

The Lincoln Effect

by Adam Sifre

Ty speed-walked down the long ass tunnel that connected his “A” train to the NJ Transit bus, which took him across the GW bridge, where he'd splurge for a cab to take him home. There he would find dinner, some wine, a wife. With a little luck, a horny wife.

The tunnel-way always smelled like piss. It was just a question of strength. Sometimes it was faint enough to just tickle the nostrils. Other times it was so strong, that he imagined it cloying to him, saturating his suit. Today it was more along the line of a tickle, for which he was grateful.

Up ahead was the saxophone player. A tall, black, toothpick with a close cropped beard, and clothes that looked older than him. Tonight he was playing an old Billy Joel song; “Always a Woman.” He was very good. Excellent, really. Ty had been listening to him play in 45 second snippets for almost three years now. He was always there, for both the morning and evening commute.

Ty started walking toward the opposite wall as he got closer to the sax player. It was Friday, and that meant flowers. If he hurried and there wasn't a line of desperate lottery customers at the kiosk, he could pick up a bunch and still make the 6:15. Just as he was about to start putting distance between himself and the sax player, Ty caught himself humming along. He blushed. Did the man hear him? Was he such a douche that he could enjoy the music and just keep walking?

Silently cursing himself, Ty stopped, turned around and stepped quickly in front of the man. The man's sax case lay on the ground between them. There were only a few coins and a dollar bill in it, but Ty knew that didn't mean anything.

He may have pocketed a hundred bucks already, for all I know .

But really, he knew that wasn't the case. He took a one dollar bill out of his wallet, bent slightly and let it float into case. The black toothpick nodded and continued playing. It was then that Ty noticed he'd accidentally given the man a five dollar bill.

Fuck!

For a second, his eyes locked with the homeless man, and Ty knew the man knew it had been a mistake. There was a flash of mental understanding between the two.

'Who gives a homeless man money and then asks for change? Not you.'

Ty turned and continued his speed walk to the florist.

The sax player finished up around 7:00 pm. Once the rush hour crowd had gone, the place became a ghost town. He gathered his coins and the few bills, put the saxophone in it's case, and started for home.

Technically, he wasn't homeless. He had a room with a small window. No electric, no water, and no heat; but a room. For the hundredth time today, the man patted his back pocket, assuring himself that the bottle was still there.

'There's my heat, anyway.'

He stopped at the bodega to buy a lottery ticket. He use to play all the time, when the money was there. Always the same numbers. It helped him remember his children's birthdays. Lately, he'd barely had enough scratch for the bottle, but tonight he'd got lucky with the suit and his fiver, and when luck visits, you don't let it leave so quick.

Outside the Port Authority, he took a long pull from the bottle, and started walking. There was a hotdog vendor a few blocks from his

home. At the end of the day, he gave away whatever hotdogs he didn't sell, but you had to get there fast. Supplies were limited and the line was always long.

He didn't think about the man who'd given him a five spot. And he didn't get a hotdog either. The drink hadn't gone down well, and his heartburn was acting up. So he just went home, laid down and died.

Later that night, there was the usual Pick Six lottery drawing. He wasn't even close.

