

An Epiphany at Wembley Park

I'm a decent man. I earn an honest living, pay taxes, and do my best to raise my two adolescent daughters on my own. If Michelle was still with us, she'd tell you the same.

'I was lucky to have shared my life with you. You're one of the good ones, Simon. Always have, and always will be.'

My darling wife's final words before the fucking cancer took hold and snatched her away from me for good. *Damn*, I miss her. Going home to her.

It's Michelle I'm thinking about when the tube pulls into Wembley Park. From the look of things, a concert must've just ended. The platform is heaving with adrenalized youngsters. Even through closed doors, I hear a chorus of voices belting a tune I don't recognise. In a key no one should have to listen to. And here I thought I'd enjoy a quiet journey home; it is after the evening rush and all.

I don't often stay late in the city. I've got my girls to think about. They need me at home more than ever these days. But a client insisted I join him for a meal. Declining his invitation could cost me the sale I need to fund my thirteen-year-old's upcoming school ski trip to France. I couldn't bear disappointing her.

So, there I am, standing with my back to the platform, when the doors hiss open behind me. I grip the handrail with my free hand and position myself firmly. Still, I'm rendered powerless when the crowd forces its way in all at once, filling the carriage with the stench of alcohol and a cacophony of shrieks and laughter. I lose my grip and lunge forward as shoulders, elbows, entire torsos shove me deeper towards the opposite side of the compartment—and up against a small-framed woman cowered in the space between the door and the bench seats. She whimpers as the full weight of my body slams into hers.

Using all my might, I push back to create a gap between us; to give her a chance to reposition herself. But efforts are futile. More and more people nudge and push their way in; maximum capacity be damned. Her body flinches with every shove. Only when I hear her sobs and see fear in her eyes do I realise she is terrified. She has been here before. Somewhere in the past, some man—some monstrous predator—took advantage of a tight situation and preyed on her vulnerability.

I want to tell her she is safe with me. I will protect her. I'm a decent man. But mostly, I want to apologise on behalf of a society that allows women and girls to live every day in constant fear.

When I am home with my daughters, I hold them close and whisper a daddy's promise. 'I will protect you. I will keep you safe.'