thảo Quế Trần.
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