**A Sudden Snap**

The train was crowded. It was stifling. Surely winter beckoned, but it seemed that the climate gods had other whims. The day had been in the mid sixties.

The passengers wore heavy coats in a determined way, as if to say, I know what season it is damn it, and you can't persuade me otherwise.

Yet staring out the window yielded neither the cold overcast noon that one would have expected, but rather a bright sunny world of active-goers.

And it was this anomaly which frustrated.

It really was a combination of events. The clock had been too loud. There had not been enough sleep. There had been a drizzle on the way to the train, just enough to be uncomfortable; just enough to *threaten.* Yet then, of course, when finally on the train, simply this sunny humid afternoon.

Catching the train had been close. That had been a large piece of the frustration as well. Previous knowledge had screamed out when the sounds of the announcement warned the approaching train. Peering down onto the tracks revealed lights. Another minute late out of the door and the train would have sailed right past, too quick to climb aboard.

As it was, the run was annoying, unpleasant, and ultimately, unneeded.

As soon as the doors had slammed shut, like they always did, with no regard for the desires of the latecomers, an announcement had splurted over the neigh impossible to understand comms.

Psssshhhhhhhh… going to have to hold at the station… psssssh… another ten minutes… psshhhhh

So to begin with, there was not much amusement to go around and it only got worse as time progressed.

With excruciating slowness, the train finally lumbered from a standstill to about halfway through the tunnel. The comms came on again and the conductor tried to explain what was happening, but he might as well have taken a big chug of Listerine and simply gargled in front of the microphone for all it was worth. Incomprehensible.

The other passengers would have normally had simply turned to their phones, but they were in that part of the tunnel. You know the section right? The big long stretch between the two stations where they always stop. And worse, it doesn't have any reception. Not a single bar. It might as well have been the 1800s.

And after a brief while the others came to the same conclusion and started to stare around the train in a disinterested yet slightly pissed manner.

One of them locked eyes for a moment, probably by accident, but such a contact was very much unwanted and it was easy to look at another direction. Like at the wall.

It was covered with posters. Most of them were for consumer goods of some sort, but a few were for medical trials, and others were for programs.

The absurdly happy actors on the posters stared down mockingly.

Or perhaps yet another direction. Like out the window.

Huzzah. Tunnel. Very interesting.

Not much out there really. Bunches of wires. The occasional light fixture.

A sudden jerking sensation rocked the car. They were moving again.

But the sudden acceleration… Just that tiny little knife wheedling its way through the armor, seeking out its very weakest point, and when identified, mercilessly sticking it into the flesh. Why couldn't they fucking start the train without bowling everyone over?

Luckily there was a handhold nearby, and gripping it was sufficient to arrest any mortifying possible fall.

And there they went. Feet by feet. The race of a lifetime. It was assured that the conductor certainly had places to be; for sure they had requested a special license to travel so blazingly fast.

It was easy to identify the same light fixture from earlier as it ever so slowly crept by.

Was it ten minutes or twenty? An absurd amount regardless. At this point it would have made sense to take off jackets and that sort of thing, but the slowness of the train, the excruciating experience of hearing the announcer for the third, now fourth time, had obliterated any conscious thought.

They were in the twilight zone now; here be dragons. Really fucking boring dragons made out of disgustingly dirty cables and soot covered light fixtures.

Yet finally, as if emerging from a dream state, the train lumbered into the next station, for, after all, in boredom even death may die. And standing in the train was certainly death.

A sudden crush of people flooded the compartment. A hodgepodge of tourists, earnestwhile corporate compatriots, be-suited braggadocios, and plaid wearing everymen clambered into the train.

A voice wanted to warn them, to yell at them to turn around, that only death from the most insipid fate imaginable lay on this train. But nothing was said. It was far too loud. Too loud to speak, too loud if spoken. Gotta be quiet in public spaces. Have some manners.

And it was only when the last people shoved their way in that the regret engine really started up.

It was way too hot in the train. The heaters had been set for a cold day. It was like the units in apartments. They had two settings: surface of moon and surface of sun. And things were looking sunny.

There might have been others who felt the same way. But therein lay the trap. The insidious cunning ploy. For once the passengers had embarked, and been forced into too-close personal contact with one another, there was no longer any room to politely take off one's coat.

A few of the most rude men shoved their neighbors away as they clumsy clawed at their garments, but by in large they were met with the mild contempt of the stranger. How dare they inconvenience everyone for their own gain?

So the majority of the passengers suffered, hands and bodies held in place by social chains too strong even for the mightiest gym goer. The curse settled on them, men and women alike.

And the train squeaked on.

The jacket had a collar. It could be adjusted so that a bit, just the tiniest bit of air could…

But then the person nearby bumped into the hand mid task. A thin bead of sweat on the forehead.

Better to wait. The stop will come eventually. Then the jacket can come right off with ease. Two stops. Surely that was easy enough for the train right?

Wrong.

The next section of the track rose subtly from its depths, bit by bit until it found itself among the vehicles. Or at least, it would have if the bridge hadn't been closed to car traffic. A single bus ventured across the expanse.

The sudden light attracted many eyes. Out the windows they went. The bus was found. People were identified on that bus, as was human nature. And again, just a brief second, eyes locked. Bus and train were connected. Only for a second however, since the bus was capable of going reasonable speeds. Ha!

The sigh of regret in the train was almost palpable.

The bridge was under construction, and the whole project had apparently sufficiently hindered almost three thousand years of accumulated human knowledge in bridge maintenance. The inherited knowledge of the ages, combined with cutting edge technology and the world's largest economy was absolutely no match for a spot of water and some concrete blocks. Not even close. Slow safe speeds were required. Wouldn't want to go too fast! Might fly off the fucking tracks eh? Right into the damn water!

But there was the water. Glistening. And it sloshed its merry words which all could hear, at least in their too warm hearts: cool and inviting I am, yet unobtainable. Didn't you know Tantalus? You must suffer for your crimes!

The sight that normally would have had the tourists crammed up against the scratched plastic windows barely entertained a response. Their eyes looked upwards towards the gleaming skyscrapers but their souls were gone. Trapped in boredom. The train's conductor had opened his forbidden grimoire, sacrificed a goat to the eldritch lords of time and slurped away the passenger's very spirits with each announcement.

It was getting hard to breath. Agitation was definitely a problem.

Sure, it was infinitely more interesting here in the surface world. There were things to look at. Things other than the blackness of tunnel.

But here too was the cruel sun. And it was that sun which proved to be the undoing.

The conductor came onto the comms, and, dropping all pretense at this point, simply cried his unspeakable words into the helpless ears of the prisoner passengers. The rasping slurry of demonic phrases, the chaotic rite came forth.

The train ground ground to a halt right in the center of the bridge.

No… Dear god no…

But there was no god. Not on that bridge. With the sun overhead, shining cheerfully through the thick melting windows, and the heating system performing much better than any of the logistics systems, all those aboard were doomed. There was only heat.

And yet it was more than heat. By lets try not to think about it.

The collar was one thing. It was something that could help. It was an action.

The chains shuddered. People nearby narrowed their eyes as they were pushed slightly aside.

Now surely…

It was not enough. The bulk of the coat was still encompassing, clinging to body with a tenacity made all that worse by an unpleasant and embarrassing amount of sweat.

The crowd vibrated now. Everyone was suddenly acutely aware of their own discomfort. It was a game with only one player: each person and their tolerance. How long could they last? How strong was their will? Surely the elder gods chuckled in wet, meaty exclamations.

And the weak link was here.

All of the factors combined. The horrible bleary eyed wake from slumber, the sudden rain, the rush to make the train, the lack of breakfast, the years spent on the train, the heat… Dear god the heat…

Breathing became heavy. Patient zero.

It wasn't just the heat. The heat was unbearable, it was claustrophobic, maddening, but what was the true spirit breaker was the knowledge that they were stuck there. It was the lack of any possible action. It was the complete and utter destruction of the human psyche.

Right there on that train, crushed between seven people all similarly trying not give into their nervousness, western philosophy failed in a massive way.

What happens when someone has been raised all their lives with the idea that their own actions and individuality are the cornerstone of their own existence, then suddenly thrust them into such a powerless situation? Don't forget the added communal aspect of disturbing those nearby.

It was like a rising tide. Perhaps those nearby could even feel it, the helplessness. Inch after inch, degree after degree, the water raised. First coming up to the waist, then the shoulders, then the neck. Until, finally it was at the very throat, rising inexorably above the lips, even as one stood on tiptoes, gasping for air. The dark pool of helplessness rose over the head. Now was the time. Drowning! Drowning! Drowning!

Mammals know when they're drowning. But humans are cursed with intelligence, self consciousness and petty thoughts towards the neighbors on the train. So perhaps drowning went quietly? Not with a bang but a whimper?

Well, that’s how it might have went for another person. The slow slip into unconsciousness as the brain metaphysically peace'd-out. See you sucker.

But not here. Not now. Because darn it, don't you know, people don't really like to drown. And the thoughts of helplessness, well, its one thing to just think them, but its a very different think to *realize* you're thinking them. Once that whole instinct/survival thing got involved, the whole, will to live or whatever, all bets were off.

So what happens when an unstoppable force meets a very moveable object? That objects going to move. And move it did.

“Hey! What are you…?” One of the people nearby yelped as the protagonist tore their way towards the door.

But their words were cut off with a single sight. Matted hair, soaked with sweat. The jacket, still half on, clinging on vehemently despite attempts to the opposite, and the eyes.

They weren't the eyes of someone on their way to work. This wasn't a commute anymore. That's a human word, a constructed fake word. That was way too high level for what was going on. Things had been broken down into their simplest constituent pieces. We're talking bare metal. They were here. The train was here. The sun was here. That couldn't be denied. It was a fight: life or death!

“OH GOD LET ME OUT OF HERE!”

Hands still stuck in jacket sleeves pushed aside the last passengers and clawed frantically at the plastic windows.

Don't you see the water? Water good! Water cool! Get to the water! Haha, just gotta get through this door and we'll be all set! Go! Go! Go!

The other passengers recoiled. This obviously should not be happening. This was not the way a proper commute should go…

But didn't they feel it as well? And perhaps they slowly realized how close to their own limits they were. And perhaps a slow pale of terror crossed their hearts when they realized: Now there's a person whose talking sense. That response? This situation? Completely reasonable.

The prophet clawed at the window with enhanced strength, raking their hands over the smooth, graspless surface. A dull moan escaped the lips. The door was hard to open. I'm going to need some help here! Come on crew! Gotta lend a hand!

Well wouldn't you know? There's this neat trick about large groups of people. Large groups of humans. Group sociology or something. *When one person does something it's much easier for others*.

A sigh escaped the closest of the other passengers. They had all had things wrong. They had been standing there in the horrid wilting heat, slowly dying as the train refused to move. And whats worse is that they were doing it *alone*, each one fighting their own losing battle against themselves. But this was a group activity.

So when our hero flung off their cloak and announced 'I am Spartacus!', it opened the blessed floodgates. Masks off everyone! Its time! Reveal! Gentlemen, Reveal! Weare *all* Spartacus!

A wave of recoil shuddered through the ranks of the passengers. Those closest to the door joined in the clawing with maddening intensity, shoving and gasping for a purchase.

And thus, the professor says, pointing stick firmly in hand, one neutron destabilizes a nucleus begetting more neutrons! Isn't fission great?

“I agree!” Shouted the passengers.

The chain reaction churned its way through the car. People were standing on seats, pressing their bulging eyes against the window, struggling, struggling, struggling, to get out, to escape the heat, to escape the helplessness. Why not both?

Coats were shredded like so much paper, the cloth filling falling to the ground like the snow that was promised only a half week earlier. People wrestled with one another. Trampled, in mad desperation to escape, or barring that, do something, anything.

It spread from car to car. Imagine the horror of gritting your teeth trying desperately to hold on for the train to *move across the fucking bridge* and just casually glancing into the other car and seeing what true liberation is like. Horror? Perhaps relief! Thank god I don't have to do that anymore! Man repression sucks, I'mma going to just let go a little you know?

The train churned as one. Bodies writhing on top of bodies, punching, tearing against the walls, against one another. It was wonderful.

But all good things must come to an end. The cruel conductor, perhaps seeing the chaos unfolding in the cars, or some helpless passenger flailing wildly finally hit the emergency door release.

The contents of what used to be men and women spewed onto the track. Some climbed the fence, ran across the road and threw themselves into the water. 10/10 Forget the Russian judge. Others were just satisfied to get out of the train and blinked in the sun when they got to the tracks. The least motivated were mollified with just *seeing* that there was a possible way to escape, and collapsed.

All in all, it was pretty much 100% satisfaction.

Police investigating the incident said things like 'crowd mentality' and 'mob psychosis'. The conductor was held for a day or two but they quickly worked out he wasn't really to blame. I suppose he hid the pentagrams in one of the secret spaces they have up front there.

A review of the tapes narrowed down the person who caused the whole thing and of course they were investigated. They were all investigated. You just don't get to liberate yourself like that. There's gotta be hell to pay you know, upending the social order and all.

No matter how long they grilled the passengers, they couldn't hit anyone with anything criminal. It was just a freak accident. The heat was blamed. The slowness of the train was blamed. The bridge was blamed. But at the end of the day, none of these things could be held accountable.

However, in the heart of all those involved, and especially in that of our hero, they knew better. They had a little taste. A little bite of something good, just a tiny little nibble. And maybe it was just some crazy one-off thing a friend brought over from another country, a once in a lifetime flavor... but maybe it was something you could order at a restaurant…? or maybe you could even make it at home? After all, its got a great aftertaste, this sudden snap.