

ALL ABOARD

Written by

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CHARACTERS

WOMAN middle-aged woman.
SAM mid-twenties.
JENNY 19.
CONDUCTOR Female

On the overnight train from Melbourne to Sydney a middle-aged WOMAN at a window seat knits a jumper. It's late at night and the curtains are drawn. A NO SMOKING sign is visible. General conversation and the rhythmic clickety-clack of the train can be heard. The female CONDUCTOR, who has mastered the balance of the aisle walk, appears

 CONDUCTOR
Next stop, Henty
 (quietly to the woman)
Next stop, Henty.

 WOMAN
I know.

The CONDUCTOR stops and stares at the WOMAN.

 WOMAN
Is something wrong?

 CONDUCTOR
Oh no. No, you just remind me of
someone, that's all.

 WOMAN
You must meet lots of people.

 CONDUCTOR
Reckon I've met half of Australia on
this job and I never forget a face.
The things I could tell you.

CONDUCTOR (CONT'D)

And the couples. You should see what some of them get up to. You're lucky you're in this carriage. We've got a whole soccer team in Car Twelve.

WOMAN

I don't mind company, but I don't know about a soccer team. You must have plenty of stories to tell.

CONDUCTOR

(pointing)

See that old bloke. We don't know his real name but he's a pensioner. Goes up one night, comes back the next. Half price. It's cheap overnight accommodation for him. Don't tell anyone but we always give him a free meal from the Diner.

WOMAN

I won't.

CONDUCTOR

I even delivered a baby once, in the Baggage Car. You know what the mum called the baby?

WOMAN

Your name?

CONDUCTOR

Casey.

WOMAN

After the suitcases?

CONDUCTOR

After Casey Jones.

WOMAN

That's a nice name. Girl or boy?

CONDUCTOR

Girl. You should see some of the things people bring on board. Snakes, portable televisions. Even had a biker the other day, tried to get their bike in here, would you believe? Wouldn't trust the Baggage Car and old Bruno's been doing that for thirty years.

WOMAN

Why didn't he just ride it to where he was going?

CONDUCTOR

He was she, actually. Beats me. Last week we had an old biddy with a chook in a cage. Just up from where you're sitting. For her son-in-law she said.

WOMAN

What'd you do?

CONDUCTOR

Told her if she didn't take it to Baggage I'd raffle the damn thing.

WOMAN

At least you've got a sense of humour.

CONDUCTOR

Have to in this job. There's always something happening and if there's not, just watch because we get them all, kiddies, bands, secret rendezvous, businessmen escaping debts...

WOMAN

Suppose everyone's escaping from something.

CONDUCTOR

And people're always making mountains out of molehills. After a while you can pick the termites a mile off...

WOMAN

Termites?

CONDUCTOR

Troublemakers. But that's all about to change when they bring in the VTF. You'll see...

WOMAN

Sorry?

CONDUCTOR

Oh, Very Fast Train.

The lights go out. There are murmurs of alarm from PASSENGERS.

CONDUCTOR

Nothing to worry about. Happens every now and then.

The lights return.

CONDUCTOR

One of the fuses overheats. Nobody really tries to fix it. I think they're just waiting for the change over. Pretty soon it'll just be pokies and tourists. No need for us. Bruno and I don't talk much of the good old days anymore. That's all secure. It's the future that worries us.

WOMAN

At least your destination's always certain.

CONDUCTOR

(indicating the knitting)
Who's the lucky person?

WOMAN

I haven't decided yet.

The CONDUCTOR moves on.

CONDUCTOR

Next stop, Henty. Take your feet off
the seat, please! Next stop, Henty.

SAM approaches from the opposite direction. Dressed in singlet, shorts and thongs he is obviously under the weather. He flops in the seat opposite the WOMAN and throws an overnight bag, which contains a fishing rod, on the seat next to him. He looks at the unresponsive WOMAN and laughs.

SAM

Gedday

She nods.

SAM

Anyone sittin' 'ere?

He looks underneath himself.

SAM

Shithouse day, eh?

She ignores him. He removes a bag of cans from his overnight bag. As he tosses his overnight bag on the above rack he nearly pokes her eye out with the fishing rod.

WOMAN

Careful!

SAM

Sorry, Luv.

He sprawls in his seat.

SAM

Hardly the Orient Express, is it?

She politely shakes her head.

SAM

I said it's hardly the Orient Express,
eh?

WOMAN

Have you journeyed on the Orient
Express, have you?

SAM

Course.

(pause)

I knew who the murderer was before
interval. Can always pick the
murderer, can't you?

He takes cigarettes from his pocket.

SAM

Don't mind if I light up, d'yer?

WOMAN

(pause)

This is a non-smoking compartment.

SAM

SAM Right.

He can't find matches so he gets his bag down, again nearly
poking her with the rod. He finds matches, returns the bag,
puts a cigarette in his mouth and offers her one.

SAM

Help yerself.

WOMAN

No thankyou. I don't smoke.

SAM

(lighting up)

No small vices, eh? Hah ha. Can't say
as I blame yer. Yer read so much bad
stuff about smoking, it's enough to
make yer wanta quit reading, eh?

He throws the dead match on the floor.

SAM
What's yer handle?

WOMAN
I beg your pardon?

SAM
What's yer name?

WOMAN
Oh.

SAM
(pause)
Yer do any duck shootin'?

She doesn't respond.

SAM
Don't know what yer missin'. Can't
beat a couple of stuffed quail,
skitzababed. I reckon that'd be your
go at a barbie, stuffed quail with a
bit of dead horse. Where yer headin'?

WOMAN
Pardon?

SAM
Off to Sydney for a dirty weekend, are
yer?

WOMAN
(avoiding the smoke)
How far are you traveling?

SAM
Dunno. Haven't decided yet. Got a mate
in the Cross who can put yer up if yer
want.

WOMAN

I appreciate yer offer, but...

SAM

Yer don't wanta hit Sydney unless yer got a bloke to look after yer. I knew a chick once, went into the dunnies at Central and that was the end of 'er.

WOMAN

Well I'll stay very clear of the...dunnies. Thankyou.

SAM

Good idea.

(pause)

Yer not too bad for yer age, yer know.

Takes a can from the paper bag.

SAM

Git this inta yer.

He tosses the can into her lap. She jumps with fright, dropping her knitting. She returns the can.

WOMAN

No thank you.

He opens his can and drinks three quarters in one go. He burps and puts his feet on the seat opposite. He points to one foot.

SAM

See that.

(She doesn't look.)

That!

She looks.

WOMAN

What?

SAM

That!

WOMAN

All I can see is a foot that shouldn't be on the seat.

SAM

That's what I'm talking about. That there.

WOMAN

Pardon?

SAM

You can thank the bloody pigs for that. Bloody arseholes!

WOMAN

Would you mind not swearing?

He drinks the remainder of his can. The train slows.

SAM

Pulled me over and made me get outa the car. Then one of the arseholes trod on me bloody toe.

FEMALE V.O.

Watch the language, Sunshine!

SAM

Well you shouldn't be listening, Rainbow. Bloody gigs! A bloke loses his toe and all she can say is cut the bloody language. Bet she works for CentreLink

(loudly)

How long d'yer spend in the queue to hand yer form in, eh? While they're chatting about the footy or some bloody sausage sizzle or somethin'.

He opens another can and sprays beer over the WOMAN.

SAM (CONT'D)

Bloody pigs!

She quickly jumps up and wipes beer off her dress and knitting.

SAM

Sorry, Luv.

He attempts to brush her down but she pushes his hands away.

SAM

It's the bloody train's fault.

She sits and somewhat disturbed continues knitting.

SAM

Hey, yer know, yer not a bad sort. Yer know that? Yer got a bloke?

WOMAN

I'd appreciate it if I could continue my journey uninterrupted, thank you.

SAM

I was only askin'.

(pause)

Yer know, if yer were with me...

(laughs hysterically)

Well hyper...hypothetically. It's a big word isn't it? Yer wouldn't be in with this lot. Forget yer bloody economy sit-up. Nuthin' but first class when yer travel with Sam.

The train stops.

SAM

Sure yer don't wanta beer?

The CONDUCTOR returns.

CONDUCTOR
Would you mind putting your feet down,
Sir?

SAM
Down where?

CONDUCTOR
And put that cigarette out, please.

Sam takes his feet off the seat.

SAM
Were yer an undertaker in a past life?
(to the WOMAN))
Never trust conductors and
undertakers, they'll both let yer down
in the end.

CONDUCTOR
Can I see your ticket, please?

SAM
Here we go.

He hands his cigarette to the CONDUCTOR who immediately puts
it out.

SAM
Anythin' else I can get yer? Yer wanta
a smoke?

He unsuccessfully searches his pockets for his ticket.

SAM
Maybe I gave it to that other bloke,
the Inspector bloke.

CONDUCTOR
I need to see your ticket.

SAM

Sure, mate, no worries. Yer know, yer remind me of that chick in, what's their name again? Used to be in Neighbours. What's her name again? Yer know the small one. Can't sing but I bet she'd make a great conductor. Can you sing? Let's hear it. Carn, don't be a piker.

(to the PASSENGERS)

Yer wanta hear that chick who used to be in Neighbours, whatisname, sing? Yer wanta hear her sing or what? Carn, they wanta hear yer, mate.

(to the WOMAN)

Don't yer reckon she looks like that chick that used to be in Neighbours?

WOMAN

I don't watch Neighbours.

SAM

Yer havin' me on!

CONDUCTOR

(referring to the beer))

Did you get those from the Buffet Car?

SAM

Yer want one?

He grabs a can.

SAM

G'on, it's yours. Mum's the word.

CONDUCTOR

Because its an offence to bring alcohol on board.

SAM

That's where I got 'em from then, didn't I?

(to the WOMAN)

SAM (CONT'D)

Its alright to buy 'em from Meals on
Wheels...

(to the CONDUCTOR))

...but yer can't get yer own for half
price, is that it?

CONDUCTOR

Its because we have a licence to sell
alcohol. I'm merely asking to see your
ticket.

A young WOMAN, holding a baby and carrying an overnight bag,
enters. She checks her ticket against the seat numbers.

SAM

Here I am givin' 'er a chance to make
the big time and all she wants to do
is see a ticket that's already been
checked by a bloke who's job it is.

JENNY

(to SAM)

Oh, there must be some mistake.

The CONDUCTOR takes her ticket and checks it.

CONDUCTOR

Funny...

(to SAM)

...this is her seat.

SAM quickly moves across forcing the WOMAN to move her legs.

SAM

Just keepin' it warm. Givin' Tootsie
here a bit of leg room.

(to JENNY)

Hi, I'm Sam.

JENNY indicates not to wake the baby.

SAM

Yeah, sure, Luv, sure.

The train moves and the CONDUCTOR leaves. Sam imitates The Terminator.

SAM (CONT'D)

I'll be back.

(to JENNY)

So, what's yer name?

JENNY

Jenny.

SAM (CONT'D)

Good one. What about the dunny rat?

JENNY

Huh?

SAM

The brat?

JENNY

Shush, she's asleep.

SAM

Right, yeah, right. Sorry.

JENNY

It's taken me ages to put her down.

SAM

Yer put her down? What was wrong with 'er?

JENNY smiles at the WOMAN.

SAM

I had a chick once who looked like yer, only she had tatts everywhere. Yer got a ring in yer belly button too?

JENNY shakes her head.

SAM (CONT'D)

She 'ad one of those rings from the top of a beer can in hers. Where yer headin'?

JENNY

Sydney...
(looking round))
...I suppose.

SAM

Same 'ere. Want me t'put yer bag up?

JENNY

Na, I need things. If you could pass me that plastic bag though.

He reaches into her bag and removes a plastic shopping bag.

SAM

What tapes yer got?

JENNY

Just some Country and Western.

SAM

Yeah, right.

SAM looks at the cover of a book in her bag.

SAM

Saw that on TV. I've read all 'er stuff.

JENNY

A friend gave it to me. He reckons she's dead you know.

SAM

Shirley Maclaine's dead? That'd be right. I reckon someone else wrote 'er last book. They all do it all the time. Get students to write 'em.

SAM (CONT'D)

The world's full of pretenders. D'yer believe in past lives?

JENNY

I don't know.

SAM

There's gotta be I reckon. Like where's everyone off ta otherwise?. What d'yer do?

JENNY

Oh nothing? What about you?

SAM

Roadie.

JENNY

Yeah?

SAM

Work for all the big bands, yer know, Guns n' Roses, Silver Chair...

JENNY

Who?

He sings a couple of lines from one of their songs. Jenny and The Woman couldn't be less interested.

SAM

Could probably get yer a job.

JENNY

Na, I couldn't do anything like that.

SAM

Course yer could. Some of the crew I work with are straight outa the bargain basement. If yer interested...

JENNY takes an apple from the plastic bag. SAM pulls out a

flick knife and springs it open. She jumps as he holds it for her to take. The WOMAN notices but doesn't react.

JENNY

(refusing the knife))
I'll be right.

SAM

You know what shits me? Yer've got pigs who tread on yer feet, conductors who can't even sing and now yer can't even buy a bloody book without gettin' ripped off.

WOMAN

Would you mind putting that away, please?

SAM

Someone should do somethin' about that I reckon.

He runs the blunt edge of the knife across his throat, before putting the knife, still opened, in his pocket.

SAM

When we gets ta Sydney hows about I phone this bloke I know and line yer up with a job? Yer'll be able to bring...

(indicating the baby)
...Ratsak, here.

JENNY

Na, its alright.

SAM

No bother.

JENNY

Na, me boyfriend should be gettin' on at Wagga.

SAM
Yer got a boyfriend?

JENNY
He's a soldier, in the army, a
Commando.

SAM
Good one. That's what I should've
been.

The CONDUCTOR returns.

CONDUCTOR
Found that ticket yet?

SAM
I told yer, yer mate's got it.

CONDUCTOR
I checked and he didn't have it. Could
I have your name, Sir?

SAM
Why, haven't yer got one of yer own?

CONDUCTOR
So I can check the passenger list.

SAM
Yeah, well me sister brought the
ticket, didn't she and I wouldn't've
known what name she used. See her old
man's always chasing her. He's a real
swine, dead set. Always on the go.
And she uses a bodgie, see. What
name's on yer list?

CONDUCTOR
I need to have your name.

SAM
It's Sam.

CONDUCTOR
Sam who?

SAM
No.

CONDUCTOR
Pardon?

SAM
It's not bloody, Sam Who. What kinda name's that? Knock, knock, Sam Who?

CONDUCTOR
Look, I just need a confirmation, okay?

SAM
Why? There's no one standing in line, is there?

The BABY stirs. JENNY becomes agitated.

WOMAN
Would you like to swap seats?

JENNY
Na, I'll be fine.

SAM
(to the CONDUCTOR)
Why don't yer have a can? Relax.

CONDUCTOR
I have to ask you to accompany me, Sir.

SAM
(loudly)
Why?

WOMAN
You're waking the baby.

CONDUCTOR
Would you mind stepping this way, Sir?

SAM
I've had this!
(standing))
I've had this up to here!

SAM runs his finger across his throat.

CONDUCTOR
(Walking off)
It'll only take a moment.

SAM
(loudly)
Watch out for me bloody foot!

PASSENGER O.S.
Shut-up!

SAM
(following the CONDUCTOR)
Get stuffed!

JENNY
JENNY He's not with you is he?

WOMAN
Thank god.

JENNY
Sorry, I just thought...

WOMAN
That what we do when we go on trips,
I suppose.

JENNY

What's that?

WOMAN

See each other for what we really are.

JENNY

Probably harmless.

WOMAN

Boy or girl?

JENNY

Girl. Riley.

WOMAN

That's nice. How old?

JENNY

Three months.

WOMAN

Nice age. They're so vulnerable yet so full of life. And to think what we go through when they won't remember a minute of it.

JENNY

I can't wait till she gets older and starts talking and goes to kinda. You got any kids?

WOMAN

That's the best age. It really is. They're so innocent, so full of surprises, so unconditional. And then...You're so lucky. Is she demanding?

JENNY

Na, na, I just get tired sometimes, that's all.

WOMAN

I can hold her for you if you like.

JENNY

Na, it's alright.

WOMAN

I don't mind, really.

JENNY

She's not used to anyone else.

WOMAN

When your friend gets on he might be able to give you a rest.

JENNY

Yeah, sure.

The train slows.

WOMAN

Must be a station.

JENNY

Wagga.

WOMAN

Normally the Conductor comes around. Do you want to sit here so you can look out?

JENNY

Na, it's okay.

The train stops. JENNY bites the apple. The BABY stirs. JENNY puts the baby on her breast. The WOMAN offers to hold the apple.

JENNY

I'm right. I'm used to it.

The WOMAN continues knitting. She looks out the window , her attention drawn to something happening outside.

WOMAN

Wonder what's wrong?

JENNY

What is it?

WOMAN

Can't see properly. Some sort of commotion or something near the front.

JENNY

Be some of the louts. They're always getting up to something. Wagga's like that. That's why I moved to Henty.

WOMAN

I think there's police there.

JENNY

I hope it's none of my friends.

The train slowly moves.

WOMAN

Good. Your friend. I hope nothing's happened to him.

JENNY

Na, he'll be okay.

JENNY nearly vomits but holds it back.

WOMAN

You alright? What's wrong?

JENNY

Its nothing. I'll be okay.

WOMAN
 (standing))
 I'll get you something.

JENNY
 Na, don't, please. I'm alright.

WOMAN
 At least let me hold the baby.
 ((JENNY is reluctant.))
 G'on, please. I'm really good with
 them, really. Not that I have any of
 my own. But you see my father's name
 was Nicholas and St Nicholas was the
 patron saint of children you know. And
 his great great grandmother was
 Domiduca named after the goddess who
 brought little children home safe and
 looked over them when their parents
 were out of sight. I think that was a
 lovely thing to do, don't you?

The WOMAN holds her hands out.

WOMAN
 You can freshen up...for your friend.

JENNY
 I'm alright, really.

The WOMAN sits.

JENNY
 Actually I'm pregnant again.

WOMAN
 You'd never know.

JENNY
 I think it might be twins.

WOMAN

Congratulations. Are there twins in your family?

JENNY

I don't know.

WOMAN

Oh.

JENNY

And wouldn't you know it. They're trying to close down the local Health Centre. Why would anyone close down a Health Centre? Makes you wonder about some people.

The train suddenly stops.

JENNY

What's happening?

WOMAN

Don't know. But it doesn't look good, does it?

SAM returns. He carries a cup of coffee and his knife which appears covered in blood. His hair is messed and he's agitated.

SAM

(to Jenny)

Move over, will ya?

JENNY

I'm alright.

SAM

Move over!

JENNY quickly moves over. SAM flops down and puts his feet on the seat which blocks JENNY and the WOMAN. He holds the

coffee for JENNY to take.

SAM
Here git this inta yer, Jenny.

JENNY
It's alright.

SAM
Yer drink coffee don't yer, Jenny?

JENNY
I'm not thirsty.

SAM
I got it for yer.

JENNY reluctantly takes the coffee.

SAM
Good one. I haven't touched it. It
just spilt a bit back there.
(to the WOMAN)
I would've got you one only I ran outa
hands didn't I?

JENNY sips the coffee.

SAM
Taste's shithouse, eh? Its the bloody
water they use. Yer reckon they'd wake
up to 'emselves, eh?

SAM notices them looking at the knife. He quickly wipes it
with a hanky.

SAM
Idiots in the canteen. I ask the fat
one to put tomato sauce on me pie
don't I? So what's he do? Puts it all
over me bloody hand, don't he? Anyway
that bloody Conductor won't be
bothering me again. Bloody tickets.

SAM (CONT'D)

Yer'd think it was a matter of life and death. Eh, Jenny, tell me, what would yer do if somebody trod on yer foot.

The train slowly moves. The WOMAN looks out the window.

SAM

Exactly.

WOMAN

(to JENNY)

They've taken somebody away in an ambulance.

SAM

(referring to the floor))

Look at this bloody mess.

(yelling)

Yer'd think somebody'd do something about it, wouldn't yer?

He opens a can and tosses the crumpled bag on the floor.

SAM

Is that 'er head?

He puts his hand on the baby's head. JENNY trembles.

SAM

Jeez, what're yer feedin' it on, Brylcream? Got 'nough hair to cover a horse. That was Wagga, wasn't it?

JENNY

Dunno.

SAM

Yer wanta a smoke?

JENNY

Don't smoke.

SAM

Don't know what yer missin' Yer need a bloke to look after I reckon, Jenny.

He drinks half the can and yawns.

SAM

I knew this chick once. She was on her own with a sprog and next minute she's just keeled over with exhaustion. Right in the bloody kitchen. Before she kicked in with the rent too. Yer reckon the pigs'd listen? That was Wagga yer know, Jenny! What's say when we git to Steak-n-Kidney I tee it up with this mate of mine? Can yer sing? He can git yer gigs and he'll do it for nothin'.

JENNY

That boyfriend I was telling you about....

SAM

Rambo?

JENNY

...well he's not really a soldier. Well he is, but he's not in Wagga. He's been in the nick and I'm meeting him and he gets real angry when I talk to other blokes.

SAM

Yeah, I knew a bloke like that once. Yer wanta keep away from 'im, Jenny. I'll give that bloke a ring. See if he can't fix yer up with somethin'. Yer can't trust some blokes these days. Course if yer were with me yer wouldn't have to worry 'bout shit like that.

(closes his eyes)

Wake me if I start snoring.

He sleeps, the knife still in his hand. They consider taking the knife. His head rests on JENNY'S shoulder. Just as the

WOMAN is about to take the knife he opens his eyes, frightening them before returning to sleep. They wait then the WOMAN carefully removes the knife and puts it in her handbag. They look at each other, unsure of what to do. The CONDUCTOR appears, putting refuse into a garbage bag.

CONDUCTOR

Whatever you do don't wake him. You get one like him every trip. First time I've run into him though. You're lucky you weren't in Car Twelve. One of the soccer players had too much to drink, head butted the roof. What a mess.

(to the WOMAN)

I know where I've seen you before.

The WOMAN seems concerned.

CONDUCTOR

You're a dead ringer for my history teacher. She always said I'd be going places.

The WOMAN relaxes. The CONDUCTOR speaks to JENNY.

CONDUCTOR

Oh, I know what I wanted to tell you. I've got a sleeper for you. This couple getting on at Wagga. Seems they didn't make it. It's your's if you want it.

JENNY

(pause)

No thanks, I'm okay.

JENNY and the WOMAN smile at each other.

CONDUCTOR

Suit yourself, but the old bloke over there snores like a vacuum cleaner.

The CONDUCTOR puts rubbish in the bag.

CONDUCTOR

It's amazing the amount of rubbish you
collect on this trip.

The CONDUCTOR leaves. JENNY and the WOMAN laugh at their
overactive imaginations. The WOMAN holds a nearly finished
baby jumper up.

WOMAN

Now why don't you let me hold her so
you can have a proper break?

Jenny hands her baby to The Woman. Jenny dozes. The lights
slowly fade focusing on the WOMAN apprehensively watching
JENNY.

THE END