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Switching

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Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters is an international literary journal dedicated to publishing works encompassing, but not limited to, the Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. The Journal is especially dedicated to presenting the arts and letters of those communities that have long been under-represented within the creative discourse of the region, among them: Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles, Maroon societies, and the Asian and Amerindian societies of the region. Calabash has a strong visual arts component.

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Peggy Garrison

SWITCHING

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At 42nd
I descend the lower ramp
to catch the 7,
pass the friendly leg-less man
in his wheelchair,
irritated that he's always friendly
and always there,
feel a pain under my arm
and a pull in my bicep
metastasizing me to the grave—
these past five down days—
is it holidays?
Is it chemical?
Did I eat enough protein for breakfast?

People on both sides of the platform
waiting—
I hear bongos louder and closer—
the drummer, dark, thin
wearing glasses, a shabby black jacket
and pants.
I imagine taking off my winter coat
and furiously dancing
right here on the platform
then decide he's not very good;
he can't hold a pattern for any length of time.

Five minutes of drumming,
plenty of people, yet
not one has approached
his open black case—
probably a crackhead,
doesn't deserve it anyway—but
what the hell.

I zip open my purse

and dig down for change,
two dimes and a nickel
(that's not enough) dig for
another quarter—reflect
it takes just one person
to set the train in motion.

I drop my little load
in his big black case.
He gives me a smile;
I give him a thumbs-up
walk away and hear
a clink of change behind me.

I board the lucky 7.