

L TRAIN

by Chris Jennings

FADE IN:

EXT. DIRTY NEW YORK CITY STREET IN WINTER - EVENING

A young caucasian man in his early 30s, PARKER, dressed in casual office wear and overcoat walks through the city drunkenly. He pauses, fumbling to untangle the cord to his EARBUDS and inserts them in his ears. He clicks the play button on his IPOD and we hear indie music in the background as PARKER narrates an inner monologue to himself. He sways unsteadily as he walks through the city.

PARKER (V.O.)

Damn. You're fucked up. You drank too much wine. Of course, it was almost impossible not to at half-price bottles. What an unbelievable happy hour, especially for Manhattan. Then again, she kind of inspires you to drink heavily, doesn't she? She gets all weepy and starts telling you how much she misses you so you'll spill your guts to her. And then you won't see her again for another six months. Ridiculous.

A young attractive Bolivian girl in her mid-twenties, GABRIELA, in a form-fitting dress, coat, and fuzzy cap walks quickly through another part of the city carrying a large BAG on her shoulder. She pauses, pulling out her IPOD from the bag and inserts the EAR BUDS into her ears. She clicks the play button and we hear indie music in the background as GABRIELA narrates an interior monologue to herself in a slight Bolivian accent. She resumes her stride purposefully.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

Fucking asshole professor. Narrow-minded motherfucker. Says it's too "experimental." That he doesn't "get" it. He's such a fucking

literalist. I don't know what he wants from me. Actually, I do know what he wants from me, but I'm not going to do it. He can fail me for all I care.

She pulls out a cigarette, lights it and begins smoking furiously while walking.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

(considers)

Except that if he fails you, you lose what little student loan money you already have and don't graduate.

(sighs)

What will you do then? Get another job waitressing? You're barely making it as it is. And you can't ask your father for more money. He'll see you as a failure. Just like that professor. Fucking asshole!

CAMERA CUTS BACK TO PARKER WALKING.

He looks down, expertly navigating around a pile of dog shit without slowing his stride as he passes closed store fronts and other people on the street wearing headphones.

PARKER (V.O.)

Well, she was always agonizing over what she wanted to do with her life. Like she could never quite find her purpose or something. I think she thought she was going to be famous, though for what I don't know. That's one of the reasons you broke up with her, wasn't it? Because she would just get depressed and sit on the couch eating Ben and Jerry's and watching American Idol every evening?

(sighs)

But, of course, now you miss that little body cuddled up next to you

and would do just about anything to get her back, wouldn't you? So what does *that* say about you?

(muses)

It says that you're a freaking idiot.

CAMERA CUTS BACK TO GABRIELLA WALKING.

Gabriella expertly navigates a pile of vomit in the middle of the sidewalk while casually noticing a used condom on the sidewalk nearby.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

What did he say again? I was so pissed off I didn't hear what he wanted edited. Something about keeping it simple? Did he actually suggest I start over? He's so fucking old school! He's like my grandfather! And what did he ever do that was successful anyway? His films are so obvious. There're no questions in them. No passion. Can he fail me if I don't do what he says? Could I fight it? What's the point of fucking art school then if I can't do what I want? Why have debt that I can never pay off? It's just like what the Americans did to Panama in the 1960s with government subsidies to build infrastructure and keep the countries in servitude. Dictating how they should run their own countries, what kinds of news stories they should run. All that fucking propaganda.

(muses)

I should make a documentary about that.

CAMERA CUTS BACK TO PARKER WALKING WITH A DIFFERENT SONG PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND.

He notices a swarm of taxis swimming by and tries unsuccessfully to hail one and keeps walking noticing a variety of people on the street: people walking their dogs, hipsters going to bars, business people heading home, homeless people begging for spare change.

PARKER (V.O.)

She said she'd been looking into Buddhism, trying to improve how she relates to people, which surprised me. She can be so competitive sometimes, I wouldn't have thought it would occur to her.

(laughs)

I have to admit, When I told her that I thought Buddhism repressed necessary human emotions and she agreed so passionately with me, I got a secret thrill. She even said we were finally connecting again, and it really felt like we were. I haven't felt like that since we first started dating. I mean, there was a time when I felt like I could tell her anything. No judgment. No bullshit. Just complete acceptance of me for who I was. But, of course, it wasn't enough for you was it? The grass is always greener with you.

CAMERA CUTS BACK TO GABRIELA WALKING WITH A DIFFERENT SONG PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND.

Gabriela studies a bevy of televisions projecting a sitcom in a store window as she passes.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

(passionately)

No one here knows about American foreign policy abroad. No one cares. They just read about Britney Spears and Paris Hilton. They just watch those stupid reality shows as if they impart real emotion with these dumb bleach blonde women in short

shorts crying because they're not picked to be some millionaire's wife. If people in America knew half the shit the we do to poorer people abroad they would hang their heads in shame. Instead they turn up the television and iPods so loudly that they can't hear anything.

Gabriela looks down at her iPod in her purse and laughs bitterly shaking her head.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

And look at me. Little American girl with her fancy new iPod. What would my grandmother say? Is it selling out if you don't actually have any money?

CAMERA CUTS BACK TO PARKER WALKING.

Parker notices a homeless man sleeping on the street and stares at him as he passes. An elegantly dressed couple pass by walking an expensive looking dog.

PARKER (V.O.)

Homeless guy. Jesus, he's gonna freeze his ass off out here. Smells awful. Like he's just pissed himself.

(grimly)

I hope he doesn't die out here.

CAMERA CUTS BACK TO GABRIELA WALKING.

Gabriela notices a homeless woman sleeping on the street and approaches her.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

More homeless people. Homeless people everywhere. Nothing changes. Everywhere now is the same. Starbuck's on every corner, the same fast food restaurants, the same convenience stores. It makes me

sick. New York is starting to look
like the rest of America.

She drops a quarter in the dirty plastic cup next to the
sleeping woman.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

(muses)

Or maybe it's the other way around?
What's the difference. No one cares
anyway.

CAMERA CUTS BACK TO PARKER WALKING WITH NEW SONG IN THE
BACKGROUND.

Parker approaches a subway entrance.

PARKER (V.O.)

Is that a subway? Sweet. I didn't
know the L train stopped here.

INT. DIRTY NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY, L TRAIN STOP - EVENING

Parker slips clumsily on the stairs catching himself at the
last minute as people look him over warily.

PARKER (V.O.)

Whoa... careful. Man, I am really
drunk. I need to get some food.

He goes through the turnstile to the platform.

PARKER (V.O.)

Oh good, there are people on the
platform. Train should be coming
soon. Assuming they're on a regular
schedule. Fucking MTA.

Parker looks around at a diverse array of bystanders waiting
on the platform, some looking more freakish and obnoxiously
garish than others.

PARKER (V.O.)

Such a freak show down here
sometimes.

EXT. DIRTY NEW YORK CITY STREET IN WINTER - EVENING

CAMERA CUTS BACK TO GABRIELA APPROACHING SUBWAY WITH NEW SONG IN BACKGROUND.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

Be careful on the steps. You can't afford to break this camera.

Gabriela clutches her bag tightly and descends the stairs, going through the turnstile.

INT. DIRTY NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY, L TRAIN STOP - EVENING

CAMERA CUTS TO GABRIELA ON THE PLATFORM

GABRIELA (V.O.)

Ah, good. The platform is full. My train should be here soon.

She looks around at the people on the platform.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

Kinda crowded for this time of night.

CAMERA CUTS BACK TO PARKER.

Parker notices Gabriela standing on the platform near him.

PARKER (V.O.)

Well, hello there. She's pretty cute. All bundled up with her fuzzy blue hat.

He watches her for a moment.

PARKER (V.O.)

Okay, stop staring, dude. You're drunk.

Parker looks away gazing around the platform bored. His gaze eventually drifts back to her studying her intently.

PARKER (V.O.)

Actually, she's quite beautiful.
Dark features, almond eyes, toffee
skin. Alright, stop staring. Jesus,
you're fucking obnoxious.

He turns away again sighing.

PARKER (V.O.)

I'm really turning into a dirty old
man.

(smiles to himself)

It's come down to this: ogling
random girls on the subway. That's
great.

Parker finds himself staring at her again and turns away
negotiating with himself.

PARKER (V.O.)

Is it really that bad to be checking
her out? Oh, what the hell. You're
fucked up. You have an excuse. But
hey, if you're going to look, just
be a little more discrete about it,
okay?

Parker nonchalantly turns to look at Gabriella and finds her
staring directly at him. He turns away quickly.

PARKER (V.O.)

(panicked)

Shit! Shit! Alright, no problem.
Should you look back? No, just act
cool. It's no big deal.

CAMERA CUTS TO GABRIELA.

She eyes Parker warily.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

That guy keeps staring at me. What's
up with that? Is he checking me out?

(studying)

He's kinda cute I guess. But he
keeps looking away.

Parker looks at Gabriela out of the corner of his eye.

PARKER (V.O.)

She's just staring at me. Fuck. Why is she looking at me? Is my fly open? Did I leave my fly open?

He subtly moves his hands to the flap of his crotch to check his zipper while looking in the other direction.

PARKER (V.O.)

No, I'm cool. Alright. Maybe I'm mistaken. Maybe she's looking at something else.

He turns to face her and finds her looking directly at him again. He holds her gaze for a moment, smiling curtly before turning away again.

PARKER (V.O.)

No, she's actually looking at me. What's up with that? Is she checking me out? Was she just acknowledging that she knew *I* was checking *HER* out? Maybe she's just showing me that she wasn't going to be objectified by looking back at me. Returning Laura Mulvey's "male gaze" as it were.

(depricatingly)

Jesus, you're such a pretentious fucking grad student.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

Did he just touch his crotch? What's up with that? Was he scratching himself? That's disgusting!

She looks him over briefly.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

Yes, he's definitely good looking in an older man sort of way. Heavy eyebrows, stubble. Nice jaw line. I wonder if he's intelligent?

As soon as she turns away, Parker scans her body up and down.

PARKER (V.O.)
Definitely cute. Good body. Nice
tits too.

She turns to look at him again briefly and he turns away
casually.

PARKER (V.O.)
Okay, she's definitely checking you
out. So what are you going to do?

The subway pulls into the station.

PARKER (V.O.)
Ah, subway's here finally.

They get on the train together in tandem, looking at each
other awkwardly and smiling before standing next to each
other and looking in opposite directions.

PARKER (V.O.)
So what now? Do I talk to her? It
just seems so random here in the
train where everyone can hear you.
But she was definitely looking at
you.

(pauses)

Oh, what the hell. You're never
going to see this girl again. I
mean, what's the worst that could
happen? But listen, you have to be
pretty smooth if you want to pull
this off. Don't fuck it up, okay?
Otherwise, you'll be agonizing over
her for weeks.

GABRIELA (V.O.)
What the fuck? Why does he keep
looking at me without saying
anything? What, is he shy? I don't
need shy men. They're so hard to
respect. Wait, is he coming over?

Parker removes his ear buds and smiles sheepishly as he
approaches.

PARKER

Hey...

He hesitates for a second as if deciding what he wants to say.

PARKER

I'm Parker.

GABRIELA

Gabriela.

PARKER

(nodding approvingly)

That's a nice name. So... do you, uh, live in Williamsburg or...

GABRIELA

Oh, no. I'm just going to have dinner with a friend.

PARKER

Oh, cool. So, uh, where do you live?

GABRIELA

Carroll Gardens.

PARKER

(nodding)

Cool. I hear good things about Carroll Gardens.

GABRIELA

Yeah, it's nice.

PARKER

So... are you in school or, uh... what is it you do with yourself?

GABRIELA

Yeah, I'm getting my Master's at the New School in Media Studies.

PARKER

Nice. I'm actually in a writing program right now at NYU. So do you make films?

Gabriela nods humbly.

PARKER

Cool, what kind?

GABRIELA

Um... mostly documentary. Some short fiction.

PARKER

Awesome. What's your subject matter?

GABRIELA

Well, lately I've been working on this documentary about this crazy artist from Flatbush. He walks along the side of highways collecting refuse and turning them into these amazing psychedelic collages that are these strong social critiques about natural resources and energy conservation. It's some pretty powerful stuff. I've tried to edit the documentary to reflect his art, but it's come off as pretty experimental, so I'm not sure if people would get it.

PARKER

Wow, that sounds intriguing. I would love to see it. I totally love experimental film. Have you seen "The Five Obstructions"?

Gabriela shakes her head.

PARKER

Oh man, it's awesome. It's by Lars Von Trier who founded the Dogme 95 school and it's basically a documentary about this famous director who is challenged to remake his movies with these various restrictions and he pulls off these fucking amazing short films. It's like the guy is so talented, it doesn't matter what obstruction limits him. It's really a must for anyone editing documentary film.

She looks surprised and a little impressed.

GABRIELA

That sounds great. What's his name again?

PARKER

I'll tell you what, how about you give me your email and maybe we can discuss it over drinks or something.

Gabriela hesitates.

GABRIELA

Sure, that would be fun.

She takes a pen from her bag and writes down the number on a piece of paper. The train begins slowing down.

PARKER

Oh shit, this is my stop.

He takes her hand.

PARKER

It was really great meeting you. Uh... I look forward to hanging out.

GABRIELA

(smiles)

Me too.

PARKER

Okay, see you.

Parker exits the subway, puts his ear buds back in his ears and begins climbing the stairs to the sidewalk. Indie music begins playing in the background. He's smiling and there's a little spring in his drunken step.

PARKER (V.O.)

Huh. That was unexpected. Seems like an awesome girl. I wonder where she's from. She's cute, though maybe a little young. But, of course, you like the young ones, don't you?

He pauses smiling to himself.

PARKER (V.O.)

Actually, this would make a great short story. I should write this down.

CAMERA CUTS BACK TO GABRIELA.

Gabriella is sitting on the train listening to her ear buds while indie music plays in the background. She has her eyes closed and a serene smile on her face.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

Hmmm.. that was interesting. Kind of cool. I love how you meet random people in this city. He seems like a nice guy, maybe a little older, but you kinda like the older guys don't you?

She pauses smiling widely to herself.

GABRIELA (V.O.)

Actually, this would make a great short for my final project. I should script this out when I get home.

FADE TO BLACK.