

Train Algebra

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Train Algebra

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*Do not use a calculator. Show your work.
Haruki leaves Chicago Union Station at 10:42 pm
on a train traveling at 60 miles per hour.*

At 10:33 pm, Haruki boards the train.
He's abandoned his job,
his collection of cactuses;
has only his cell phone, his wallet,
and a dog-eared paperback.
He walks through two carriages
before finding an open seat,
apologizes as he sits down
beside a woman his mother's age.
The woman glares at him.

*96 minutes later, Pedro leaves Chicago,
headed in the same direction, on a train
traveling at 84 miles per hour.*

Haruki tries to sleep.
Can't.
His thoughts snag on Pedro.
The train horn bleats, slow and lonely.
Haruki picks up his book,
retreats to the nineteenth century,
Jack Aubrey, Stephen Maturin....
The Dutch ship, *Waakzaamheid*,
chases them through heavy seas,
the waves like cliffs, like mountains.
Wind. Cannon. The gray-green water.

¹Mary Soon Lee writes both fiction and poetry, and once upon a time earned a degree in mathematics from Cambridge University. Her book *Elemental Haiku*, containing haiku for each element of the periodic table, was published by Ten Speed Press in October 2019. Her website is <http://www.marysoonlee.com> and she tweets at @MarySoonLee.

Both trains continue at the same speeds.

a) When will Pedro catch up to Haruki?

b) How far will they then have traveled?

The *Waakzaamheid* founders, broached to.

Six hundred men. Dead.

Haruki puts down the book.

A distant house looms and recedes
through the rain-smearred window.

He swipes his eyes with his sleeve,
opens his wallet,

takes out the photo of Pedro.

a) Pedro's train will catch Haruki's at 4:18 am.

b) They will have traveled 336 miles.

The trains have no sense of propriety.

They stop at stations.

Their speed varies.

At 4:46 am, Haruki's phone rings.

At 5:02 am, he gets off the train
at Port Huron, Michigan.

He waits on the damp platform,
peering down the rails into dark
for the next train.