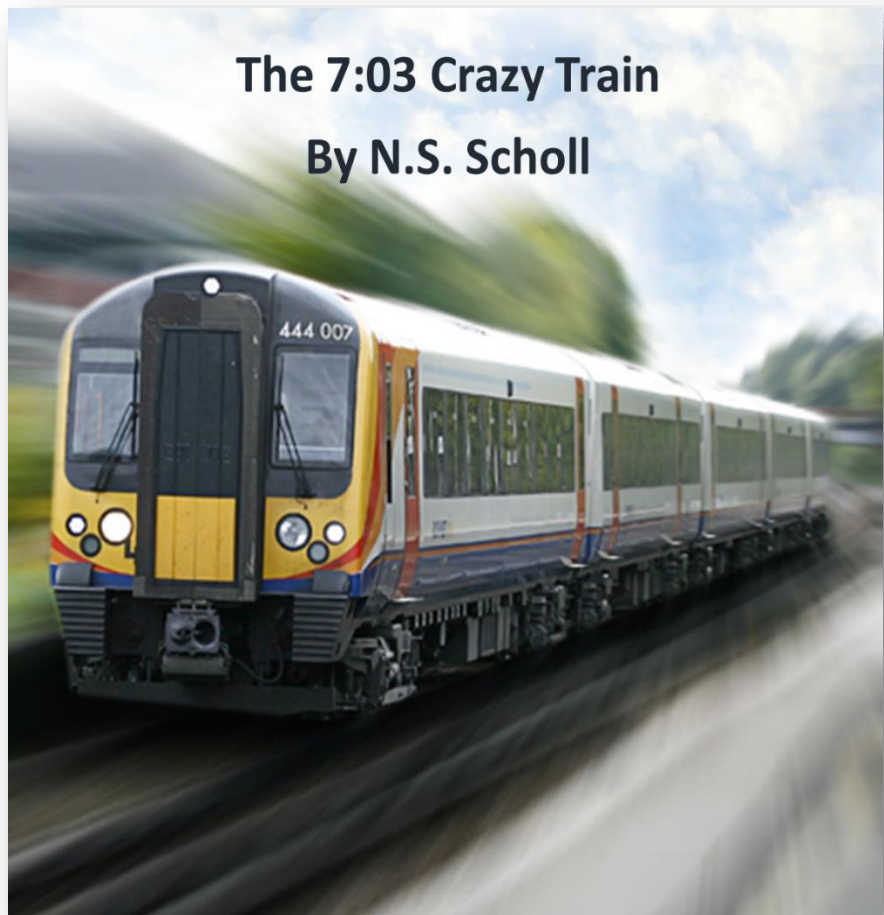


# The 7:03 Crazy Train

By N.S. Scholl



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Life makes sense this morning. I see the young couple standing at the front of the line holding hands waiting for the train to stop. They are always at the front of the line waiting for the train to pull up to the platform. They know exactly where to stand so they are positioned in front of the doors when they open. But that's not magic, everyone knows how. It's three feet from the signpost and half a foot to the left of the cracked pavement, recently fixed, so there is a dark patch of concrete. People are creatures of habit, this young couple proves it, and so does everyone else on this train. There is an unspoken etiquette for train commuting, without it, we would just be riding the crazy train. I like habits and routine, it makes me feel safe, and therefore life makes sense to me the mornings that I see the young couple at the front of the line. They are the first ones on the train and they take the first set of seats next to the window facing east.

The seats facing east are important. Everyone wants a seat on the east side of the train, because, at this time of the morning, for half a minute, you get a glance at the sunrise over the lake. If it's a good one, for that half minute, everyone on the train stops what they are doing (phones go down, laptops are ignored, and conversations pause), and we allow ourselves a beautiful golden moment. For most, it will likely be the most beautiful and calming thing they see that day.

I'm sixth in line. We are orderly, everyone knows Young Couple gets the first set of seats. They sit and hold hands, she puts her head on his shoulder. It was cute for the first few

months, now it's just sickly, I wonder how long they will last. Then the rest of us fill in the rows of seats, the east facing seats filling up first. A woman actually pushes past me and takes the next seat. Bitch! She doesn't know the etiquette, but she knows about the view. I'm forced to take the seat across the aisle as the next east facing seat is taken while I'm in shock and hesitate. The west facing seats only give you trees and factories to look at. No one wants to stare at factories! I give the woman a silent distasteful glare, like I can smell a fart and I know it was her. She doesn't make eye contact with me, she knows what she did. I haven't seen her before, she's new to this train. But she knows about the sunrises. Curious. I wonder if I will see her tomorrow.

Book Lady is in her usual spot today. I like book lady, I've noticed that she reads about one book a week. And she is still one of the few that will read a paper book. No tablet, e-reader or phone screen for her. Good old fashion books. I sometimes contemplate just handing her a copy of one of my books, to see if she would read it and tell me if she liked it. I would appreciate her opinion.

I see Coach a few rows away, our eyes meet, and I give him a nod and smile as a hello. He returns the gesture and then turns his attention to his phone. I see Coach almost every day, and I don't think he realizes who I am. So I purposely say "hi" to him. He knows he should know me, but I can tell he is confused and has no idea. I do it on purpose now, just to bother him. You see for the last three years he has coached the top level of baseball for my son's age. Every year my son has tried out for his team. And every year he has cut my son. It's not that I think my

son is the best ball player ever and I now resent this man for stealing that chance from him to play in the major leagues. No I'm not that delusional, but it hurt my son's feelings, and this innocent revenge of saying hi to a man everyday, just to continue to confuse him, seems like a fair reprimand.

The train is fairly empty still, and everyone settles into their routine. As the other stops are made the train fills, I know every seat will likely be taken, sometimes there is only standing room after the last stop before the train takes the express route to the city. People push in, they are a lot less orderly when the seating is limited. Then I see him, Tall Guy! The poor man is well over six feet. I see him most mornings, because he is also a creature of habit. He is disadvantage today by his late boarding on the train, and space is very limited now. He is looking around desperately for a seat. He needs an aisle seat so he can stretch out. If he takes a window seat, the person sitting across from him loses all leg room! He glances at the seat across from me, it's a window seat, it's still vacant, then he sees an aisle seat a few rows up. It's a gamble and he only has a split second to decide. If he goes for the aisle seat there is a risk that, the people entering from the other end of the train car, will get there first. This window seat across from me will be taken by someone behind him and he will have to stand for the rest of the ride. If he takes this seat, he will be sitting, but he would be cramped.

I understand his dilemma and I hope that he is a gambling man. He hesitates too long, the other passengers are too close to the aisle seat now, he won't make it. He gives an apologetic smile to those sitting in our little quad section and then folds

himself (yes literally folds himself) into the seat across from me. I push my bag under my seat further so we both have more room. He looks so sad and uncomfortable, it's hard to be mad at him, it's not his fault he's tall. I remind myself that he is likely uncomfortable all day long, for me it's only a forty-minute train trip. (Forty minutes! Fuck!). But there's no reason to be resentful towards Tall Guy, he's not like Coach, he hasn't done something wrong like, cut my kid from a team.

It is a full train this morning, all the seats are taken, some people are sitting on the steps to the upper levels, the rest fill the aisle and space by the doorways. It's a long ride to be standing, and I see an older woman sitting on the steps at the far end of the train. She's too far for me to offer her my seat. If I get up now, someone standing closer would take it (even being across from Tall Guy) and my charitable gesture would be all for nothing. I glance down the train and see at least three able bodied men close enough to offer their seats. One is pretending to be sleeping, one is working on his laptop and one is hiding behind his phone. Wow, is this what the world has come to? Poor Old Lady, she's dressed in a nice suit, sure it looks like it's from the eighties, but she's dressed well. She's likely going to some shit office admin job she has worked for the last forty years of her life. Struggling to save up enough money so maybe one day she can retire and enjoy her grand kids. Maybe her husband has already passed on, and they didn't have enough saved, so she keeps working so she doesn't lose the house she raised her children in. And not one of these three guys, at least twenty years younger, can get off their asses to offer her a seat so she doesn't have to sit on the god damn floor of a train?!

Suddenly a woman starts to stand, she's only a few feet away from Old Lady, she taps Old Lady on the shoulder and offers her seat to her. Old Lady looks at her with a gracious smile, and after a short struggle, she pulls herself to her feet and takes the spot (ironically, that was the same aisle seat Tall Guy was contemplating). Across from Old Lady, Laptop Guy now looks up, acting startled, like he hadn't realized what was going on. He quickly closes his laptop and stands giving his seat to the now standing woman. She accepts, and he takes the standing spot by the steps where Old Lady had been sitting only moments before. OK, life makes sense again. Full points to young lady for giving up her seat, half points to Laptop Guy, yes he did the right thing, but only so he wouldn't look like such an ass.

The train speeds along, and the trees clear, and we are at the one spot where for thirty seconds, we can see the sunrise. It's beautiful this morning, the sun is coming up over the lake, which is shimmering blue. There are pink and red streaks painted in the sky which is only slightly covered in small perfect white clouds. Almost everyone looks east. Me and Tall Guy strain to look across the aisle to see out the east window. I get a glance at the beautiful morning and have my moment of tranquility. Then I notice that the woman who took my seat is fast asleep. Seat Stealer is not even looking at the sunrise! Bitch!

I catch Tall Guy's eye as we turn back to our western view of trees and factories. He gives me another remorseful look, like he knows how uncomfortable I am. I just smile back and return my focus to my laptop, it's not his fault. I can feel my knees



cramping and there is nowhere to stretch. Only thirty minutes left. (Thirty minutes! Fuck!).

I start to type on my laptop, for the most part the train is quiet. That means anyone who is having a conversation, their voices carry. Two ladies somewhere behind me are talking. I can't turn to see them, but their voices are loud enough that everyone within a few rows can hear them. One woman is going on about her job. She clearly hates it. Her boss, she claims, is an idiot, apparently she isn't appreciated, and the company sucks. She then starts to tell her friend about an affair she suspects her boss is having with a co-worker. The friend seems only partly interested adding the occasional "really?" to the conversation. Maybe she's smarter, and knows not to make herself look like a fool in public.

Stupid people annoy me. I have no patients for stupid people. Don't get me wrong, I will go out of my way to help people, but not stupid people. This woman is starting to make my list of stupid people. Just shut the hell up, no one wants to hear your unfounded, hurtful gossip. And if you are so resentful about your job, go find a new one! I want to yell at her to *shut the fuck up*, and as much as I know half the train would agree with me, I would then be seen as the "crazy one". Instead I do what a sane person does, I slip in my headphones and turn up the volume to listen to my playlist. Tall Guy doesn't have headphones. He seems to realize what my sudden interest in my music means and suppresses a laugh. I'm starting to like Tall Guy, he's perceptive. But my knees are cramping like crazy, there is no

room to even adjust my footing a little. Only twenty five minutes left. (Twenty five minutes! Fuck!).

I try to focus on what I'm writing, but I'm not inspired, maybe it's because I'm not on the east side of the train. Seat Stealler is still sleeping. Bitch! You could have done that on the west side of the train! I stare at my laptop screen for awhile without adding anything to my document. I'm not even registering what I had written. Then I have a chilling feeling that someone is looking at me. I glance around and notice the man sitting diagonal from me, is staring at my breasts. And he's not being subtle about it. I have a loose fitting top on that shows a little more skin than I usually allow, but it's a hot day, and I wanted to be comfortable. The man spends a few more moments gawking at me, before he realizes my body language has changed. He actually realizes I have eyes, meets my glare for a half second and then looks to the floor embarrassed that he was caught. I glare at Boob Guy a moment longer but he doesn't look my way again. I know he can feel my arrow eyes piercing the side of his head. His cheeks are red and he continues to hold his stare to the floor. How do you like that flat view Boob Guy!

When I turn back to my laptop I notice Tall Guy suppressing another laugh. He understood my whole interaction with Boob Guy. Damn, he's perceptive. Then I notice that he very subtly drops his eyes, just for a moment, to my breasts. At least he's subtle about it, but really Tall Guy? WTF! I was just starting to like you. As revenge I now shift one of my painfully aching knees, and gently tap his foot in the process. He shifts his foot an inch to give me more room. Tall Guy is smart, he knows I did this

on purpose, but he accepts his punishment in silence. The extra inch only gives my aching knee relief for a few minutes, then the cramping returns. Only fifteen minutes left. (Fifteen minutes! Fuck!).

The train continues to move, out of kindness, I don't blast the volume on my earphones, I know they can be heard by the people next to me if I have them too loud. No one needs to hear my sappy Country Music. Yes I secretly like Country Music, shut up. But, because the volume is low, I can still hear the women a few rows away talking. Complaining Lady somehow thinks everyone on the train wants to know about how her boss asked her to re-write a report she had done. Somehow it was unreasonable for him to expect better from her? Based on her actions on the train, yes I would think his expectations are too high. Seat Stealer is now softly snoring, and there is a little bit of drool leaking from her half opened mouth. This is why I can't sleep in public. Has anyone ever seen themselves sleep? It's not like the movies! Your muscles are relaxed, your face droops and more likely than not your mouth hangs open while all of your aging skin sags down and magnifies your wrinkles. I turn away angrily, Seat Stealer could be drooling on the west side of the train too.

Now Boob Guy is risking another look, this time with no shame. What the hell buddy! I pull my sweater tightly closed. Tall Guy is getting bold, he reclaims the inch he had given up. I understand, he needs it more than me, but my legs are so cramp now I want to scream. I'm using all my willpower to stay in my seat and not go running off the train like a crazy woman. But I

know my path is blocked. There are too many people standing in the aisle, I couldn't get up now even if I tried. Only five more minutes. We are a few hundred meters away from the station. People start to gather their belongings. I start to pull my bag from under the seat knocking Tall Guys legs several times. I apologize, I didn't do *that* on purpose. We will be off the train in minutes now.

Suddenly the train stops, but we aren't at the platform. Why did we stop?! Stopping before the station is never a good thing, life isn't making sense anymore. I start to feel a boiling panic in my stomach. Something bad is about to happen I can feel it! Boob Guy is still trying to sneak a peak through my sweater, Seat Stealer woke up and is wiping the drool from her chin. Complaining Lady is continuing her rant, and Tall Guy claimed even more leg room while I was pulling my bag from under the seat. (Is it possible he grew taller during the ride? It feels like it).

The Customer Service Host's voice can be heard over the speakers.

"Sorry folks," he says. "We have to come to a stop here. Apparently, there is a medical situation on the train in front of us and our platform isn't accessible right now. Please make yourselves comfortable. This could take awhile."

Fuck.