

If You See Something, Say Something

by Melissa Swantkowski

You're on the subway with your mama, and she's ignoring you and feeding the baby sister a banana. The baby keeps getting the peel in her mouth. Stupid, even for a baby. There's a couple giggling and wishing they had one, thinking she's so cute. Your mama keeps grinning this big, toothy grin as if to say, look I did it, I made this.

You're worried about the bag on the seat next to you, and your nose is crusty around the rim from a little bleed earlier when Jimmy McKeegan dared you to stick as many pencil erasers up there as you could, and you did it just to prove something. Jimmy McKeegan's nostrils are stretched out, and you should have known better. Ms. Simon caught you with one eraser still up there and blood all over your face and threatened to call your mama but didn't in the end. She helped you get the last eraser out with a gloved hand and then sent you to the bathroom to pinch your nose closed and hold your head back. You eyed Jimmy McKeegan the whole time to let him know you could rat him out, if you wanted to.

You look around the train, and realize you're the only one who's worried about this bag. It's brown and has the number thirteen on it, which you know to be a bad luck number. It has a single strap and a bulge on one side that keeps the flap open like a mouth. The old velcro trying to hold it together has lint and fuzz stuck to it. There is a hole in the bottom where the fabric is worn out that you think is just the right size for a wire or an igniter. In school, you did an experiment with batteries and wires and you know all about conducting electricity. You also had a special seminar on subway safety and the kinds of things to look for.

The bag is in the middle of the orange cradle of the subway seat, and when the train starts and stops, it wobbles and threatens to

topple to the ground. Two people who were sitting close to it have gotten off at different stops and now there's just one last guy, and he's playing with his phone. You're trying to get his attention by tap dancing your feet on the floor of the subway car, but he won't look over. You tap some different patterns, then just do a fast stomp until your mama looks up from across the aisle and says, "Quiet. Enough."

You think about moving over closer to your mama, but she's with the baby sister, of course, who's biting her own arm and pushing gummed up banana between her lips onto her skin. Your mama's wiping away the banana with her hand, laughing with the people sitting next to her because baby upchuck is just so adorable. Then your mama reaches her arm out and offers you a bite and you nearly die. You tell her, "No way," and she takes the bite herself. You fake a gag in case anyone is looking.

So instead you slide down in your seat and stretch your legs out and try to tap your foot right in front of the guy with the phone, but you can't reach, not even close. But the man finally looks up anyway, and you look back at him to say, *hey is this your bag, because if it's not, whose bag is it?*

He just tilts his head to one side and looks at you confused. He points to your nose, so you shake your head, like, *yeah I know, no biggie*, and point at the bag, but the man just shrugs and goes back to his phone. You touch your nose but it's not bleeding, just a little crusty in one place, same as when your mama picked you up from your after-school program and said, "Jesus Christ, look at the mess of you." Your mama likes you to dress up really neat for school - something about learning better when you look nice - but you can't seem to keep things in place like she wants them. You think you look alright when you go to school and alright when you get home, too.

Your mama is still feeding the baby sister that same banana because her bites are so dumb and small, but at least now she has a wipe out for all the spit and goo.

You look back at the man typing away on his phone and think, doesn't this guy realize that it could be a bomb? You think, "If you see something, say something", or "Si ves algo, di algo," because there are signs in both languages in every station, and even though you only speak English, you can read them. You decide he's either playing a game or he's programming the bomb in the bag that may or may not be his.

If the bag isn't his, this guy should be just as worried as you, because there's one more stop and then it's 59th to 125th, express train, no way out, except maybe walking out through the tunnel which is something you've always wanted to do. If it is his bag, it's probably not a bomb, unless he's one of those guys who plans to go along with it. A suicide bomber, a kamikaze - you learned in school, but not from Ms. Simon.

The baby sister finishes the banana and your mama puts all the dirty, sticky wipes in a plastic bag with the peel. She puts the whole mess in the bottom of the stroller.

"Mama!" you say then, because you can't hold it in anymore. She hands you a bag of Fritos from the the bottom of the stroller, so you eat the chips. You think there's a chance the bag could be holding a severed head, or live or dead kittens.

The baby sister has started to whimper now, and the couple who wanted her, or one like her is still smiling, but you know this is her wind-up. Soon enough the baby sister will get louder and they'll look away or put on headphones or get annoyed and turn towards each other and shake their heads. There's nothing worse than the baby sister on the subway. They think they want one, but they have no idea.

The more you think about it, the bag looks like a book-bag, but for all anyone knows, once it hits the ground, it will explode with a super nuclear bomb, or a million poisonous spiders or some disease that will come out and infect everyone through their skin. And the train isn't helping with all its jerky movements.

The guy with the phone gets up to leave and you stick your foot out to get his attention, but he thinks it's to trip him and he wags his finger at you. You watch him walk off into the crowd. No one else gets on the train and you've got three stops left with your mama and the baby sister and this bag.

Your mama's packing up now. To you she says, " Help me, unlock that back wheel," and points to the stroller. You don't want to move too much or too fast because you're almost out and this is another time the bag might explode, like it knows you're almost to safety. Like it can tell. You made it past 125th Street, and then all the way past 190th and now you're almost out of danger - just one more stop! Then POW. Explosion!

"Let's go!" your mama says, so you get up but move carefully. Your mama's movements are wide and messy, and she wraps up the baby sister in a coat and blanket and tucks all the fabric beneath her chin. The baby sister has stopped whimpering though, and you're surprised. She's smiling and chewing on a finger.

The train stops fast between stations while you're messing with the wheel of the stroller and you fall over and land with your face right on the mashed up banana bag, full of banana peel and spit and wipes. You say, "Oooooof," and then "Ewwwww" once you realize what's happened even though your face is on the plastic and nothing gets on you. You're glad the train is empty because falling is one of those embarrassing things. Your mama's big hands pick you up from behind and straighten out your coat. You push them off but they feel strong and safe and you feel like you want to cry for a second. You make sure it doesn't happen.

The baby sister starts to cry like she was the one who fell and had banana next to her face. "Shhhhh. Shush. Shhhhh," your mama's saying. The train's gearing up to move again. You can feel it vibrating under your feet. It starts with a jerk and the number-thirteen bag falls to the floor. You look around to see if anyone else is freaking out, but there's just a couple of other people on the train

and they're all lined up ready to get off when it pulls into the station. Before you know it, your mama's grabbed ahold of your arm and is leading you through the doors, and out the emergency exit gate. The alarm is broken on this one, so the only sound is people's feet and their walking. Your mama pushes the stroller through in front of the two of you. You want to turn your head to see if the bag's still there. If anything's happening. There are too many people behind you though, and you just get shoved through. Nothing seems to have happened yet. But that doesn't mean it won't.

You break free from your mama and run up the stairs to the street. "Mama," you say, "did you see that bag? The one on the seat? The one that fell? Did you see it!" You yell to her from the top of the stairs. She's carrying the stroller up with the baby sister still inside, and you don't want to take any chances by going back underground.

"Oh honey, someone must have left it. They'll miss it when they get home. That's what the lost and found is for," she says, and pats your head when she gets to the top of the stairs, huffing and puffing.

"But, but what if it was a bomb?"

"Bombs don't look like that. I bet it was somebody's school bag," she says, and you wonder if your mama is just lying to make you shut your mouth, or if she really wasn't worried on the train.

