

## Strangers on a Train

I've never been a particularly lucky person. If it wasn't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all. From the outside my life seemed insipidly normal but in reality it was a constant melee of unfortunate events. Take today, for example. I'd slept through my alarm after staying up half the night finalising a report for an important meeting scheduled this morning. Already running perilously late, my hairdryer had chosen today to finally take its last breath in a sudden shower of sparks and rancid smoke that had burned my eyes and caused mascara to run down my face. With only moments to spare, I'd hurriedly tried to make the best of the situation and then fled to the railway station. The automatic doors of the commuter train were just whooshing shut as I slid through unscathed only to have the strap of my handbag catch in the mechanism. The train lurched forward and the resulting tug released the strap from its holdings and scattered the contents of my purse all over the floor. After spending frantic minutes retrieving my lost personal effects from the filthy floor, I finally plonked myself into a nearby seat. I was out of breath and smelled like a combination of burnt hair and football player. I had an indistinct smudge down the front of my blouse that refused to budge no matter how hard I rubbed at it. Dark circles had pooled under my eyes from my hastily repaired mascara and my unruly hair had a noticeably lopsided skew to it. I told myself the resulting look was 'edgy' but I was fairly sure my new style wasn't going to catch on any time soon.

The commute from the Blue Mountains into the city was a long one but I didn't mind as it gave me time to indulge in my favourite pastime. I would secretly watch my fellow passengers and envisage interesting and fanciful lives for them. A young man was sitting across from me. He was slumped back in his seat, eyes closed. Tiny earbuds peeped out from his mop of dishevelled hair and a sleek, black guitar case rested precariously next him as the rhythmic rocking of the train threatened to dislodge it from the seat. I imagined his life. He had no doubt been up all night, rocking it out with his band at some trendy nightclub. The music had been loud and intoxicating and his fans had gyrated to the pulsating beat until the wee hours of the morning. My exhausted rocker was now returning home to his hip loft in the inner city suburbs for a well-earned rest.

Two seats in front of him, an elderly lady leaned over in her seat to whisper something to the squirming child nestled beside her. I pictured their conversation. They were off to spend the day at Luna Park and the sweet grandmother was extolling tales of the marvellous fun they would have, zooming down the death-defying rollercoasters and stuffing their faces with fairy floss until they were fit to burst.

The train lurched to a stop and a stunning woman sat primly in the seat before me. Her dark suit hugged her sleek figure and her hair was immaculately styled, not a hair out of place. I patted despondently at my own unruly locks and despaired of ever being able to emulate this beautiful creature. I visualised her life, a jet-setting air hostess on her way to the airport where she would soar to exotic destinations and mingle with the rich and famous. No boring occupation for her, I thought somewhat enviously. She wasn't stuck in a mundane job as a personal assistant with an oppressive boss who was the devil reincarnated. Not in the literal sense, you understand, but I could not help but think that it wasn't a serendipitous coincidence that his name was Luke Darkmead, short for Lucifer I'm sure. It was if his parents had foreseen the adult he would become and had named him accordingly.

My phone beeped loudly, disturbing my contemplation as if the mere thought of my boss had conjured him into existence.

"Hello."

"Smith! Where are you? You were supposed to get here early so we could prep for this meeting!"

"I'm sorry, I missed the early train but I'm on my way." I scanned the view from the window. "I think we're close to Granville Station. I'll get there as soon as I can."

"If you blow this for me, you needn't show up for work tomorrow!"

The call ended as abruptly as it began. Insufferable man! It was like he was living in the 1950's instead of 1977. I reluctantly bid a mental farewell to my travelling companions and jostled my way towards the front of the train in the hope that it would save me valuable

moments when we reached the station. I approached the door of the final carriage when the deafening screech of metal on metal filled the air and I was thrown to the floor as the carriage lurched violently to the left. My momentum carried me forward, slamming my head into something hard and unforgiving. Pain exploded and my vision blurred. The acrid taste of blood filled my mouth and a cacophony of disjointed screaming echoed in my ears. A thunderous roar vibrated from the back of the carriage and the air was suddenly filled with a choking haze of gas and dust. Disorientated, I clambered my way to the nearest window and stared disbelievingly at the mound of concrete shrouding the carriage I had just exited. Trembling with shock, I thought of the young man, the laughing child and the beautiful woman. Strangers on a train that now lay buried beneath tonnes of rubble and debris. I absently touched the gouge on my head. Maybe I was lucky after all. I had just been saving it for the moment that I would need it the most...