

Mr. Christopher Nardelli, revealed the small white sticker on the front of his magazine. To the other passengers he appeared engrossed in the glossy smut. Hesitant to soil his tailored charcoal suit, he stood, feet a little more than shoulders' width apart, and rocked with the train. Dull lights flicked by in the darkness outside the window of the door behind him, illuminating small blurry details on the tunnel walls. Eyes, my eyes at least, couldn't help but try to track a crack or door or artwork as it flashed by. The movement was too quick and focused. It strained the fibers in my head. The slow illuminated interior was much less painful to peruse and myself far more rewarding to ruminate upon.

Mr. Nardelli agreed. He would flick his attention about the train before pretending to focus once again on the glamor in front of him. Some people, deemed important due to the merits of corpses of the same surname, needed to eat more despite pioneering the latest trends in the liquidation of body mass. Others, of similar fame or that of previous one time achievements of social absorption, needed to eat less. Surplus management was of extreme importance at the time.

The train bucked hard to the right and Mr. Nardelli's swaying shoulders needed to use the door as support. A sticker on the window warned against pretending the doors were walls for leaning, but they did a good job acting as a wall nonetheless. I've never seen them open like that, with pressure. Mr. Nardelli grimaced. He wasn't concerned about the millions and millions of microorganisms that had a lifetime of opportunity to cross from the door to his body via the threshold of his shoulder blades. He instead was tussled over dust and the possibility of getting dusty. He folded the front cover of his magazine back to create basically a binding and one page that was manageable with just one hand. With his liberated right hand he grabbed onto the

mirrored metal pole made for grabbing. An image of micro-armies marching up his palm flashed momentarily through his mind before he pushed it aside. What choice did he have?

He shared the pole with another. This other was old. Mr. Nardelli first recognized this through the man's hands. Looking through Mr. Nardelli's eyes I could see that thick blue veins made a raised map from the man's knuckles into his white shirt sleeve. He wore a loosely fitted suit and a long thick gray beard. I too wore a beard at the time, but it was not gray because I was only a few decades old. Mr. Nardelli too, it was like mine.

Based on the man's headwear and facial structure he was of Arabic ancestry. He was having trouble keeping his eyes open, which made him sway jerkily every few moments in half sleep, which made everyone standing near his wide frame uncomfortable. Despite the effect he was having on others, he is of no importance to this story. He simply shared the grabbing pole with Mr. Nardelli in the same way I shared a car with both of them. Not precisely the same level of sharing, but we're still of complete unimportance.

Mr. Nardelli had already moved on from his observations of the old man because it is much faster and more efficient to live one's life than it is to describe it. Speed and efficiency were just as important in those days as was surplus management. Both were vital to day to day, moment to moment living for the common citizen. However, in any interactions that held any weight toward the future, efficiency dropped rapidly to the background of all other concerns.

Take Mr. Nardelli for example. He barely had time to glance at each short attentionless headline before his eyes jumped to their next subject all the while barreling in an underground train through a city known for fast walkers who didn't sleep. The top speed that Mr. Nardelli, myself, and the millions of other underground multitaskers traveled at was approximately fifty-five miles per hour.

I must digress. This subway and its inhabitants and their stories existed in New York City. This was an American city so this is an American story, regardless of any similarities that it may hold to the countless other animal interactions that have occurred on the planet Earth. Due to these American origins, the word gray is written instead of grey despite my love for grey. Also miles are used despite the fact that in any other place occupied by any other country, kilometers were the accepted measurement for great distances. If this took place in England for example, where grey was written, the train would have been travelling eighty-nine kilometers per hour. And now I regress.

Underground, with stops, the particular Four train on which Mr. Nardelli traveled could have covered the length of the urban island of Manhattan in about thirty minutes. On the surface he could've used most any phone to call someone, perhaps my brother on the other side of the planet in a nation called Japan, in a matter of seconds. Thankfully, time was a global phenomenon whose measurements were accepted basically worldwide.

Mr. Nardelli could have accomplished these feats and more as fast and efficiently as brains allowed, but he couldn't find the time to speak to his wife despite her proximity to him in the subway car. I had not at first noticed her relevance, but when she turned to more brazenly defy the window warning I noticed the letters N A R D E L L I written in pen across the top paper thin pages of the book she was reading. Unlike her husband, Mrs. Nardelli was engrossed in her reading material. Her eyes flickered only from line to line of what must have been riveting prose. Her thin curved lips mouthed the occasional word. Her nose was lightly freckled. She had brown hair that could have been described precisely the same as she herself, mousey and beautiful. Mrs. Nardelli wore a tight long gray skirt and a loose salmon cut-sleeve buttoned blouse with gray open top heels that still only raised her to the height of her husband's shoulder.

His shoulder, for simplicity's sake, rose only as high as my shoulder. My shoulder, on average, is higher than most other shoulders. His eyes, I noticed after mine devoured his mate, were fixed to me. His glaring was humorous to me because I was wholly invisible to him and the metaphysical and metamental implications were certainly worthy of a chuckle. For fun I returned his stare until he looked off embarrassed. As was his pattern he read quickly about some scandalous break up of some dubious couple before resting his eyes on the low cut shirt of a pneumatic young brunette further down the car. Mr. Nardelli saw just a fraction of a hidden tattoo on her right breast and his eyes lingered longingly, desperate to see what it was and understand what it meant. She suddenly felt his gaze because she looked at him. She accepted his peeping and smirked across the car knowingly. He shrugged a smile back at her before he returned to the safety of his magazine.

He didn't want to, but Mr. Nardelli couldn't help but fill in the rest of the tattoo when he pictured it and her voluptuousness bouncing naked upon him. Without breaking stride he leaned up and sank his teeth into the inked panther paw. He shook the thought from his mind. It was too improper for the commute home, too common. The loud speaker crackled.

A crowded train is no excuse to sexually harass fellow passengers...

Mr. Nardelli glanced furtively at his wife, as did I. He looked back at his pages. I wonder what part she's up to. She was reading *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. I learned this through Mr. Nardelli's knowledge and when she readjusted her hands for a moment showing me the painting of two men pondering a bridge. Mr. Nardelli wondered whether or not she thought of him as Robert Jordan or Pablo. He nearly snickered aloud into the pages he no longer saw. He pictured himself sulking though the Spanish mountains and loving horses.

The old man, in his haphazard dance, remained stationary while the entire car moved around him. Another suited man bumped shoulders with him and angrily changed grabbing poles. The appearance of the suited man was just that, an appearance, and Mr. Nardelli and I judged him despite our knowing better.

The next stop is Grand Central- Forty-Second Street...

Grand Central, while being the hub of so many shuffling feet, was incredibly neglected by the residents of New York City. The marble floors appeared in too many wide-angled multi-budgeted shots. The celestial ceiling was gawked at by too many foreign pick-pocket targets. On the rare occurrences I found myself in the grand hall I craned my neck like the rest though. It was the most magnificent transfer that I made each weekday and yet I desperately stayed below ground.

That day was no different as I would be moving on to a Queens-bound Seven train, as would the Nardellis. If I had to guess, the Panther Paw was any stop north of Eighty-sixth Street and the angry suit got off at Fifty-Ninth. It was hard to judge sleepy old men so I didn't bother. Am I really Pablo?

He knew he was. Looking at himself, he knew. But they were not old bitter lovers in a cave. Maybe in metaphor, but fight they did not. He prided himself on his ability to avoid confrontation. The bust of his suit rose a little with the air inflation. He turned the page of the magazine. Yes, that actress can wear cropped hair. Mrs. Nardelli could too. That would bring us back. He thought of running his fingers through her short hair while nestling in a sleeping sack. We should go camping.

He should have brought that up. It was a good idea. Neither of them had been camping in years. Then she could not finish up her lesson plans while he cooked. Maybe he would ask her

how she felt instead of sitting at his computer. He could ask her that while camping because she would say cold or hot or I hate mosquitos. They could have had sex like rabbits and then cross both “outdoors” and “in a tent” off that list that was lying around somewhere. She’d say no.

No. She’d say maybe. Mrs. Nardelli had developed that feminine novelty of absent contempt. It lived in her maybes. He scowled at the thought of the word. When Mr. Nardelli said maybe it genuinely meant maybe. I genuinely meant maybe. I just didn’t care enough to decide right then and there. You want Vietnamese? Yes. Do you want to see *Love Actually*? No. Can you drive my parents and I to the airport on June 2nd? Maybe. Do you want to start looking for a bigger place? I don’t know.

The train is now approaching the station...

The old man’s eyes opened and he turned towards the door. Mr. Nardelli flipped closed the magazine and held onto the pole tighter as his body tried to move faster than the train. It was/is important to slow one’s self down in such instances. Falling was/is embarrassing to everyone and potentially harmful. Mrs. Nardelli braced herself against her inertia in the corner of the doorframe and her eyes flicked faster from line to line. She readied her bookmark for a rapid marking.

Maybe. But she wouldn’t have calculated dates and possible appointments or procrastinated such calculations. She’d have contemplated conversations that may or may not have come into existence. She’d have feared the possible emotions or lack thereof. Mrs. Nardelli’s maybes were a cold preemptive no. Sensing the end she waited, like Sordo, absorbing the empty taunts of the living to lure the fool into a shared death.

I wanted her to say yes. Yes to a question I knew I’d never ask.

As the train came to a grinding halt I saw the faces of those impatiently waiting to rush off to their next delay. Mrs. Nardelli marked her book and closed it. She too stared out the windows. It no longer hurt to do so. The promised passengers of the next leg of that train's travels adjusted themselves to make room for the outflow.

Maybe she'll say yes. I'll bring it up later. Maybe during dinner. No need to rush.

The doors hissed and slammed apart. In my last act of self-inquisition I watched Mr. Christopher Nardelli block the central vein of the car and extend a charcoal sleeve to allow Mrs. Nardelli to pass. My wife walked past me then. Her eyes were focused on the exit and the collapsing tunnel walled by slowly encroaching impatient commuters. She crossed the threshold behind the old man and from safety stole a glance back to make sure I followed as I should. Her eyes met mine and, as she accepted my movement off the train and after her, she proceeded ahead. We made it safely into the cover of the trees. Maybe. The Nardellis continued home.

Stand clear of the closing doors please...