

THE END OF THE LINE

by

CJ BARNES

A business man is forced to confront a ghost from his past while waiting for his train.

INT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - DAY

The station is old, rundown. The tiled walls are chipped and cracked and, in some places, covered with peeling posters or graffiti. There is a small bar at one end.

People dot the platform waiting for their trains to arrive. There are a few homeless people, either wandering aimlessly or camped out with their meager possessions along the wall.

MATT (40), with a fresh haircut and a fine suit, hurries down the stairs onto the platform. He carries a briefcase and overcoat in one hand, a ticket in the other.

In his rush, he brushes roughly past PETER (70), weathered and thin-haired in rumpled janitorial coveralls, who mops the floor of the platform. "Peter" is embroidered on the chest of his coveralls.

Matt stops and looks up at the arrivals board hanging from the ceiling, then at his ticket. He's confused. He looks at Peter, a bit disgusted.

MATT

Hey! You!

Peter stops mopping and points to himself.

MATT (CONT'D)

Yeah, you. Is this the right platform for the 6:14 train?

PETER

(nods)

You're in the right place. Your train will be here soon.

MATT

Oh thank Christ. I feel like I've been wandering around this station for days.

(looks at Peter curiously)

Why do you even bother mopping this shit hole?

PETER

Oh, I just like to look after the place. All these folks rushing to catch their trains? They don't notice, but I don't do it for them. I keep it nice for travelers like yourself.

Matt nods absently; he's already dismissed the lowly janitor.

A train pulls into the station and lets off a load of passengers. New riders embark and the train pulls out of the station and disappears into a tunnel.

PETER (CONT'D)

Maybe try the bar. Fine place to wait for your train.

Matt gives the bar a look of disdain but walks towards it anyway. None of the passengers crossing the platform seem to notice him crossing their paths.

INT. TRAIN STATION BAR - DAY

It's small, cramped with a few beat-up stools at the bar.

The bell above the door TINKLES as Matt enters the bar, empty apart from the bartender polishing glasses, and sits on one of the stools. He sets his briefcase and overcoat on another.

The alcohol selection surprises Matt; they are all his favorite whiskys.

MATT

Double scotch, rocks.

Peter, in a fine white shirt and waistcoat, turns and smiles. His name is etched in gold on shiny black name badge.

PETER

Coming right up.

Matt double takes and looks back out onto the platform. Empty except for passengers hurrying about.

Peter sets the drink on a napkin in front of Matt.

MATT

Cute trick. How much?

PETER

No trick. No charge.

Still confused, Matt takes the whisky.

PETER (CONT'D)

Where you headed today?

MATT

Up north. Big meeting today.

PETER

An important meeting, no doubt.

MATT

Obviously. Otherwise I wouldn't be riding a shitty train to it.

PETER

There's nothing wrong with trains.

Matt looks out the window of the bar. Just outside, ISAIAH (40) sleeps in a dirty sleeping bag. A cup and a cardboard sign are propped up in front of him.

MATT

Trains are disgusting. Poor people using the trains, poorer people living in the stations. Places like this should be condemned.

PETER

Do you believe yourself so just that you can condemn others?

Peter points at Isaiah, laying on the ground outside.

PETER (CONT'D)

What about him? Does he deserve to be condemned?

MATT

(scoffs)

Goddamn right, he does. He screws up his own life and I have to look at him? It's bullshit, man.

Isaiah stirs and sits up against the wall. He begins coughing, which turns into a violent hacking.

Matt squints and has a moment of recognition. He walks to the window to get a better look.

MATT (CONT'D)

Wait a minute. I know him.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY

Fine furniture and expensive artwork adorn the sleek office boardroom.

Matt sits on one side of a rosewood boardroom table in a leather-bound chair. Isaiah, looking healthier and happier in a fine looking but less-expensive suit, sits across from him.

MATT

Mr. Fariman, I think we are in business.

ISAIAH

Please, call me Isaiah.

The two men stand and reach across the table to shake hands. Isaiah grins mightily.

MATT

Isaiah. We'll be in touch.

Isaiah bubbles with excitement as he gathers his things.

ISAIAH

This is huge. Thank you so much. I can't wait to tell my wife!

Matt nods dismissively and pours himself a drink from a crystal decanter.

Isaiah flashes a winning smile, waves goodbye, then exits.

Matt sips his whisky. His ASSISTANT (30), wearing her tight skirt and blouse well, passes Isaiah on her way in.

ASSISTANT

Shall I have legal draw up the paperwork?

MATT

No. Don't put anything in writing yet. I'll see if he's dumb enough to hand over his designs first. Then we can just ghost his ass and save a fortune.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. TRAIN STATION BAR - DAY

Matt shakes the vision from his head. Matt looks at Peter.

MATT

Come on. That has nothing to do with why he's here. It's just a coincidence.

PETER

Is it also a coincidence that you are here now? Why don't you go ask him?

Matt frowns at Peter but exits the bar onto the platform.

INT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Matt strides up to Isaiah. A WOMAN in business attire passes right in front of Matt and drops some coins in Isaiah's cup, then continues on. Matt glowers at her back and looks back down at Isaiah.

MATT

Hi...Isaiah, right? It's Matt. You probably don't remember me.

Isaiah doesn't seem to hear him. He starts coughing again.

MATT (CONT'D)

How the hell did you end up down here, man? Guess all those million dollar ideas didn't work out.

Another MAN in a suit drops coins in Isaiah's cup.

ISAIAH

(to the man)
God bless you!

MATT

Must've made some pretty bad decisions along the way, right?

Isaiah continues to ignore him.

MATT (CONT'D)

Hey, man, I'm talking to you!

Peter, back in his janitorial coveralls, leans on his mop a few feet away.

PETER

He can't hear you, Matt. He's not with us yet.

Matt is as befuddled by Peter's words as by Peter's sudden appearance and change of clothes.

MATT

I don't...what the hell do you mean he can't hear me?

PETER

Because all you are doing is talking. Try again. Speak from your soul and maybe he will listen.

Matt starts to say something and stops, unsure of what he's supposed to say. He takes a deep breath and squats down next to Isaiah.

Isaiah still takes no notice. He coughs violently again. There are flecks of blood on Isaiah's lips.

Matt gives him a disgusted look, but continues on.

MATT

It's a shame that it's come to this, Isaiah. I'm sure that if you were to look back, you'd find that we...you...made some mistakes. But life is hard, man. At the end of the day? It's nothing to do with me, you ending up here. It's just bad--

Matt places his hand on Isaiah's shoulder. A bright flash of white light cuts off his words.

BEGIN FLASHBACK MONTAGE

-- Isaiah argues with the Matt's assistant at the office. Matt stands in the background, scotch in hand. Security guards come up from behind and grab Isaiah.

-- In a nice house, decorated with family photos, Isaiah's WIFE (35) berates him and stabs a finger at a thick contract on the kitchen table. Isaiah holds his head in his hands.

-- Isaiah walks away from his house through the snow, suitcase in hand, while his wife watches from upstairs.

-- Matt, in an expensive suit, walks out of his office building into the sunshine, talking on his cell phone. He doesn't notice Isaiah begging for change, his suit now dirty and shabby.

-- Isaiah, sleeping on a door stoop on the street, coughs violently. Matt walks past, bundled up against the cold and wearing a Happy New Years hat and a beautiful woman on his arm, laughing and blowing party noisemakers.

END MONTAGE

INT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - DAY

Matt falls backwards. He stares at Isaiah, stunned, unable to speak. Isaiah puts his head back against the wall and starts to weep.

PETER

You see, Matt, some people look around and see coincidence. But coincidences are just life's way of showing us - of bringing us - what we need most. Or, for Isaiah, whom.

Matt tries to find words.

MATT

I'm so sorry.

Isaiah coughs violently again, blood splattering the floor. He slumps a bit and continues to cough up bloody spittle until it turns into a sickly wheezing.

Behind them, a train pulls into the station.

PETER

The 6:14, Matt. Your train.

Matt struggles to his feet. He looks at Peter with immense pain in his eyes.

MATT

I didn't...I need to get him help.

Peter puts an arm around Matt and ushers him to the train.

PETER

Isaiah's fate is his own now. Your purpose was served. Your judgement has been passed.

MATT

I don't understand.

PETER

You will. Safe travels, Matt.

The train car doors open and Peter, now in a bright red conductor's uniform, steps out and tips his cap. His name glows angrily red in an obsidian nametag on his breast.

PETER (CONT'D)

Welcome aboard, Matt. Take your seat. The train is now departing.

Dumbfounded, Matt shuffles onto the train and sits.

PETER (CONT'D)

(shouting)

Next stop, the end of the line! All aboard!

The doors HISS close and the train pulls away from the platform. As it departs, the lights inside the tunnel flicker out and a bright red glow emanates from within. The screeching of the train's wheels as it vanishes inside sound like human screams.

Peter the janitor watches it go and then returns to where Isaiah sits. Isaiah looks up as Peter approaches.

PETER (CONT'D)

What's wrong, Isaiah?

ISAIAH

Nothing. I could have sworn I just saw...a ghost from the past.

(smiles)

I think...I think I'm ready to go.

Peter smiles. Another train pulls in and Peter looks at it.

PETER

Here's your train, Isaiah.

Peter helps Isaiah up and turns him towards the train. Halfway across the platform, Isaiah looks back at his own lifeless body, slumped on the ground.

Passers-by take notice and start to congregate around Isaiah. Someone yells for help.

ISAIAH

Am I free now?

PETER

You are. Godspeed, my friend.

The doors open and Peter the conductor offers a hand. His name tag is shining gold, his name inlaid in ivory white. He helps Isaiah to a seat and the doors shut silently.

The train pulls out of the station and enters the tunnel. The lights inside grow blinding white.

None of the people worrying over Isaiah, nor waiting for trains on the platform, notice the light as it fades away.

Peter the janitor sees a newspaper on the ground and picks it up. It's yesterday's paper and the headline reads, "PROMINENT BUSINESS MAN DIES IN FREAK TRAIN ACCIDENT". Underneath is a picture of Matt, smiling.

Peter folds the newspaper gently and puts it in a nearby trash bin. He smiles and continues mopping between the passengers rushing through train station.