

A MILLION STORIES

ISABELLE CALLE

The man came here every day to read his book, but nobody seemed to know what brought him here. What reason could he possibly have to sit in this crowded station? He never took a train, never checked the time, he simply sat on a bench and flipped aimlessly through the pages of his book. Eyes always followed him, wondering what it was that he wanted. Nobody knew, but there were stories, of course. Where were people, there were bound to be stories. It was human nature, really, to try and assign meaning to the unknown.

Some people enthusiastically announced that he was a secret agent scouting out the station for a special mission. Of course, those people were usually children who hadn't yet learned to whisper and who were immediately herded away by bashful parents. Other people claimed that he was nobody all that interesting; nothing more than an old man who enjoyed his routine. These people would simply greet him with a nod as they briskly walked past and some would even hurry by him without a passing glance. They didn't care about this man, so why should they stop to speak with him? That was none of their business after all.

And yet, there was a third type of person. These people had no idea why this man was sitting there, but they didn't walk past him and they didn't create fantasies in their head. No, instead they just smiled and sat beside him on the bench. They would hold out their hands, offering him some tea, or coffee, or maybe fresh-baked cookies. Whatever it was that they had, they would offer it to him and he would always take it with a smile. Some would stay, sharing a moment of companionable silence as they enjoyed their shared treats. Others would wish him a good day and then go about their own. And others yet would speak to him, smiling as stories began to clutter the air.

Those were his favorite people: the ones that sat with him, even if it was just for a moment. They didn't mind that he was a stranger or that they knew nothing about him. They still approached him and offered up their time, their companionship, anything they had for him to accept. That was why he came day after day: to accept the gifts these lovely people wished to offer him and maybe, just maybe, he would hear a new story.