You’re sitting in a carriage, jostled by every irregularity on the dirt road, the rhythmic clip-clop of horse hooves from up ahead drowning out the birdsong endemic to the woodland landscape around you. The air is heavy with moisture, and every inhalation you take carries a trace of the muskiness worn into the leather seats by countless passengers who’ve ridden this ferry from town to town.

Beads of sweat dot your face and the faces of the other two passengers sitting across from you, despite the breeze passing through the open sides of the carriage. They are, you note, a young couple riding towards their future, while you are riding away from the long years of your past. The irony that you’re all headed to the same destination does not escape your attention.

The young woman dabs repeatedly at the incessant beads with a handkerchief, concerned she might be deemed unladylike in a society that frowns upon perspiry females. Or, perhaps, her concern is the possible smudging effect on the makeup she wears. You are unschooled in such matters.

But you’re not socially inept in most matters. For instance, you do understand propriety demands you refrain from staring at her action for too long, and you keep silent about her reasons for such behavior. Better then, to look to your right, focus on the flowering trees passing by your gaze, their pollen carried on every breeze.

Your allergy kicks up and you sneeze. Your eyes squinch in response, and even as you open them, ready to apologize to the other occupants of the carriage for your untimely action, you’re suddenly sitting in a train station, having arrived through no prompting of your own. Your suitcase, holding a smidgen of your possessions is pressed up against your side, your arm laying claim to it as you cradle it close.

The smell of smoke still lays heavy in the air even as the bits of ash born of coal-fired engines have long been trampled underfoot by the inexorable footfalls of progress marching down its one-way path with a never-changing target of *a better tomorrow*.

*Better and worse*. You scoff. *How absurd*. You wonder if anyone can look at history and assert that recent events have proven to be better than ancient history’s. Wars, disease, murder, covetousness, discontent—nothing has changed. *Well*, you think, *at least trains run on electricity and not coal anymore. That’s better, isn’t it?*

The thought makes you laugh out loud and you notice, crossing your path, the same couple who’d shared the carriage ride with you staring at you as though you calling to question your mental faculties. Maybe you *are* a madman. You can’t be sure of much anymore.

Crackling over the loudspeakers, you hear your destination called, boarding now open. You stand and grab your suitcase, then head to the platform and your awaiting train. As you put your foot on the first step leading up to the carriage, your suitcase opens of its own accord, much to your dismay. You don’t want to form a bottleneck, so you hurriedly bend over and throw your belongings back in, snapping the case securely. As you stand erect, you find yourself in an airport, air-conditioned, modern, and spacious. All around you, people are scurrying to get to their gates, luggage in hands and rolling on floors, and you’re reminded of a frenetic amusement park minus the laughter. Everyone looks serious, intent on getting to where they need to be and in no mood for distraction.

Confusion sets in and you stop where you stand, creating an obstacle the passersby need to maneuver around. You get bumped by a couple in an apparent hurry, recognize them yet again even though they took no notice of you, and your ticket falls from your pocket. Bending down, you pick it up and read the gate number stamped upon the paper. A moment later, you get your bearings and walk directly to the gate. They’ve already begun boarding, so you show your ticket to the agent and find your seat. A few moments later, the plane taxies and then, gunning its engines, speeds down the runway. You grip the armrests with knuckle-whitening pressure and swallow hard as you close your eyes for those first few seconds aloft—take-off always makes you feel queasy.

Opening them once again, you’re in your study in stockinged feet, a comfortable robe draping down your body as you read an article entitled, *Escaping Mortality*. You pause at the end of the paragraph, and gently grasp the snifter from the side table you’ve owned for many years. You swirl a small sip of brandy in your mouth and pay strict attention as you place the crystal back down. Turning your attention once more to the article, you discover it’s a blank page and you’ve been looking to get away by any available means, in a horse-drawn carriage, boarding a train, or taking off in an airplane, all the while your death’s claimant drawing ever closer with each tick of the clock, offering you no escape.