

Joseph Ostapiuk
A Night on the Subway

I stepped upon the subway train as I usually had at this time of the night, when the populace had grown thin and the countenance of the few who stood vacantly was blank and pensive. The car was empty when I looked down its whole, and at its very end a light sputtered on and off infrequently, like a candle which struggles to cease, but stays alit for what seems like an eternity. As the doors shut, the train began to rattle and rock down the tracks as it normally does when there are no voices to muffle its mechanical clatter. Looking across to the decrepit and murky windows across from my seat, another train rattled beside mine, pressing along the adjacent track with the same loud clamor and veracity; though through its decrepit and murky windows, by chance, I caught the eye of some pale and gentle creature. Her eyes looked painted upon her gentle face, caressed by her gentle hair and her gentle frown. She seemed to be drowned in her own thoughts as she stared emptily to the floor, where some somber dream of what never-was was playing before her eyes. As soon as I had seen her, our trains parted, and her pale and gentle countenance fell quickly into the abyss, seemingly gone from sight forever, as if she had never been there at all. Slowly stopping, my train skittered and screeched to a halt when the doors opened and the distant sound of nothingness crept into the empty car. Slowly, and without sound, an old man, of about seventy, shuffled past the doors and towards the end of the row of seats without ever lending the slightest of glances my way. He wore what seemed to be an old and ragged outfit which had somehow survived forty winters before, and carried with him a heavy burlap blanket which brought with it a heavy musk as he had passed. Lumbering to the corner, he huddled himself upon the seats and drew the blanket over his body in a slow and painful manner. His body never moved in the slightest as his mere breathing seemed to have ceased as the train once again began to hurdle down the tracks. Even in the routine shuffling of the car, his body remained still and

motionless while his frame was completely covered by the burlap blanket. When the train once again skidded to a halt, he remained still and soundless, like a mummified man who had been cold and silent for a thousand years before. Drawing my attention from the mummified man, I once again listened for the distant sound of footsteps walking towards the car, but could hear nothing but the sound of trains rattling down their worn and beaten tracks. Suddenly, a young couple stepped through the doors before they had shut, and sat in the opposite corner of the motionless man. Though they had been facing each other, I never heard a word uttered from their lips as they sat down in the furthest seat from me, absorbed into one another inexorably. As the train once again rattled around the bend, its dirty and smoggy windows let in brief flashes of light which gloomily fell around the pillars the train raced by. As the light flitted through the car, I caught the brief scenes of the lover's smiles passing between one another and the lifeless body of the old man; the loving eyes of the couple and the breathless air of the old man; the clasped hands of the lovers and the dead and frozen countenance of the old man. The train passed through a dark corridor for a few moments when, emerging on the opposite side, I had noticed that the couple was no longer in its seats at the end of the car, and looking towards the motionless man, he too was gone from sight. I stared deeply into where they had sat and just as if they had never been there at all, their seats were vacant, and with their vacancy- a terror of the heart struck my core- a chilling in my bones permeated through my body. "Had I dreamt them all along?" The train rattled and screeched to a halt when the doors opened to the long and empty terminal. Staring at the door with a shiver down my spine- a desperation in my eyes- its passageway void and endless fixated my gaze entirely and without distraction. Suddenly, they shut, and with a sigh of relief, I settled back into my chair- when looking to my opposite side- a man sat stared blankly at windows across from him. Nearly falling from my seat, I tried to exit the train when it once again began to move. Turning wildly around, I noticed the man had too disappeared from his seat, and I once again sat down in my seat as the train rattled around the bend. As it skittered to a halt, I thrust myself from its

opening and hurried to the stairs from the subway. Without looking back, I ran up the steps and thought to myself, “What peculiar people ride the subway at this time of night.”