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Literary

Sound of a Train
Gilbert Girion
Pleasure Boat Studio
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Subtlety and the meaning imbued into objects and action plunge this narrative forward through a plot of pursuit.

After worrying over her new vow of silence, Dan reassures his friend Loretta that she doesn't always need words to talk. Gilbert Girion's novella, *Sound of a Train*, pursues this notion just as Dan and Loretta pursue Susan, Dan's wife, after her sudden departure from their California home. In this story, characters communicate through action, physical objects and nature hold their own messages, and the instinctual responses of animals prove to be more valuable than the untrustworthy and repetitive nature of everyday human conversation. *Sound of a Train* suggests there are many ways to hear the truth.

Girion's novella is written in simple language with an appreciation for the power of action and the need to keep a narrative moving. But it reads much like a script: no backstory, static physical descriptions at the top of most new scenes, and character development that never draws from anything beyond the immediate situation. The action and dialogue are realistic but not meaningful, and so the prose never quite achieves the layered effect necessary to significantly develop the narrative arc outside the plot.

The straightforward prose does help with the novella's organization. The cast of characters is limited, with Susan and Dan clearly at the center. There is an effective focus on character—when the narrative lens moves to show what's going on with Susan, for example, her name starts off the first sentence in bold type—but the focus is inconsistent and more prominent in the beginning as part of a preliminary character setup.

The most engaging aspect of Girion's writing is the gentle and compassionate tone present throughout the story. Dan and Susan obviously care about each other and treat their family and friends with an ordinary but graceful respect. Susan meets characters on her journey

who are not always pleasant, but they're never presented as caricatures or off-the-shelf types. In fact, nothing about this work suggests formula or cheap thrills. Even Susan's most unusual habit is treated with a mature subtlety, developed as a source of tension, but never reduced to melodrama or exploited for laughs.

Susan's adventure ends with a bittersweet series of events, but the emotional resolution is satisfying and the mysteries are solved—at least the ones that can be. Girion may have intentionally left the more timeless mysteries open to debate.

Jennifer Williams