

The Suprasternal Notch

by James LePore (September 2016)



Woman on Train, © James LePore

The suprasternal notch (fossa jugularis sternalis), also known as the [jugular notch](#), is a large, visible dip found at the superior border of the manubrium of the sternum, between the clavicular notches. The suprasternal notch or well, is seen as a point of attraction by many and can be subtly enhanced by the wearing of pendants or necklaces which rest in that area, to draw focus to a part of the

body that can be considered an erotic or sensual zone. Highlighting the notch in this way is more understated in exhibiting sensuality than the usual areas (legs, chest, hips etc.) and makes it an [erogenous zone](#).

I saw her on the train every day. She was always there in the same seat when I got on at Oyster Bay. After I saw the movie *The English Patient* I was obsessed with the suprasternal notch. I fantasized about buying her a diamond pendant that I would gently lift to kiss her in that hollow at the top of her chest. I watched her quietly and secretly (or so I thought) until we both got off in Manhattan. I never saw her on the way back. I tried taking the train at different times, waiting a few times until the last train at 11PM or so, but could never catch her. On those nights my mother would scream at me like I was some kind of depraved murderer, just because I came home late. The next morning she would apologize, saying she was just worried about me because I was so odd. I was twenty-five and had never had a date, though I had memorized all of Shakespeare's sonnets, and could tell you why *Lear* was his best play. I know all about dysfunctional families, take my word for it.

After a few months I stopped trying to catch her on the return trip. Maybe she took a limousine home, or a helicopter. It didn't matter. She was there every morning, making my ride in a really nice thing, the best thing in my life, the best thing that had ever happened to me. One night I got on the train, and just before we got going she sat next to me. She didn't look at me or say anything, just folded her hands in her lap. I froze. And I know I turned beet-red because I could feel my face getting hot and flushed. By the first stop in Queens I was so panicked I thought I was going to pass out. At the station, I got up quickly, but she stopped me, putting her hand on my arm. Stay, she said. I had been so panicked that I actually thought of crashing through the train's window, but her touch did something to me that had never happened before. It calmed me. I sat back down, bewildered.

I know you've been watching me, she said. We had been riding quietly for a while, which led me to believe we weren't going to talk, which would have been fine with me. The sound of her voice was therefore a bit of a shock, inducing a little frizz of panic. Then I thought, *what a beautiful voice*. I never knew a voice could be beautiful. I didn't answer though. I was too nervous. But

Shakespeare came to mind: *When Love speaks, the voice of all the gods makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.*

You like Shakespeare, she said. Did I hear that right, I thought? Had she read my mind?

You read it on the train.

I didn't answer. My frayed paperback was in my lap. Duh!

You have to say something.

I said nothing. I'm an idiot, I thought, a lost soul.

Something from Shakespeare, she said.

When we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools.

Lear, she said, it's my favorite.

I looked at her quickly and then looked down.

I knew you could speak, she said. I could feel it in my bones.

I looked at her quickly again. She was smiling. Was she teasing me?

I couldn't speak again. It felt like there was something stuck in my throat.

I'm sorry, she said.

Sorry?

You're shy.

Is that all it is, I thought? Is that all that was wrong with me?

Shakespeare was shy, she said. He was dyslexic, word-blind. He rarely spelled his name the same way twice. That's pretty ironic, no?

Really?

If he could overcome it, anyone can.

What do you do?

I teach theater.

Really?

We're doing *Midsummer Night's Dream* next week. Would you like to come?

Yes.

How well do you know Shakespeare?

I know it all, everything.

I have some questions about the text. Let's have dinner and talk.

James LePore practiced law for twenty-plus years, then turned to writing fiction and taking pictures full time in 1999. In 2009 his first novel, *A World I Never Made*, was published by The Story Plant. Four others, in what LePore calls *The Invictus Cycle*, followed. He has written a book of short stories called *Anyone Can Die*, a volume of flash fiction (*Blood, Light and Time*) that evolved from a series of blog posts, and three historical novels, with the screenwriter Carlos Davis, featuring J.R.R. Tolkien and Ian Fleming in WW2 espionage adventures. His latest release is a novella entitled *Breathe in Grace*. His website is [here](#).

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