

# **Bowery Station, 3-15 AM**

## **Dark City Lights: New York Stories**

**by Warren Moore, ...**

**Published: 2015**



I SAW A FOOD VENDOR at his cart near the corner of Bowery and Delancey. He didn't look too busy—which made sense for a Thursday night, with almost an hour before the bars closed. The Ballroom on Christie had disgorged its concert-goers a couple of hours earlier, but thank God there was a little more time to drink like civilized people, and there had to be some of those somewhere—it was the Bowery, but even so. The vendor would be busy enough later, but right now it was alone enough and cold enough that the heat from his grill made him seem to shimmy

under the amber streetlight glow. Straight ahead were the green-and-white subway globes and the stairs down. Just behind me was the streetcar shelter.

The JZ entrance on the southeast corner—my corner—was bright, white fluorescent lamps set above tile walls with concrete stairs down. I walked down the stairs, carded my way through the turnstile and made my way down to the platform.

A Queens-bound J train receded along the west side of the platform as I came down the stairs. The newsstand was long gone—a mosaic still said there should be one, but it had been gone since before I ever set foot there. But a copy of the day's *Daily News* sat abandoned on one of the benches. I picked it up and, like a good citizen, dropped it into the trash. I breathed in deeply. It was the usual underground clammy, but it wasn't warm enough yet to start smelling like a urinal. That would wait until July.

I read somewhere that Bowery Station is one of the least-used stops in the system. I guess that made sense—for a long time, most folks didn't want to go there, and the folks who were there may not have had much reason to get out. That's starting to change, I guess; the rising tide of urban homesteaders and folks who can't afford Williamsburg or Park Slope is starting to lap against this beachhead, too. But since it isn't used too much, the station is pretty low on the maintenance list. You can't even spot a CCTV camera to stand under on the platform.

I saw the girl standing on the Brooklyn-bound side of the platform. You might not have noticed anything, but I saw the fists clenched at her sides and I saw her lips moving, and I knew what she was gearing up to do.

The subways average about one jumper a month—one person who decides that if they can't make it here, they won't make it anywhere, and decides to call it a day under the wheels of a few tons of subway train. Most of the time it doesn't make the papers—the editors don't see much point in encouraging copycats—so you don't hear about it except for really flashy cases, like the guy last year who pulled his three-year-old off the platform with him. But even without much publicity, we get about one a month, and this girl—she couldn't have been more than twenty-five—had decided it was her month.

I heard the Brooklyn train before I saw the light—it sounds like a giant exhaust fan a good ten seconds before it shows up. I ran across the platform as she bent her knees to tumble onto the tracks, grabbed the collar of her fake leather trench coat and jerked her back as the cars roared by. I had let go by the time the car doors opened, but no one got off the train, and after a moment, the warning tones sounded, the doors closed, and the train rumbled away.

She looked at me. She was blonde, with that leftover seventies middle-parted Marcia Brady hair that so many of them seem to like these days. Not much makeup, or it was applied well enough that I couldn't tell. A little on the pretty side of average, I guess. She just glared at me for a moment and said, "What the fuck did you do that for? I'm never gonna have the guts to do that again."

"Then maybe you shouldn't have tried," I said. "I mean, it seems kind of drastic."

"Of course it's drastic," she said. "That's the point. If it wasn't drastic, I wouldn't be doing it. Not that I will now."

“Glad to hear it. Suicide’s wrong, you know.”

“What’s it to you?”

“Well, not much to me, I guess. But I kind of figure that you didn’t pick when you got here, so I’m not sure if you should pick when you leave. That’s God’s decision, and it’s not like there’s much chance to get right with God when you’re doing it, huh? When it’s your time, He’ll make sure it happens, I think.”

“You believe in God?”

“Yeah, there are even a few of us who live in town.”

She shook her head. “Well, I haven’t had much proof lately.”

“I don’t know,” I said. “I mean, I just stopped you from becoming subway mulch. That would seem to indicate something.”

“Yeah. It indicates that you’re a Jesus freak who can’t mind your own fucking business.” She was probably right, but she smiled when she said it, and her hands had relaxed out of their fists. We both knew she wouldn’t jump now.

I asked her why she had wanted to do it. It was about like I had figured. The job hadn’t come through, which meant the rent wasn’t gonna make, which meant that she’d have to hitch back to Antelope Springs or Sioux Falls or some other city named after animals or Indians. Another big city success story, except that I hadn’t let her write that last chapter. But I knew, even if she didn’t, that she hadn’t wanted to die with that last decision on her soul.

Another train rolled in, headed for Queens. A couple of guys got off and made their way up the stairs, and to the streets above, I guess. The girl and I just stood there and the train rumbled away.

“So I guess this is where we’re supposed to fall in love and I get my happily ever after, right?” she said. Her voice seemed to trail off, but it was just the beginning of the roar of the oncoming train.

I smiled, but shook my head.

“So what happens next?” she asked.

I saw the headlight. “This,” I said, as I hooked my left foot around her right ankle and shoved her off the platform.

The train hit her with the sound of a meat-filled Hefty Bag smacking the pavement, and the effect was much the same, I guess. Not that I stayed to watch. I was already running up the stairs, my feet light, the screaming of the brakes still in my ears. I had helped her leave without sin, and I knew I had done God’s work. Why else would He have put me there?

I felt cash in my pocket as I went up the steps opposite the ones I had gone down a few minutes earlier. I could get dumplings. Life was good. Amen.

