

## Kim Farleigh

### Untitled

Three teenage girls at the train carriage's end reminded a German of his daughter's friends, this giving the German a feeling of homeliness.

A man's head jolted, his book hitting his lap, the girl facing him on the other side of the train intrigued by his struggle for consciousness. His eyes closed, then snapped open, his head going back upright bolted, then falling forward again, asleep.

Two Indians, white shirts enhancing their chocolate complexions, had such white teeth that when smiling cloths seemed to be being torn away from piano ivories. A backpacker imagined the Indians' long, elegant eye-lashes as palms being wafted by slaves above an emperor.

A man surreptitiously studied a woman's legs. He read the blurb on the woman's book: A homicide detective, facing "nothingness", ends in a "pool of terror." A philosophical thriller? A new literary genre?

He observed the woman's dark, ambitious eyes, blonde hair, and plump, well-shaped lips, concluding: Brainy crumpet; perfect for drunken nights out.

A man removed a report from a briefcase. The woman facing the briefcase owner stared between heads, contemplating the behaviour of a work colleague: He had an ulterior motive for being there. For sure!

The backpacker observed her contemplative distance.

Three men boarded the train, breaking the backpacker's contemplation, one wearing a white T-shirt that showed a bulldog in a Union Jack, leather boots laced half-way up the bulldog man's shins. The three men sat apart on the only previously available seats, their chatter stopping the lady's contemplation. The Indians' conversation halted. The woman stopped reading. The teenage girls stopped talking. The man put his report away. He stared out a window. People started staring out windows. The legs admirer ignored his sexual feelings. One of the teenage girls turned around to face the threesome, the only person now not feigning indifference.

The tired man was now alert. He wanted to warn an American, who was standing in the triangle formed by the seated, giggling threesome, to remain quiet. The American sneered at the threesome, oblivious of danger.

The train remained stationary, silence punctuated by: "D'ya think he knows," one of the triumvirate said, between gulping from a can of beer, "that he's disturbing the peace?"

A black man was staring upward, foot tapping, eyes closed, listening to music. One of the threesome laughed when the beer drinker gulped again and said: "I'm

sweating my bollocks off. It's like a bloody furnace in here."

Giggler, facing the beer drinker, giggled, the train still stationary. It had sat for five minutes in the humidity of a London summer's day. The beer drinker, after smelling his armpits, raised his arms, sending body odour towards the black man whose eyes remained shut.

Giggler removed a packet of cigarettes from his shirt pocket; the cigarettes, sliding out of his hand, spilt over the floor, causing laughter between the threesome. Chuckling, they picked up the cigarettes.

Armpit Lifter studied the black man and said: "Excuse me, mate; hope yar don't mind if I smoke?"

The black man's eyes remained shut.

"Looks as if he doesn't mind," the leader remarked.

The smoke the leader blew smoke into the black man's face wafted past a NO SMOKING sign. The doors shut; the train still didn't move, the *Führer* repeating that his testicles "could hit the carriage floor and these ladies here would like that, would they?"

Bulldog Man giggled, his leader's speech God-like.

"Oh, Christ," that fat-faced *Führer* complained, placing his armpits near the black man's face, "look out ladies, my bollocks are dropping off."

The German studied the American. Probably at some New England college, he thought. No idea what he faces.

The American sneered at the *Führer*. The German wished he could warn the American; but the German was a foreigner.

If I speak, the German thought, what'll happen?

"When's this bloody train going," *Führer* moaned, gulping beer, lifting his armpits, his friends chortling. "I think," *Führer* continued, grinning, "that we should call this thing the *Sweaty Bollocks Express*. Whadda yar think?"

*Führer* looked, with sardonically-concerned inquisitiveness, at the black man whose eyes didn't open.

"I think," the American said, "that if you find it so stuffy in here that you shouldn't want to smoke."

The German felt shock. One of the teenage girls grabbed her curious friend and dragged her out of the carriage as the doors opened again. The space left by the girls emphasised the American's isolation that increased when the doors shut again, locking everyone into hot fluorescence.

*Führer* glanced up and said: "Wot?"

"I said," the American replied, "that if you find it so stuffy--  
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"SHUT THE FUCK UP, YANK!" the third member of the triumvirate screamed, leaping up, as if a mental coil, sensitive to confrontation, had sprung open inside his head.

Freedom is fragile, the German thought. Mist consumed by heat.

"THIS IS OUR COUNTRY!" the third member screamed. "We do what we bloody well want here, right? So why don't you just fucking well shut-up and bloody well go back to fucking America, or wherever it is that you fucking well come from, you fucking bastard!"

*Führer* smiled at the American. He liked smiling at people who stimulated indignation.

"Now, now," he said. "We shouldn't have said that, should we? Now you shut-up," he continued, pointing at the American, "and Joe, calm down."

Joe sat down, bowing to his *Führer's* wishes, but calm down Joe didn't. From his seat, Joe screamed: "You fucking, Yank bastard!" the carriage silent, inquisitiveness now dangerous, Joe's mouth frenetic in contrast to his body's stillness. The podgy, rosy-cheeked *Führer* smiled, a man having exquisite fun; every time the gleeful leader grinned, the giggly bulldog cohort chuckled like a well-trained puppet, strings pulled by He across the way.

"I HATE YOU FUCKING BASTARDS!" Joe yelped, staring at the back of the American's head, the America's grimacing smile revealing embarrassed fear as Joe announced: "You're fucking scum."

The American's forced, lingering smile made Joe leap up and wail: "Don't you fucking well smile, you fucking bastard-trying to take the piss out of me!"

Joe smashed his right fist into the palm of his left hand beside the American's head. Joe's face crinkled with

frustration. His *Führer* had refused permission to pounce, so Joe groaned, dismayed.

Submissive, the German thought. His freedom depends upon the will of might.

“At the next stop, Yank,” Joe blasted on, his black eyes like polished bowling balls of spite, “you’re going to get off and catch a cab to wherever it is you’re going; then you’re going to go back to your hotel, or wherever it is you’re staying, and you’re going to pack up and get the hell out of here, right? Because we don’t want you bastards here, right!”

“I agree,” *Führer* said, smiling like a proud master. “The next stop, right?” he said, pointing at the American who remained silent.

The leader spoke quietly; no tranquillity in that quietude.

The American, like the other passengers, had chosen moral, rather than physical, death; but there were degrees. The absorbed lady hadn't moved since the triumvirate's arrival, her fear resulting in gazing between heads on the other side of the carriage.

The backpacker, clutching his backpack, formed a defensive unit from which he could attack. The reader exuded cultivated disregard. She looked everywhere, except at the threesome. She glanced out windows or at the floor, running her fingers through her hair, dreamily observing the dreary ceiling. If they wanted to harass me, you could imagine her saying, they'd be wasting their time. I'm so bored with this, the German imagined her

thinking, that I'm not even aware that some tourist is about to get his head punched in.

The train whistled down a tunnel, cables on the tunnel's walls rising, falling and rising like heartbeats. The train entered the next station, halting with a whistling shrill that resembled artillery.

Rising Joe bumped into the American who didn't respond. Joe stood, glaring at the back of the American's head, Joe's eyes suggesting that the American had raped his sister. The American had never encountered people beyond his humane comprehension; it disturbed him that he couldn't respond, like being in a tank with a shark and not knowing how to use the barb tossed to him by someone resembling the *Führer* whose smile he could see through the quivering surface of the shimmering waters. The waters he now felt were those of his armpits where rising moisture resembled the Ganges' tides. The heat was not unbearable; it was just there. And so was Joe. Big, rosy-cheeked, white-faced Joe, who hissed, like icy water pouring over broken glass: "Die soon, Yank, and very slowly."

Joe's hands collided again beside the American's head in a slapping thump. The noise on the platform was raucously apparent, but sensuously distant, like the sound a sprinter perceives from the crowd in a race; inside the train, all sound was magnified. The next sound was a primeval wail of anguish from Joe that may have resembled the first ever reaction to unrequited love; it preceded Joe's head

being plunged by its owner into one of the clear vinyl sheets that sit at the ends of the seats.

The German was sitting on that end seat. Joe's forehead had smashed into the vinyl only inches from the German's face.

He's a dog, the German thought, preferring frustration to opposing his master's will.

The American breathed out, saying: "Hoo wee," as Joe left the carriage. The *Führer* and Giggler had left by another door. Other people had climbed on board, the sounds friendlier.

"Jesus Christ," the American said, now breathing freely, "Jee suzz Ker Reist."

His eyes glowed with amazed palliation. Silence reigned. The German felt pretentious indifference evolving to a further stage.

"Jesuzz Kereistttt," the American whispered again, armpit tides sliding back, his breathing now more relaxed. "Hoo wee."

Then head-butt Joe plunged back on board. The American involuntarily stepped back. The shark had returned to the tank. That shark back in that tank, screaming: "You fucking Yank bastard! I hate you bastards! I hate you fucking Yank bastards," Joe being held back by three men who had just boarded, the men smiling, saying: "Come on, man, cool it, come on, it's okay," smiling and smiling, Joe's arms pinned, his head bent forward, screaming at the

American who had backed further off to avoid the flailing verbal venom. With one final scream of: "Die soon, you fucking, Yank bastard," Joe departed.

"Gawd," the American said, breathing out again.

Again the tenebrous, metaphysical sky above him had suddenly cleared. He felt the sweat cooling on his breast. A slow, cool drop slid down his spine.

Then *Führer* charged back on board, *Führer's* previously pale, smiling face reddened with fury. *Führer*, bursting through people while charging at the American, screamed: "I told you to fucking get off here, Yank-HERE!"

"CHRIST!" the American gasped.

The rotund tormentor attacked him like a crazed bull, horn fists raised, plump *Führer* cheeks crimson-inflamed, people contorting to avoid him a *Führer* who looked desperate to rid "scum" from England.

"Oh, Jesus," the American exclaimed, running backwards, "I don't need this!"

*Führer* struck the American's head just over the right eye. *Führer's* timing was so perfect that the American's head went back and hit the wall at the end of the carriage, before bouncing forward to be struck again. The American had backed off that far, people leaping out of the way, the American having stumbled back like an amazed fisherman reeling in something vicious on a line that could not be cut.

Two more fists struck the American's body, the American hissing "Jesus Christ", his face twisting into disbelief, his contorted mouth chanting: "I don't need this!"

*Führer* stood in a doorway, holding the doors open, saying: "You're in London now, Yank, and don't bloody well forget it!"

The German watched the *Führer* joining other National Front members on the platform. A National Front rally was occurring that day in Trafalgar Square. The German knew the *Führer* had displayed to his cohorts his superiority, a necessary function for a *Führer*; he watched the *Führer* marching through his admiring troops, the American muttering: "I don't believe this. Unbelievable."

The American touched his swelling right eye, the thunderous silence punctuated by a man beside him who said, in a sensitive whisper: "Sorry mate. National Front. Britain's Klu Klux Klan."

The German admired this man for offering sympathy while under an awkward moral threat. This was all that was said to the American. The woman facing the American stroked her chin, her fake casualness revealed by the worried glints in her eyes. Few people could look into the victim's face and be asked: "Why didn't you help?"

This also applied to the German. He was disgusted with the disorganisation that allowed three unarmed people to unnerve twenty ill-prepared ones.

The American got off at the next stop, his throbbing right eye now in dark blue. Other people boarded. Those who

had witnessed the triumvirate's work continued their silence, haunting shapes hanging in the carriage's fluorescent light, eye contact taboo.

More people boarded. The Indians began smiling again. The backpacker released his tight grip on his possessions. The woman resumed her reading. Leg Admirer began again his contemplation of the reader. Conversation erupted. The train rocked along harmoniously. The businessman sorted through his briefcase's contents. He closed the briefcase, looking satisfied, glancing at his watch, then at the Underground map on the facing wall.

## *About the Author*

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**Kim John Farleigh** has worked for NGO's in Greece, Kosovo, Iraq, Palestine and Macedonia. He likes to take risks to get the experience required for writing. He likes painting, art, photography and architecture. 151 of his stories have been accepted by 89 different magazines from across the world.

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