

City Trains

A Dark Seam Story

Traffic's not so good here in the city. I hate driving. Many people like to have their own cars so they don't have to take a cab or train. Their pride is their downfall. It's not really worth the frustration and upkeep when there's so many alternate methods of transportation. Me, I take the trains most of the time. Taxis take you most anywhere you want to go, but the train costs less and doesn't have to be hailed. You don't have to talk on the train.

Underground, all we do is watch the tunnel lights shine on one another as we pass them. Nobody talks to anyone they don't know, but we all keep a watchful eye out for those who might threaten us. There's almost a silent understanding between all who ride the trains. Those who do talk are watched more carefully than others, regardless of the well-known fact that they're probably distracting us so their friends can pick our pockets. I just watch my pockets; make sure everything stays there. I've been robbed three times in my life, once at gunpoint. The other two times I just wasn't watching my pockets. You don't even feel it when they do it; you just eventually notice your wallet's missing.

Meredith is a grandmother. She rides the trains regularly. I know her name because she often has someone with her with whom she converses. I listen to their words sometimes. They call her Meredith. She's a widow, and her only son passed away some time ago. She still has a daughter and six grandchildren, without whom I don't think she could go on living. She's a retired schoolteacher. Today she rides alone. I know she doesn't like to ride alone. I can see it in her face, and in the way she tightly grips her purse on her lap. Some might call her a bit paranoid, but I call her wise. Many would see her as just a nice old lady, but the predators see her as an easy target. "She's old," they think. "She won't even notice at first." Of course, she will notice, but she'll be powerless to do anything.

John is another regular on the train. It's about eight o'clock in the morning, so he's probably on his way to work. He's wearing the same suit he always wears. I don't think he owns another. He sometimes alters one of his ties to make it look different. Most people won't notice that you're wearing the same suit as long as you change your tie. John's been riding the train for about three months. He probably just got the job then, and couldn't afford another suit. He probably doesn't have as much furniture in his apartment as he'd like. I can tell he lives alone. He's always right on schedule in the morning, but I don't see him often in the evening.

The train slows to a stop. Meredith and John both get off here. Meredith is probably going to see her daughter and grandchildren, but I don't know where they live, so I can't be sure. Just before the doors close, Marcus slides in.

Marcus describes himself as a "ghetto boy". He's tall, black, and has short hair. He wears his clothes like he's poor, but I know better. He lives with his parents in a high-rent apartment. They buy him good clothes, but he prefers the "ghetto" look. I guess he doesn't want to be ostracized by his *less fortunate* peers. Personally, I don't

measure a man by his wealth, but by his friends. I don't consider the people he hangs out with his friends. They all just want to be accepted, and yet feel superior to everyone else at the same time. I'm not prejudiced, but I'd bet they'd stab each other in the back just to look good to their peers.

Marcus takes a seat next to Janice. She moves away from him a bit when he does. She's more prejudiced than me. I don't think Marcus is a thief, but then I know him much better than she does. I've actually talked with Marcus a few times.

"Whassup, Stu?" he says to me.

"Hello," I reply.

Marcus looks to his left at Janice. When he does, she grips her purse. "What?" he says. She looks away.

Janice is what you'd call a "good girl". She led a sheltered life in a suburb a significant distance from the city. I don't know where, exactly, I've only heard fragments of conversations she's had with her friends. She came to the city about a year ago in pursuit of a career. I don't think she's really adjusted yet. She's been robbed at least once. She came onto the train once, crying and without a purse. She sat right next to me. I asked her what was wrong and she told me how she was robbed at gunpoint. I related my story of how it happened to me with the intent to comfort her, but she just cried more. I think she was disappointed with society, perhaps expecting a different lifestyle here in the city than the one she got. Since then she and I have never spoken.

At the next stop, Janice gets off. Two men with spiked and colored hair board the train. They're followed by a man with a briefcase. I know one of the guys with spiked hair as Stitch. He has purple hair and stitches in each arm going from the hand to the shoulder. I haven't seen his friend before, nor have I seen the man with the briefcase before. Stitch and his friend sit down next to me. The man with the briefcase nervously sits down next to Marcus. "H-hi," he says to Marcus.

"Whussup?" Marcus replies, then looks away.

"Hello, Stu," Stitch says to me, putting his arm around me and shaking me a bit. "How's it going?"

"It's going very slowly right now," I reply. "How's it going for you?"

"It's fucking great, man!" he says, laughing a bit.

"Who's that, then?" his friend says with an English punk accent.

"This is my buddy, Stu," Stitch replies. I don't know why nobody calls me Stuart. It's only my name.

"How's it goin'?" the friend says.

"Deja vu," I reply.

"I just asked him that, ya bloody fool," Stitch says to his friend. He then turns back to me. "You'll have to excuse my cousin, he's a naive bloke."

"Look, Robert, stop using my words," the friend replies.

"Don't you fucking call me Robert, stick! It's Stitch!"

"Hey, you two, will you shut up?" Marcus says. "I'm trying to think over here."

"What? You want to make something of it?" With this, Stitch stands up. "Why don't you come over here and say that again?"

"Look, man. I don't want no trouble," Marcus replies.

"Well I don't want no trouble either, so just mind your fucking business," Stitch says.

“I would if you’d shut up,” Marcus replies.

“That’s it!” Stitch jumps up. “You wanna start something? Let’s get started!”

Marcus jumps to his feet. “Man, I think you oughtta take that back.”

I notice the man with the briefcase shaking. I guess he doesn’t know that Marcus and Stitch are actually friends. He must be more prejudiced than me.

“Well, you know what I think?” Stitch replies. “I think you ought to take my fist in your face!”

With this, the man with the briefcase quickly opens up his briefcase and pulls out a gun. He jumps to his feet, the gun shaking in his hands. “You stop that!” he yells. “Y-You stop that now! I-I’ll shoot you!” The briefcase falls open to the floor. There’s nothing in it. He was only carrying the gun in there.

Marcus and Stitch immediately back away from him. “Look, man, we was just playin’,” Marcus says.

“Yeah, me and him are good friends,” Stitch says, his voice a bit shaken.

“Shut up!” the man says. “You j-just shut up!”

The other people on the train try to be as inconspicuous as possible. They don’t want to be involved.

“Be cool, man,” Marcus says. “Just put down the gun.”

“SHUT UP!”

With that, the gun goes off. A woman at the other end of the car drops to the floor, and blood begins to pour from a hole in her shoulder. She’s breathing heavily, probably in shock from what just happened. The man who is sitting across from her stares with wide eyes, denying to himself what just happened.

“Oh my god,” the man with the gun says. “Oh my god, what did I do?” He looks at Marcus. “What did I do?” Tears are now streaking down the sides of his face. You truly begin to grasp a situation when it goes different than expected.

“Put down the gun,” Marcus says. “Just put down the gun, it’ll all be all right.”

“What did I do?” the man says, beginning to cry. “What did I... I...” He puts the barrel of the gun in his mouth, and before anyone can try to talk him out of it, he pulls the trigger.

The train begins to slow to a stop. Marcus, Stitch, and Stitch’s cousin all quickly exit the train and run off. I don’t think this was actually their stop previous to these events. One of the things I don’t like about the trains is the lack of constant security. One of the janitors sees the splattered blood in the car, drops his mop, and calls the police. Everyone in the cars next to us get off, some screaming, some just chattering. The doors slide closed and the train begins to move once again. Only me, the man in shock, and the woman bleeding on the floor remain inside the car.

“Help me,” the woman on the floor says in a weak voice. I look over at the man who just took his life. His face looks pretty much the same as before, just a few drops of blood on it and some in his mouth. It’s rare that I’m actually frightened, especially after the event has already resolved. “Help me,” the woman says again. I stare at her for a moment, then walk over to her and kneel down. “I don’t want to die,” she says.

“You won’t die,” I say. She knows, however, that I am not certain of this. I put pressure on her shoulder to help stop the bleeding. “Try to relax.”

Police and ambulance are waiting at the next stop. The doors slide open and a swarm of men rush into the car. They immediately hook up electronics to the woman,

and a couple of police men escort me and the man out of the car. They ask if we're all right. "I'm fine," I reply. "He's not so good." I point to the man in shock. They ask him if he's all right, and he doesn't reply.

They take me to the police station for questioning. I answer their questions, and they give me a paper telling me when to appear in court as a witness. At the end of a long day of sitting around and answering the same questions multiple times, they tell me I'm free to go. When I step outside, the sun has already set and darkness has consumed the sky. The city lights once again thwart night's attempts to darken the world, and I walk away.

I enter the train station and board the next train. I don't know where it's going, and I don't really care. I only need time to forget the events of today. When I get on the train, I see Meredith, sitting alone, but smiling. I sit across from her and stare. She can't tell I'm staring at her because I'm wearing sunglasses. I often wear them for that reason. She seems so happy. She has no knowledge of what happened on the train after she got off. I think about her son and husband, and wonder how they died. She seems so happy that I can't bring myself to ask her. I don't see her smile that often.

As the train departs, we all watch the tunnel lights shine on one another, gaining speed with the train. At the next stop, some people get off, and more people get on, all nameless faces to me. I look at all of them, some happy, some sad. Some of them may be having the best day of their life, and some may be having the worst. I don't ask, I just stare, and wonder.