

STAGE

by

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SETTING: A subway train in Chicago. Evening rush hour. December. Cold.

SCENE: Commuters riding home from work, school, wherever. Some are tired, some read, some try to shut out the world with headphones. A homeless man sleeps on several seats. An automated announcement calls out the next stop.

TRAIN ANNOUNCER (OVER LOUDSPEAKER)

"State Street is next. In the direction of travel, doors open on the right at State Street."

From one end of the "subway car" a vendor enters. He carries a dufflebag of his items for sale: tube socks, bedsheets, fake leather wallets. He immediately begins hawking his wares in a loud voice to be heard above the rumble of the train. He's spiel is well practiced.

VENDOR

Tube socks! Five pair for a dolla! Tube socks! Got them tube socks here! One size fits every damn body!

He's ignored for the most part. He decides to try the wallets.

ID wallets, three dolla! Genuine fake leather wallets! Put your ID in 'em and shit! Three dolla! Let folks know who you are and where ya from! Everybody need an ID in this country, so you need something to put 'em in! ID wallets, three dolla!

Again, no takers. VENDOR tries again.

Bed sheets! Six hun'erd thread-count bed sheets! Genuine 'Gyptian cotton! Right off the Nile River. Ten dolla! Six hun'erd threads. You can count 'em yourself if you want, I'll wait. Ten dolla!

RIDER 1 is interested.

RIDER 1

What color you got?

VENDOR

What color you want, my man?

RIDER 1

You got blue?

VENDOR

What kinda blue you need? Baby blue? Powder blue? Sky blue?
(Pause to check in bag) Periwinkle?

RIDER 1

You got powder blue?

VENDOR

(Searching) Naw, ain't got that. I got white.

RIDER 1

That's it? Thought you said you had blue.

VENDOR

HAD blue. Sold out. Just got white now. That's it. Ten dolla.
Six hun'erd thread count. How many you want?

RIDER 1

Lemme see it.

*VENDOR hands sheet pack to RIDER 1,
who examines it, flipping it over
and over.*

VENDOR

Damn, it's just a bedsheet, man.

RIDER 1

I see that. (Thinking) Alright, gimme one.

Pays VENDOR.

VENDOR

Alright, there you go, my man. 'Gyptian cotton, straight
outta the pyramids. You gon' sleep like King Tut's ass
tonight.

Returns to selling.

Tube socks... ID wallets... six hun'erd thread count Egyptian cotton sheets. Tube socks... ID wallets... six hun'erd thread count 'Gyptian cotton sheets.

Suddenly, the door opens at the other end of the train car. Suddenly, the door at other end of train opens. A woman enters carrying a Bible, arms raised to the sky. She speaks loudly, making sure to get attention.

MINISTER

Good afternoon my children and praise the Lord. Give thanks to God for this lovely day we're having, my children. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord.

Everyone is slightly annoyed - including VENDOR - as most people are when someone thrusts religion into their face.

VENDOR

(Getting louder) Tube socks, five dolla! ID wallet, one dolla!

MINISTER

(Moving through the car) Are you ready to receive the Lord today, my children? I'm here to help you get ready for the Lord. Listen to the word of the Lord, my children and...

VENDOR

(Gettig more annoyed) I said... (Raising voice) TUBE SOCKS, FIVE DOLLA! ID WALLET, ONE DOLLA! SIX HUN'ERD THREAD COUNT 'GYPTIAN COTTON SHEETS, TEN DOLLA!

MINISTER

(She gets louder too) The Lord is waiting for you my children. You are lost, my children...

VENDOR

You won't be lost if you got an ID wallet. Look right in there and it tell you where you live. One dolla.

MINISTER

(Moving toward center of the train car) You need to open your eyes and find the Lord, my children. You are sleeping...

VENDOR

(The battle is on) ...on genuine six hun'erd thread count 'Gyptian cotton sheets! White only! Five sets left!

MINISTER

Walk to the lord, my children...

VENDOR

...wearing brand new tube socks! You get 10 pair for a dolla. You can walk to the Lord in clean socks 10 times if you want. One dolla...

MINISTER

You need only come to the Lord once to be saved, my children.

VENDOR

But just in case you need to go back again, take 10 pair. You could give some to your friends so they can walk to the Lord too.

VENDOR and MINISTER meet in the middle of the train car. It's a showdown.

MINISTER

(Slightly irritated) My brother, I'm trying to save a few souls here. Your blaspheming's not helping.

VENDOR

And I'm trying to make a few dollas here and you ain't helping ME. Why you messin' with my game?

MINISTER

The Lord doesn't play any games, my brother. The Lord is serious and He created me to do his works.

VENDOR

The Lord also created about six other cars on this train. Cain't you go do His work on one of them?