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## **JOURNEY ON THE RAILS**

By

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Author's Note:

This novel is a work of fiction. All of the main characters are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons is purely coincidental. Though settings, buildings, and businesses exist, liberties may have been taken as to their actual location and description. This story has no purpose other than to entertain the reader.

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And once again I dedicate this book to my  
granddaughter, sons, and brothers.

May life bless all of you.

“One life and one alone  
We have to live  
Upon this little earth.  
One life in which to learn so much...  
To seek and find and prove our worth.  
So many dreams there are to dream...  
So many things to know and do.  
So many rosy peaks to climb...  
So many pathways to pursue.”  
Anonymous

## CHAPTER 1

Chugga, chugga, choo, choo. The Zephyr gently rocked and swayed on the bumpy tracks as Phoebe looked out at the sea of corn fields flashing by. Sometimes the corn was broken up by fields of soybeans planted for crop rotation to put needed nutrients back into the soil. But mostly it was corn.

As the little towns out in the middle of Iowa passed by she wondered, besides agriculture, how these people made a living here among all this empty space. It would certainly not be an area she would consider residing in. But at the same time she knew that people here would hate living near a big city, as she did.

Twilight was rapidly descending. As she looked out the window of her rented Pullman car, she thought about how this journey had occurred. As she continued watching out the window she saw the reflection of a woman who was no longer a girl. When she turned off the last light the night sky, free of city lights, rapidly came into view

She often felt like a forty year old trapped in a sixty year old body. Phoebe took care of herself and exercised every day, but there were certain body parts that did not work as well as they used to with her knees being the best example.

Her friend, Riley, would always say "It is hell getting old", and as much as Phoebe did not want to admit it, she knew her friend was right. As she continued gazing out the window, she knew she could definitely lose twenty pounds. She now wore a size twelve. Although she did not look too bad, she longed for the days when a size ten fit perfectly.

With all that had happened to her in the past her therapist told her a few extra pounds would not hurt. He was proud of how far she had come, and this trip was the culmination of the last few years of counseling. Besides her health was good and she needed no pills for blood pressure or cholesterol issues.

"Just wait," Riley would say.

Continuing to stare out the train window, she saw an older woman with medium brown hair and glasses in the reflection. Although everyone said she did not look her age of sixty-two, she realized she was no longer the young woman she had once been.

Where had all the years gone? It had been eleven years ago. She had been fifty-one when Dan had finally been diagnosed, and it had been a long two and a half years of many inconclusive doctors' visits before the cause had been discovered.

When he was found to have early-onset Alzheimer's she was shocked. She remembered how she finally felt when she understood the reason for his inexplicable anger. She had studied

about the disease as much as she could after the diagnosis. Then Dan died seven long years after his diagnosis. She began going on speaking engagements at Alzheimer's support groups to let others know what she had learned. She hoped to help them better understand the disease.

Through her research she learned that Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia. At first memory loss is mild, but later people lose their ability to carry on a conversation or respond to their environment. In the beginning it is hard for the person to remember newly learned information.

As the disease advances through the brain it leads to more severe symptoms such as disorientation, mood and behavior changes and confusion about events, time, and place. Unfounded suspicions about family, friends or caregivers, along with difficulty speaking, swallowing and walking can follow.

She wanted others to know that when a spouse develops this disease, it is heartbreaking. The person you fell in love with and married is not the same anymore. In her case Dan soon needed her help with daily activities like bathing, shaving, and using the bathroom. As the years slowly went by his eyes became vacant, and he became unaware of his surroundings. The slightest thing would set him off. She remembered when he could not find his keys or cell phone. He would accuse her of taking them. And nothing she said would change his mind.

In the beginning if she mentioned anything to him about his behavior, he would lash out in anger, slam out the door and drive off. This was so painful, as well as scary, worrying that something might happen to him or others in his state of mind while he was driving.

And she was concerned whether he would find his way home. She was torn about calling the police. If they took his license away, how could she keep him from driving? As he worsened she knew he would forget about driving a car in time. Much as she hated that fact, she also looked forward to that happening.

She learned that up to five percent of those with the disease have early onset Alzheimer's. But how did that help her? What was even more frightening was that early-onset can run in families.

It is genetic but there are tests to determine if you have a higher risk of getting it. However, there is no single test to determine if one has the disease. That is why for over two years Dan's symptoms were mistakenly diagnosed as anxiety and depression due to his stressful job.

She talked about many things in her speeches. She would tell people how the disease does not progress any more rapidly than if you were to get it when you are older. There are medications that can help manage symptoms but none to halt the disease. Staying physically active and keeping connected with friends is very important no matter how old the person is. Dan was able to do that for about two years after his diagnosis.

Although he tried fighting the symptoms, once he was unable to articulate what was wrong, he became very frustrated. That put terrible stress on both of them. He became helpless, childlike and began shadowing her, as she was familiar to him even after he forgot her.

Then the violence began. His behavior got worse, and he would come up behind her and try to choke her. Once when she was bathing him, he punched her so hard her lip started bleeding. As she stood at the shower door, he seemed confused by her crying. However, he never

unclenched his fist which continued to scare her. She knew he had not meant to do it, but he could have hurt her very badly.

Not long after he punched her, she decided it was time to place him in a residential home. However after a couple of months they asked her to remove him, as his violent behavior increased. So she took care of him at home with some big, burly male nursing assistants that she hired to help her. Since he did not sleep well at night she also hired an in-home caregiver to sit with him all night. It was the only way she could get any sleep. She thanked God every day that she had enough funds to cover these expenses.

For five years she felt such a sense of loneliness and emptiness as birthdays and holidays rolled around. Nothing they had shared was the same anymore. She loved him but it was such a difficult time because he was no longer Dan. It also saddened her that her two grandchildren would always remember their grandfather and his home as a place of sadness whenever they visited.

Her daughter, Laura, lived on the West Coast and was only able to visit three or four times a year. Laura called her every day and she treasured and looked forward to their talks. After her dad's diagnosis, Phoebe insisted Laura get tested. The relief they both felt when she was diagnosed negative was unbelievable.

That was why she went on speaking engagements. It was because she felt so shell-shocked by what she had gone through with her husband. After he died she went to see a therapist, who thought it would be cathartic for her to talk about everything she had dealt with.

There is no cure, and so little is known about the causes of the disease, her prayer was that by getting the word out on a broader basis, hopefully more research and funding would happen. It is true that there is a greater chance of getting Alzheimer's since it is genetic. However anyone can be afflicted. Because of that she wondered about her grandchildren's future, if some breakthrough was not found for this terrible disease.

Perhaps her speaking out, would help others to deal with this problem. She hoped she could make them realize that they are not alone as the disease ravages their loved one and tears their lives apart. Sometimes knowing others are going through the same problems helps people to better deal with their own. As more and more baby boomers develop this disease, hopefully there will be more support for these people.

Extraordinary events don't define people's lives. Instead they detour them for better or worse. Dan getting sick was certainly a bad thing, but perhaps her speaking out to others made her life more worthwhile.

Her friends told her she needed to get a life! It had been four years since Dan died. But she kept thinking what if she fell in love with someone else, and he developed the disease. She just could not go through that again.

But as her therapist says, "You've come a long way, baby."

## CHAPTER 2

Phoebe knew she should not dwell on what happened to Dan but in a way it was why she was now on the train. All their married life her husband had talked about a wish he had for when he retired. He wanted to rent a Pullman car, attached to an Amtrak train, and travel the Western United States.

He had belonged to a Wisconsin train club and since they lived outside of Chicago it was close enough for him to go on get-togethers with his train friends whenever he was able. Every chance he got he would take Phoebe to train museums, especially if there were restored Pullmans to be seen.

Dan had taken out a large insurance policy a few years after they had gotten married. He had made her promise if something happened before he retired, she would go on the journey without him. She had jokingly agreed to his request thinking nothing would happen to him.

So she had spent the last year researching her trip. Dan's friend, Todd, owned a Pullman car and it was a beauty. Todd loved renting out his Pullman, which came with a train attendant and cook, because it helped defray some of the costs of ownership.

It was quite expensive to rent a Pullman for the distance she was anticipating traveling. She definitely could not, and would not, do it on her own. The first person she talked into going with her was her friend, Riley.

Riley's husband had made a lot of money in the stock market before he died and she lived very comfortably off the investments and life insurance he had left behind. She thought it sounded like a fun adventure, and told Phoebe to count her in.

Riley was fifty-eight years old. She had short curly red hair, blue eyes and was a petite size 8. She had been married to Jake, the love of her life for over thirty years. She had been widowed for three years and was having a difficult time accepting her husband's death.

Jake traveled overseas for business quite a lot. Usually on long flights he got up and walked around every hour or two. But he had not been feeling well before his last trip and had spent all of his time sleeping in his seat both going and coming home.

He had no idea he had developed blood clots in his leg. By the time he got home he had chest pain, was coughing and having difficulty breathing. He did not realize the blood clots had flowed into his lungs. He only knew he felt terrible. Riley was worried about him and had driven him to the emergency room. As he exited the car at the hospital, he fell over dead.

The two women had encountered each other in the office of the therapist they both shared. When the doctor had gotten an emergency call they had met in the reception area of his office. As they were rebooking appointments, they started a conversation. Realizing they had a lot in common they started going out to lunch every week. It was not long before they became best friends.

Like Phoebe, Riley had no intention of ever marrying again. If it was perfect the first time, what were the chances that would happen again? Riley had a friend named Hugh. His wife, Hillary, had died. But he would never talk about her or what had happened. The two had met at a charity event and had become fast friends. Since neither of them was interested in having a serious relationship, they had an easy going friendship.

Hugh was what you would describe as tall, dark and handsome. He was six feet tall and Riley looked like a dwarf next to him. He had brown wavy hair with just a hint of grey and green eyes. He was sixty three years old and had retired at fifty-five having made his money in technology.

When Riley told Hugh about her upcoming train trip, he asked if they had room for anyone else. He thought it sounded like a wonderful adventure. He had a friend whom he knew would also be interested in going. Since they had grown up together and been friends all their lives, they would be willing to share a room if necessary.

Phoebe, knowing Riley would vouch for her friend, thought it sounded like a good addition. It would be quite expensive to do the trip she was planning, so the more people to split the cost the better. It would be fun having a few people along to share in the adventure.

Her Aunt Julia and Uncle Henry had also asked to come along. They were celebrating their sixty-second wedding anniversary and decided it would be a unique way to remember the occasion. Their only son had been killed in Viet Nam. As they had no immediate family to leave their money to they did not have to worry about how much the trip would cost. Since Phoebe knew they were comfortable but not wealthy she and Riley agreed they would count the couple as one when dividing up the cost.

There were five bedrooms in the Pullman, and Phoebe realized they would now be full. She and Riley would have their own rooms, her aunt and uncle would have another one. The two men would have to bunk together. The last room would be shared by the attendant and cook. Todd told her they usually shared a room unless there was a spare. Although they were not married, they had worked together on the Pullman for fourteen years and respected each other's privacy.

Phoebe wondered about the other man who was coming, but knew she would meet him soon enough.

## CHAPTER 3

Phoebe and Riley were having lunch one afternoon at one of their favorite diners. Riley's friend had agreed to come meet Phoebe. As the women were discussing their itinerary, Hugh walked in with another man. He was not quite as tall as Hugh, and Phoebe guessed he was around 5'9" since he appeared a couple of inches taller than she was.

He had white hair and brown eyes just like she did. He seemed to be a very polite man, and you wanted to smile when you looked at him. Tony was Hugh's friend, and he was also sixty-three years old. Hugh had told Riley his friend had been divorced for twenty eight years.

He was very good looking, and must have gone through something traumatic to stay unattached so long Phoebe thought. He seemed a very agreeable man and thanked Phoebe profusely for letting him join them on their journey.

It was good having several people share the cost. At the same time Phoebe and Riley did not want anyone along who was bossy or unpleasant. That is why they wanted to meet the two men beforehand to make sure everyone was similar in temperament.

Riley had told Hugh that they needed to be compatible and that would be a condition of whether or not the women accepted them on the journey. Hugh said that was very smart of them instead of just taking anyone along. If someone got on your nerves, it could make for a very unpleasant time.

They still did not have all the details of the trip worked out, but they thought they would probably be gone about three weeks. Being in such close quarters it was important that everyone got along well. Riley had been out with Phoebe's aunt and uncle several times and knew they would be fun to have along.

Aunt Julia and Uncle Henry were very unassuming people and loved traveling. Her aunt had already given Phoebe some great ideas for the itinerary since they had been to most of the places they were going. She had also told Phoebe that whatever the group decided to do she and Henry would be fine with it.

"Riley and I were thinking of making a few stops along the way. What do you think?" Phoebe asked Hugh. That's a great idea. I suppose we have to stop at the major cities since they have the capability to uncouple our car," Hugh said.

"Yes, that is what Todd said. We are being charged a flat fee for the use of the Pullman which includes our food and drinks and a per diem for the cost of the cook and attendant. We also have to pay Amtrak so much per mile, and there is a charge every time we couple or uncouple the car. You can understand why this is a costly venture."

Todd wants a specific amount the week before we leave. This should completely cover our costs for the Pullman. He said if we did run over for some reason we can pay the balance when we return.

Riley then spoke up, "Phoebe has been in contact with the owner and has asked him many questions. She also contacted some friends of her husband who belonged to the same train club as he did. She has gotten some great advice. Obviously we do not know everything and since you are paying your equal share any input you have will be taken into account. We will be in close quarters for several weeks and need to be comfortable with each other."

"I want to thank you for letting my aunt and uncle be counted as one. They have traveled everywhere and have given me some good suggestions. Aunt Julia has already told me that the four of us should make all the decisions regarding our stops and sightseeing. They are good with whatever we decide."

"We know this was your idea and really appreciate being able to go with you. This is a really fun idea but we would never do something like this on our own. It will be nice to share the burden of the cost among all of us. We definitely appreciate you letting us have some input into the decision making," Tony said.

Hugh then spoke up, "Will you tell us about the Pullman. Have you seen it?"

"Yes I have," Phoebe replied. "It is really awesome."

"Phoebe and I drove up to southern Wisconsin where Todd keeps his car. So I also saw it, too. Phoebe is right It is awesome!"

“Tony and I looked up information about Pullmans online the other day. You may already know, but they have a very interesting history.”

At that point Hugh spoke up. “Did you know George Pullman manufactured his railroad cars from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century through the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when railroads were in their heyday? The workers who built the cars lived in a planned worker community (a ‘company town’) named Pullman. You can still visit this area today just south of downtown Chicago.”

Tony then continued, “After spending a miserable night sleeping sitting up in a chair, Pullman began designing a railcar with sleeper berths. During the day the upper car was folded up and at night the two facing seats folded down to make a bunk. There were curtains for privacy. And although it was pretty spartan by today’s standards, it was comfortable and private. Actually the concept is similar to what Amtrak provides now with their roomettes.”

“Just like we are doing, Pullman operated his cars on most of the railroads by paying the companies to hook up his cars to their trains,” Hugh added. “By 1862 Pullman began building luxury sleeping cars which had carpeting, draperies, upholstered chairs, libraries, card tables, and an unparalleled level of customer service.”

Just like a tag team the two men were very excited talking about Pullman history. Phoebe and Riley had studied up on trains and had seen their Pullman, but they had not really delved into the history like the men had.

When it was Tony’s turn to talk, he said, “These cars offered complete privacy. They were intimate, luxurious and a memorable way to travel. It was also a wonderful way to spend time alone with the people whom you cared about the most. The company used the trademark phrase

‘Travel and Sleep in Safety and Comfort’. With over ninety-eight hundred cars by the 1920s people obviously believed the advertising.”

As he continued Tony said, “When George Pullman died in 1897, Robert Todd Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln’s son, took over as company president. After a strike in 1897 the court mandated the town be sold. The sale was completed in 1907. But the Pullman Company thrived all through the heyday of railroads. With more people driving cars and an interstate highway system coming to the fore in the 1950’s, train travel began to diminish. In 1955 the company closed its factory in the Pullman neighborhood of Chicago, and an era came to an end. Today, as I told you previously, Pullman is a Chicago neighborhood and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.”

## CHAPTER 4

The two women were very impressed with the history the men had just relayed to them.

“Wow. You really did your homework. Let me tell you about our car, and then Riley and I thought we could talk a little about our itinerary.”

Riley was nodding as Phoebe continued, “Even though we will be coupled to an Amtrak train there is no way for people to walk from the Amtrak train into our car. The only way to get in is to go outside, walk over to our car and climb the stairs. That makes for complete privacy, because the attendant, the cook, or one of us will always be by the stairs at stops and will not allow anyone to board who does not belong. At night, when everyone is sleeping, the door will be locked.”

As the men listened Phoebe resumed, “When you go up the stairs the first room you encounter is the kitchen. It is small, but space had been conserved quite well. There is a little stove, a refrigerator, microwave and even a small freezer. There are cupboards just like in a regular kitchen. According to Todd, the cook’s name is Margaret. And since she has been

working for him for fourteen years, I am sure she really knows her way around that little kitchen. She probably has her work area down to a science.”

“Next are five bedrooms,” Riley added. “And they appear very spacious compared to Amtrak’s bedrooms.”

“Maybe the men would like to know the Pullman’s dimensions,” added Phoebe. “The car is a little over 81’ long, 14’ tall and 10 & ½’ wide.”

Riley continued, “The first two bedrooms have twin beds. The first room is where the cook and attendant, Charles, will sleep. It is pretty small with a small dresser between the beds. The next room is bigger but it also has two twin beds. There is a larger dresser for clothes, and it has a table and chair. That is where you two will sleep. The next two rooms have a double bed with a dresser and two chairs. Finally the last bedroom is a little bigger with a Queen-size bed, a dresser, chair and vanity. I told Riley we would flip a coin to see who gets the bigger room.”

“I told Phoebe the room was hers since this whole escapade was her idea. Her aunt and uncle and I will take the two double bedrooms. I hope you men are ok with the sleeping arrangements. Oh, and all the bedrooms have a small closet and a bathroom.”

“It sounds great,” said Hugh while Tony nodded in agreement.

Phoebe resumed, “Next comes a little bar area. I suppose it is there so that the help has someplace to put the food and drinks before and after serving us. Continuing on you climb up three stairs into the parlor. Although this car was built in the late 1940s, the owner had it restored in the rich ‘Pullman green’ colors of earlier days. Naturally you will notice the varnish

on the walls. This was put on to protect the wood in the cars. There is black walnut woodwork, framed mirrors between the windows, French plush upholstery, polished brass fixtures, and deep pile carpeting. You almost feel like you are traveling in the Victorian era.”

“It is a very impressive parlor,” Riley added. “On the left side are two built in rounded couches with coffee tables. On the right side are some velvet brocade chairs with end tables. And there is a Victorian writing desk in a corner on the right in the back before the observation platform. When you first walk into the room to your left in the middle is another set of stairs to the dome car. Up there are two tables, actually booths, on each side with seating for four at each one. They can be used for eating, playing cards and games, or just watching the world whizzing by through the large observation windows. There are also built in cabinets on each side with counters to put the food and serving dishes on.”

“Well, it certainly sounds incredible,” the two men said at the same time.

“Do you realize we have been sitting here talking for almost two hours,” Riley said. “Phoebe and I both have appointments in a half hour so we need to go. Besides this restaurant is going to close soon, because it is only open for lunch. I had no idea we would be talking so long, and we haven’t even started on the itinerary yet. Today is Tuesday. Do you think we could meet for lunch on Thursday or Friday? It will probably take a couple of meetings to go over the itinerary, since we spent so much time just talking about the train today. And it would be nice to have a preliminary plan, so we could start researching actual attractions.”

“That is a great idea, Riley. However both Tony and I have some obligations towards the end of the week.”

The women did not know that Tony and Hugh volunteered at a shelter for children in foster care every Thursday and Friday afternoon.

“Why don’t we have lunch next Monday? That will give the two of us time to research the routes and figure out what attractions look interesting. I believe your plan is to take the California Zephyr out to Oakland, California. Then we would take the Coast Starlight up through California and Oregon to Seattle, Washington. And finally the Empire Builder through the northern states back home. Is that correct?”

“Sort of Hugh. There are two things my aunt suggested which Riley and I thought were good ideas. First we will get off in Denver and rent a van and do a loop around the state to Grand Junction. There are quite a few historic trains in Colorado, and as long as we are there we should probably experience them. We would have our Pullman continue to Grand Junction without us, uncouple and wait for us to get there.”

“That sounds like a great idea,” Tony said.

“The other idea is to skip the Coast Starlight. It is a very nice train but there are only views of the coast between Los Angeles and San Francisco, and we would not get on until Oakland which is the San Francisco stop. Aunt Julia says the Oregon coast is awesome to drive. So we were thinking when we get off in Oakland our Pullman can continue on the Coast Starlight north without us. We can rent a van and drive through the Redwoods in California, the Oregon coast, stop in Portland and do the Columbia River Gorge, Mount St. Helens and finally Mt Rainier on our way to Seattle.”

“That is another good idea, Phoebe,” Hugh continued, “Not only will that save us on coupling and uncoupling fees, but your aunt is correct. I have been along the Oregon and California coasts and they are awesome. I noticed the train does not get near the coast in those areas and you will miss a lot by not driving. Perhaps we could have the Pullman stop in Portland, Oregon, so we can use it as a hotel when we are there.”

“That is also a good idea. Sometimes we need to get hotels but since we need three rooms it would be good to use the Pullman whenever possible. So it is agreed,” Riley said. “How about we meet next Monday at 12:30 p.m. at that new deli on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue? Everyone I talked to said it is really good. And they use real meat instead of that processed stuff.”

As they left the restaurant they waved good-bye, and the men went one way while the women went the other.

“You know, Riley, I get very good vibes from those men. They were never pushy, and we talked almost two hours agreeing on everything. I also liked that they did the research on the Pullman history. I have a feeling we will all be very compatible traveling companions. Considering how long we will be together that is important.

“I agree with you, Phoebe. I already know Hugh, and he is a very likeable man. And it seems Tony has a similar disposition.”

Waving good-bye they got in their cars and went their separate ways. They still had about three months before their trip, and Phoebe was hoping to have a pretty good outline of their journey finished before they met again. She knew the week would fly by with all the research she wanted to do.

On the way home she stopped at her local AAA office. She did not want them to do a Trip Tik for her, but she did want maps and books for all the states they would be traveling through. Hugh had mentioned he would also stop by AAA for books and maps. Phoebe thought that was a great idea, because then they would have double sets in case something happened to one set.