Right Brain: Ondine's curse

Aaron F. Struck, MD

Correspondence to
Dr. Struck:
astruck@mgh.harvard.edu

The overhead sign announced a 15-minute delay in the train's arrival. Hans headed for the small food shop within the terminal. The 16-hour shift at the hospital had squeezed the last residual drop of empathy from him like a sponge caught in an industrial vise. He tried to conjure concern for the 88-year-old woman with dementia who came in with a stroke, but nothing materialized. He scrutinized his heart for compassion for the 42-year-old patient with alcohol withdrawal seizures, but again nothing.

He chewed his sandwich and stared at the waiting passengers. They read, they texted, they mostly worked on laptops. The train arrived and they boarded. Quickly everyone settled in and restarted their preoccupation. The young professionals gazed rigidly at laptops or tablets. Feverishly they typed, graphed, and power-pointed. The elderly passengers stared at the ground or amused themselves with large paperback books with titles like *Word Find: US States* or *Sudoku: Super-Quick*. Hans' own laptop was open with a largely white screen under the heading "Functional imaging of genetic epilepsies." But he did not

type. He had no lack of focus nor was fatigue to blame for his stagnant manuscript production. Like most people, he had not felt the need to sleep nor even had fatigue in the last 4 years.

His cell phone started to buzz and like a swamp on a July night the rest of the train's right front pockets started to hum and vibrate. The passengers rummaged around their belongings and pulled out their bottles of Productivia. Hans found his own prescription and rolled the 150-mg pill between his fingers, looking at the markings on the green-hued hexagon. He placed the pill on his tongue, but then quietly spit it back into his hand. Within 20 minutes, his eyes closed. His fellow passengers at first just averted their eyes, but soon their furtive glances gave way to nervous whispers, but Hans was not disturbed.

STUDY FUNDING

No targeted funding reported.

DISCLOSURE

The author reports no disclosures relevant to the manuscript. Go to Neurology.org for full disclosures.

Neurology®

Right Brain: Ondine's curse

Aaron F. Struck

Neurology 2014;83:e159

DOI 10.1212/WNL.0000000000000914

This information is current as of October 20, 2014

Updated Information & Services

including high resolution figures, can be found at:
<http://n.neurology.org/content/83/17/e159.full>

Permissions & Licensing

Information about reproducing this article in parts (figures, tables) or in its entirety can be found online at:
http://www.neurology.org/about/about_the_journal#permissions

Reprints

Information about ordering reprints can be found online:
<http://n.neurology.org/subscribers/advertise>

Neurology® is the official journal of the American Academy of Neurology. Published continuously since 1951, it is now a weekly with 48 issues per year. Copyright © 2014 American Academy of Neurology. All rights reserved. Print ISSN: 0028-3878. Online ISSN: 1526-632X.