

Uptown A to 207

It was snowing, big flakes brushed his face as he walked up Bond street. He smiled, jumping across the slush as he crossed Schemerhorn, as though the snow was his own private joke. The dour faces, the spinning tires, the shopkeepers diligently brushing the walk in front of the bodega and hair salon - they were focused on the wrong things as far as he was concerned. The snow was beautiful, it was that simple - it coated the cars and fence posts white. Everything else was irrelevant.

He stood on the subway platform, crowded with the usual mix of morning commuters, and unfolded the free daily paper. He shifted from foot to foot - more anxious now than he had been before. He debated putting the paper away and pulling out the articles he'd been meaning to read the night before, but was even more tempted by the book in his bag. He stared, absently, at the dark hole with its glistening rails, waiting for the train to arrive, hoping he could divine from the flickering lights in the tunnel just how long it would take.

"This is Hoyt-Schemerhorn Street. Uptown A train to 207 street Manhattan. Next stop is Jay Street. Stand clear of the closing doors."

He stood, swaying slightly as the train started up, hanging onto the pole with one hand, paper clutched in the other. He looked up and glanced around the train, scanning, out of boredom more than anything else, people's faces. Then he caught a glimpse of a color, an orange, that he felt in his stomach before he could even understand it. It had to be.. He repositioned himself to get a slightly better look but kept the large man with the green london fog coat between them. Sure enough, she sat in the row of seats to his left, eyes closed, ipod buds tucked in her ear. Her face looked tired, dark puffy circles under her eyes. She's done well for herself, he thought. He noticed her cashmere scarf, the amber earrings in antique silver settings, the soft rich leather of her handbag. She wore glasses now with dark plastic antique frames. Her eyes were shut tight, her hands were stiff, palms up, on her lap. She was asleep.

"Jay Street Borough Hall. Transfer here for the F and C trains. A to 207 - High Street next. Standclear-closingdoors."

He adjusted his paper and scanned the headlines but couldn't concentrate. Was it really her? His stomach flopped. He was sweating for some reason. It had been a long time. What was she doing in this part of town? The last he'd heard she'd moved to Morningside Heights. Had been thinking of going back to Cleveland. It all seemed so long ago.

They'd met a few years back in a bar in DC called Glass City. Toledo Mud Hens pennants on the wall, the Ohio State - Michigan game on TV. The conversation flowed naturally, it was no surprise really that they were both from Ohio. Him from the south, the hilly northern suburbs of Cincinnati, drinking Jim Beam and Coke. She was from an old Polish neighborhood in downtown Cleveland, drinking Miller Light. She had copper

earrings, that sparkled in the afternoon sun.

She'd come to DC from Case Western to work at the Hirschorn, a junior curator of graphic design. She'd noticed his black oval glasses and pegged him immediately as an architect. Ohio State scored and they cheered.

"This is High Street - Brooklyn Bridge. Broadway-Nassau next."

The train hurtled under the river. This part of the trip always made him a tiny bit nervous - the plunge under the water, the sense that if the train were to get stuck there would be nowhere to go - no way out. He glanced over at her again. Where was she going?

Things both really came together and began to fall apart a month or two after they met, when they got lost in Georgetown on that early-fall afternoon. He'd taken the train to her Adams-Morgan apartment, a 19th century brownstone above a liquor store, and they'd wandered south, through Dupont Circle. The sky was Yves-Klein blue, spotted with clouds as big and puffy as Sigmar Polke's. They turned down R street and as they paused on the Dumbarton Bridge (or, as they always called it, the Crying Buffalo Bridge - for the two copper statues on either end, streaked with years of acid rain) he told her that he'd been offered a job in New York. It was a big opportunity - the chance to work on a commission for the High Line, that crooked railroad on the West Side. Her eyes lit up. They walked and talked excitedly without direction - Q Street to Dumbarton to.. they forgot and looked up finally as a thunderclap rang out and they found themselves on the edge of a leafy cemetery with massive weathered headstones.

They couldn't afford their own places in New York and were thrust together, somewhat suddenly, into a one bedroom on the western edge of midtown. Port Authority Heights they called it, a private joke. "Clinton" is what the neighborhood association came up with. He liked Hells Kitchen with it's images of Irish Mobsters and street fights. Something like Gangs of New York but with Stogies and Sailors and Porn Theaters in the 40's. She filled the place with her cats and easel and casual relationship with chaos. He brought architecture books, a Mies chair and love of smooth lines and order.

"Broadway-Nassau. Transfer here for the J, C, 1 and 9 trains. Chambers next."

The train shuddered to a stop. She opened her eyes and caught his for a split second before he looked away and ducked, slightly, behind the tall man between them. His stomach churned. He looked down at his paper, at his hands, swallowed, and decided that once the train stopped he'd move to her.

She'd had trouble finding a job when they first moved in. She wandered the Chelsea Galleries, dropping off her resume to the vacant stares of receptionists, put in her applications to all the museums she could find and came back to the apartment and painted. He plunged into work. 60 hours a week. The first signs of strain began to show.

“Chambers Street. Uptown C local across the platform. Transfer to the Seventh Avenue 1 and 2 trains. This is an Uptown A to Inwood. Stand clear of the closing doors.”

The train emptied of Wall Street types, the *Journal* tucked under their arms. The man in the London Fog coat shuffled off as well, allowing him to slip the long half-step. He was standing in front of her. Their eyes met.

“Hello, Michael,” she said.

“Susan.” He said and laughed. “Of all the places to see you.”

“It’s not that random, “ she said. “Nice bag.”

“Oh, right. I picked it up in Italy a month or so ago.”

Her eyes flickered slightly, registering. “So – “ she said and trailed off.

“Right. What brought you to my neighborhood?”

“Do you really want me to answer that?”

“No need to get testy.. I was just, curious.”

“Right. It’s ok. I’m seeing somebody in Ft. Greene. I’d forgotten you were in that part of Brooklyn.”

Now it was time for his eyes to flicker slightly.

There had been a party. To celebrate the final submission of the High Line proposal. Andrea was a small dark haired girl from the mayor’s office with a sharp tounge and fast mind. He’d been enamored. She’d given him her number. Susan had stayed home and when he came back to the apartment he looked at her and felt as though something had changed. She barely noticed, or never let on if she did. It was what he would later call the earthquake theory of relationships - people slide past each other like tectonic plates, moving inches over years, then, in one sudden burst of energy ,shaking loose.

“This is Canal Street. Uptown A to 207. Next stop West 4.”

“So, how’s what’s her name?” She asked.

“Do you really want me to answer that?” he said and they laughed. Then added, “we didn’t last long. Not that I expected it to.”

“Not to change the subject, but I was thinking of you the other day,” she said and smiled. The air between them melted slightly. “Someone gave me this Cd. Elvis Costello and Burt Bachrach. They do a song called *Toledo* you’d love.”

“Oh yeah,” he said and laughed, singing “*Does anybody living in Ohio dream of that Spanish Citadel?*”

“Right,” she said, “you always did know your music.”

The train slid through the tunnel, rounding corners. He shifted his weight, countering the rhythms of the train.

“This is West 4. 14th next. Stand clear closing doors.”

A seat opened next to her. He sat down. She shifted her bags away. He leaned forward, elbows on his knees, and turned to her.

“How far are you going?”

“Up to 59th. I transfer there to a local and walk across the park.”

“Oh, right. You’re still at the Met then?”

“Yeah. Have you seen the show of Durer drawings?”

“Not yet. I did catch the Byzantine show though. Actually, there’s some great stuff in Chelsea right now. Cecily Brown at Cheim and Reed.”

“I saw that show. She has a great – “ she paused, “sensuous – “ paused again. “energy.”

He stopped himself and floated for a second. It felt so easy, this back and forth, yet it was empty somehow. Filling space, filling time. Those pauses. The way she waited to say exactly what she meant.

“14th Street. 34th Street Penn Station next.”

“My stop’s next. I’m still working in that building on 10th Avenue.” He said.

She pushed her hair back over her ear. Words hung in the air, unsaid, unheard. What else was there?

“I didn’t mean to –“

“To what!?” she said, eyes flaring slightly.

“I – “

The car was crowded. No one paid them any attention. They didn’t exist.

“This is 34th Street. Pennsylvania Station. Transfer here for Long Island Railroad,

New Jersey Transit, C, and E trains. 42nd Street, Times Square next.”