

agnès b.<sup>1</sup>

The first time Ga-Chai took the train to work was when he first noticed the back of the girl on the platform carrying an agnès b. on her left shoulder. The night before, Ga-Chai and his girlfriend Amy had had a fight and he had gone drinking alone. Driving home, he had crashed onto a sidewalk. His passenger door was smashed and the car had to be taken in for repairs. Luckily he hadn't injured any pedestrians, and there were no cops around. His neck was a little strained, which hurt a bit, but that was all.

The girl was standing at the very edge of the platform, with her back to Ga-Chai, staring out at the vanishing point of the metal tracks. Her hair was not long, and was parted and braided, showing a bit of slender white nape. She was wearing jeans with a simple Jean Seberg-style Tee - long-sleeved, with blue and white stripes. She had her shoulders back, collarbones out, her slender arms hanging loosely at her sides, palms open, and tush perked up. Gazing at her from behind, he imagined how her chest would be thrust forward in front. Ga-Chai's left hand gripped his heavy briefcase, and he strained to see the girl from another angle. The train tracks in front of her curved away to her left. But there was something strange about the way she looked from behind. Unable to figure out where she was off-kilter, Ga-Chai stared and stared, leaning so far forward it seemed he was about to fall off the platform onto the tracks. The train approached the station, and Ga-Chai rushed into the first car.

At first Ga-Chai thought it was the effect of the agnès b. on the girl's left shoulder. It was a flat, trapezoidal, zippered, agnès b. handbag, dark blue with white trim, the kind of retro-style travel bag favored by young women, and not the ordinary thing a typical OL<sup>2</sup> loves to carry. The bag was neither big nor small, but it was bulging, though it wasn't clear with what. There was almost no room on the train and the girl was standing at one of the doors opposite him, looking out the window with both hands pressed against it. Ga-Chai stood far behind her. He stared at the back of her head, her hair with its center part, then at her shiny nape, and then further down. Halfway down her back was where things began to look wrong. It was only then that Ga-Chai realized that the girl's spine was slightly curved to the left.

From then on, Ga-Chai took the same train to work every day, but he never managed to get a direct look at agnès b.'s face. In his mind's eye, he saw over and over again her curved back and the agnès b., which seemed to sink lower and lower down her left side. Of course, Ga-Chai did not know the girl's name, and only secretly called her agnès b. Sometimes Ga-Chai thought he wanted to talk to agnès b., but he never found an excuse. All day he would daydream about the image of her back, and he even neglected to patch up his fight with Amy, so that cold war continued. Ga-Chai could not stop himself from fantasizing about agnès b.'s naked body, always as seen from behind. He constantly imagined himself fingering each knob of her deformed spine.

Eventually Ga-Chai's car got fixed, but he sold it and kept taking the train instead. One day, at another station, somebody jumped off the platform and all the trains had to be stopped. When it started to look as though service was not going to resume anytime soon, people began to drift out of the station, leaving only Ga-Chai and agnès b. standing there. Turning her head around and checking to see that everyone else had left, agnès b. said to him quietly, "Don't you remember me?" Ga-Chai jumped back, startled, thought he heard wrong, and racked his brain to recall her face. agnès b. continued, "My mom brought me to your clinic four years ago. I was fourteen then. You had me take off my clothes and bend over to be examined, and you pressed your fingers all over my back. You said that my spine was deformed, that it was a birth defect, that it was too late. You said that if I were younger it could have been straightened, but now it could only be treated through exercise. You said that when I grew up, my muscles and bones would degenerate, causing back pain that would affect my heart and lungs. You said that in serious cases this condition could damage the nervous system and possibly lead to paralysis." Ga-Chai wanted to tell her that he was not a doctor but an accountant, but, in the end, he just murmured, "It looks like you're fine now, don't worry about it." agnès b. let out a little laugh, and, in a voice that he could not distinguish as a child's or a woman's, said, "Back then, your hands were icy cold." Then, she strode towards the exit, the agnès b. bag in her left hand swayed and swayed in the air, lightly, as if nothing were in it.