

NEXT STOP CENTRAL STATION

By

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Characters

LAURA 20s-30s Elementary school teacher type, friendly

SAM 30s-40s Business-man type, cool and confident

ALAN 20s-30s Every-day Joe type, nervous; a courier in a major city

ANNOUNCEMENT Can be recorded or read from offstage

Place

A major metropolis subway car.

Time

Now.

NOTE:

The subway car need not be a realistic set; it can be done simply with a few chairs. One suggestion is three chairs on an angle, then a space to create an entryway to the car, and then two chairs perpendicular to the first set (creating a reverse L shape).

That is just one suggestion to keep it simple and intimate.

We're in a subway car. It's run down, but efficient. Well traveled and in a major metropolitan area. It's a weekday, about lunchtime.

LAURA, mid-20s and casually dressed, is seated and reading a book. She's near the door. Across the train is SAM, maybe 30s or 40s, sitting with a newspaper and briefcase, dressed in a suit.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Next stop Fulston Station.

(LAURA looks at SAM over her book. And goes back to reading. But then looks at him again and puts her book down.)

LAURA

Anything happening in the world today?

(No response from SAM.)

LAURA (cont'd)

Great.

(to herself)

Awesome.

(LAURA goes back to her book.)

(We hear a train announcement, in a automated kind of voice that is just clear enough to understand.)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Now approaching Fulston Station, please exit the train on your right. Thank you.

(PAUSE)

Doors opening.

(ALAN enters. 20s and fit, he's also dressed casually. HE sits in the seats near LAURA. HE carries a small cooler, the kind that might hold a six-pack.)

ANNOUNCEMENT (cont'd)

Doors closing. Next stop, McKinley Avenue.

Next Stop Central Station 2

(LAURA looks at ALAN and his cooler.)

(Then her book.)

(Then ALAN.)

Hi... I'm Laura. LAURA

I'm working. ALAN

Oh. ... Okay. LAURA

(Pause.)

I'm sorry -- you were being nice. ALAN

I was trying. LAURA

This is my first time doing this. ALAN

Riding the subway or talking to strangers? LAURA

My new job, I'm on the clock. I'm really nervous. I don't want to get distracted and miss my stop. ALAN

Understood. No distracting. LAURA

(There's a pause... just awkward enough as these people suss each other out.)

What's in the cooler? LAURA (cont'd)

I'm sorry? ALAN

The cooler. In your lap. What's in it? LAURA

ALAN

Don't worry about it.

LAURA

What, is it like a bomb or something?

(SAM glances over.)

ALAN

What? No! What is wrong with you?

(to SAM)

It's not a -- don't worry, it's not what she said.

LAURA

You don't have to freak out.

ALAN

And you don't have to go around mentioning incendiary devices on public transportation.

LAURA

Well it's not a bomb is it?

ALAN

Would you stop saying that word?

LAURA

What, you think that one over there is an FBI agent? Uncle Sam might hear us joking?

SAM

I'm not an FBI agent.

LAURA

See? No harm. I was just kidding.

SAM

You shouldn't joke about such things in this city.

LAURA

Damn, sorry. I was just making small talk. Forgive me for trying to pass some time and make some friends.

ALAN

I'm sorry -- I'm just ... I've got three more stops till we get to Central Station and then I can connect to the hospital line.

LAURA

Oh my god, are you transporting human organs? Can I see?

ALAN

No!

ANNOUNCEMENT

Approaching McKinley Station. Please exit on the right.

(PAUSE)

Doors opening.

LAURA

Well, then we'll just sit here and bear the silence.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Doors closing. Next stop Anderson Street.

(LAURA puts down her book.)

(SHE and ALAN exchange awkward glances.)

(LAURA moves over and sits by SAM. SHE stares at him; he puts his paper down.)

SAM

Can I help you?

LAURA

Can you believe that guy? He won't show me what's in his cooler.

SAM

He just met you.

LAURA

Actually, I don't even know his name. A little suspicious don't you think?

SAM

I'm Sam by the way.

LAURA

Nice to meet you Sam. I'm Laura.

(They shake.)

LAURA (cont'd)

Where are you headed?

SAM

Central Station.

LAURA
And then?

SAM
Just Central Station. I have business there.

LAURA
Was that so hard?

SAM
No, it was quite lovely small talk. Very enjoyable.

(SAM goes back to the paper.)

(LAURA goes and sits by ALAN.)

LAURA
Very enjoyable.

ALAN
I heard.

LAURA
Good.

(PAUSE.)

ALAN
What do you want from me?

LAURA
Small talk.

ALAN
Why? We're just strangers. In two stops, we'll never see each other again.

SAM
We're all strangers, even in the best of times. But right now, play along. Or she'll never shut up.

LAURA
I like that one. He's observant.

ALAN
I need to focus on my job.

LAURA

We'll help you focus. Sam's getting off at Central Station so you won't miss it. Right, Sam?

SAM

That's a pretty good assumption.

ALAN

What's the point? Now Anderson's coming up and after that, it's one stop.

LAURA

The point is that everyday I sit here on this train and watch the world ignore itself. And it hurts. Everyone has a paper, everyone has a book, or music shoved in their heads... but you, you had a cooler. And you were going to be different. Something to talk about. Something to break the silence.

(ALAN doesn't say anything.)

LAURA (cont'd)

You know what? I don't care if you are a terrorist, it's something new.

ALAN

I don't have a bomb, Jesus, here look --

(HE opens the cooler for her.)

LAURA

Oh my god, look at it... it's so small.

ALAN

It's for a child. That's why I'm so nervous. My first day on the job and they give me a kid's heart. It's terrifying. To hold something like that in your hands.

LAURA

It's beautiful. Look at all that life. So fragile.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Approaching Anderson Street.

(PAUSE)

Doors opening.

(SAM exits without his briefcase.)

LAURA

Hey, Sam -- you forgot your...

(HE's already gone.)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Doors closing. Next stop Central Station.

(LAURA gets up and goes over to Sam's
briefcase. ALAN seals up the cooler.)

ALAN

What are you doing?

LAURA

I'm going to see if Sam has a business card or something.

(SHE opens the case.)

LAURA (cont'd)

I might be able to call and...

(SHE stops. Frozen.)

ALAN

What is it?

(No response. SHE's focused on the case.)

ALAN (cont'd)

Hey, you're freakin' me out, come on.

(ALAN comes over and sits by Laura, looking
inside the case.)

ALAN (cont'd)

Jesus. Is that ...?

LAURA

It's not a heart.

ALAN

We have to call the -- we have to get off this train.

LAURA

There's no time... he was going to Central Station, he had business there. It's the
next stop.

ALAN

So this is it?

LAURA

I don't even know your name.

Next Stop Central Station 8

ALAN
It's Alan.

LAURA
Nice to meet you Alan.

(LIGHTS begin to FADE as we hear:)

ANNOUNCEMENT
Now approaching Central Station.

END OF PLAY