

Alphabet City, Alphabet Soup

By Daniel Scheffler

My sneakers peep and grind as I run down to the bottom of the smallest steps in the world at the 2nd Avenue F stop. Why are these steps so tiny? Some town planner must have forgotten that the city is not just made for kids. The hot August air clouts me straight on the nose, and then coats the rest of my body as I journey further into the bowels.

Backpack on and endowed with headphones, I have made a conscious effort to always stay stationary near train tracks. “Mr. Clumsy,” I say to myself with what I’m told is my signature eyebrow tilt. I halt and find a pillar to lean on. A heart with two sets of initials is wounded through the paint—D.S. and J.T.—one of them matching my own.

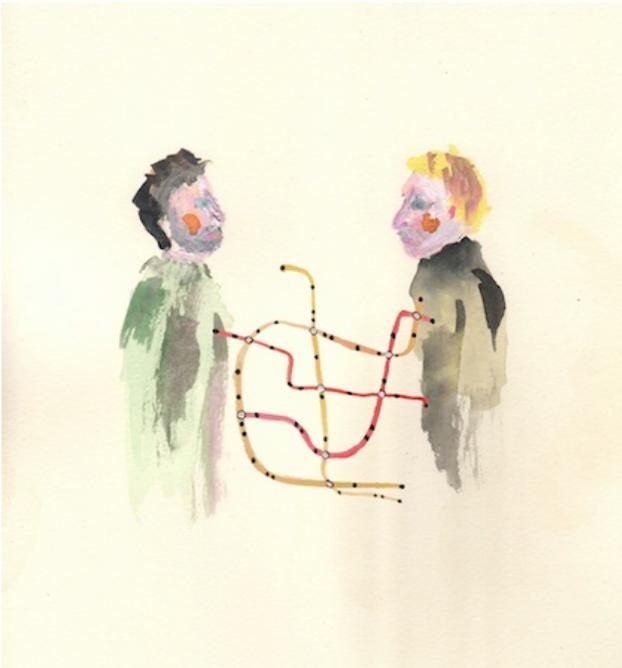


Illustration by Chelsey Pettyjohn

He is definitely staring. No doubt that’s a stare. But at me? Really? Just me, silly, rough-and-tumble me? Yes, definitely. He is jabbing my eyes with his darker-than-Heath-Ledger-as-Joker peepers as he leans too deeply back against the platform wall across the tracks. Moisture runs down my cheek as I fight the perspiration and struggle to ignore the subway system’s signature miasma.

But I don’t stop rubbernecking the well-over-six-foot blonde. I think out loud, “you have to be a Dutch athlete with a body like that.” I think he hears me as he smiles that Euro-trash peek-a-boo my way. He throws himself across the subway station and all over me just with his goggle. It jars me, and I feel like I’m falling through the floor.

Arriving trains bring release from the heat, and release from the stare, as simultaneous machines nearly headbutt between the platforms. I mount the machine, as my mirror does too from the other side, regaining the stare. Doors slide, lives change. Our faces are now a few feet apart but double glass prevents me from speaking, or breathing for that matter. He kisses me through the glass. A sucker punch.

My fingers look for a writing instrument, a way of giving him my number, my name, my heart, but he beats

me to it. He starts to write the letter J, the letter T...the initials on the pillar I call to mind; the other set matches his. The train rattles and without warning disappears in its usual way.

Daniel Scheffler is a writer living in the West Village, Manhattan and Cape Town, South Africa. He is currently obsessing about, and totally consumed by, his first novel.

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Making all Stressful Stops

By James Folta

I am particularly prone to vivid stress dreams, even when my life is relatively stress-free. It seems my body's natural resting position is stress. But this one stands out as the worst my unconscious mind has yet concocted, and I think it's no coincidence it took place in a subway station.

In the dream, I found myself in front of a turnstile, nervously watching the track, and trying to get the system to recognize my Metrocard. I am greatly ashamed when I can't show my native status by nailing my first swipe, so I emoted with a series of *can-you-even-believe-this-I-mean-come-on* faces. Of course, there were lots of people waiting to get through. I estimate that there were hundreds, perhaps thousands crammed behind me. I was occupying the only turnstile and I could feel their judgmental, sharpened glares: who is this guy, with his fancy suit (I was urgently rushing to a posh event) and his bad Metrocard skills? I was trying so hard, but in a stress dream, sweat counts for nothing.



Illustration by Andra Emilia Fenton

The stakes climbed higher; the station rumbled from an incoming train. I redoubled my efforts: "PLEASE SWIPE AGAIN," again and again and again. My zeal was so great that the card slipped out of my hand and fluttered to my feet. A groan from the onlookers. I quickly bent to retrieve the card but my slick suit