

OTHER MEN

INT. LONDON UNDERGROUND STATION - NIGHT

DAN and JAKE, drunk men in their mid-twenties, stumble laughing down the stairs onto the platform. There are only a couple of other passengers - this will be the last train of the night - and they stand well away from the staircase and pay the newcomers no mind.

DAN has something of a curated 'look', with a pair of hipster glasses, heavy boots, and a long black coat buttoned against the cold. JAKE, who's more casually dressed in a loose grey jacket and trainers, seems the more gregarious of the two. He's certainly drunker, swaying slightly as he walks and speaking more loudly than necessary.

JAKE

(complaining) But they said they were going to do karaoke.

DAN

They did say that, yes.

JAKE

I wanted to do karaoke.

DAN

Did you also want to spend sixty quid on a taxi home?

JAKE

And they're all going to have fun. And then they'll all have sex. A big orgy we're missing out on.

DAN

Well, I'm sure we'll have our own orgy on the train.

JAKE

Will we fuck!

DAN

Yes, that's what I'm saying. Anyway, looks like this is us.

A train pulls into the station, and the pair board.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - NIGHT

The train is largely empty, and DAN and JAKE have the carriage almost to themselves. The only nearby passenger is a huge MAN, well over six foot and wide to match, who sits messily eating a sandwich on the opposite row. He's mid-50s, bald with several days of stubble, is missing half the teeth in his upper jaw, and wears a brown jumper, anorak, and rough cargo pants. One empty bottle of wine is pinned behind his foot while he holds another in his hand, using the seat beside him as an impromptu table.

DAN and JAKE sit down across from the MAN. The MAN turns briefly to give them a nod before taking another bite of his sandwich. The train rolls on.

JAKE

(sarcastically to DAN) Oh yeah, this is much better.

DAN

(settling back into his seat and closing his eyes)
You'll be grateful when you're waking up in your own bed tomorrow morning.

They sit in silence for a moment. The MAN takes a break from his sandwich and takes a swig from his bottle, regarding them.

MAN

You boys been on a night out?

He has a thick Scottish accent, and the sound of the train partly obscures his words. He seems friendly, giving them a broad smile.

DAN

(trying not to engage) Uhuh, yeah.

MAN

(Holds up the bottle.) Ah've been on a night out.
Been a long night, eh?

JAKE

You look like you were enjoying that sandwich.

MAN

Aye, it's just crap and all, but you need to eat something. Soak up the alcohol.

He looks at the remains of his sandwich for a second, then starts clearing up the mess, putting it all into a shopping bag along with the empty bottle.

MAN (cont'd)

Ah don't like to leave a mess. Tha's training.
Someone else would have to clean it up, so ah don't like to leave a mess. Training.

DAN

Yeah.

MAN

Ah was in the Regiment. Do you boys know what tha' means?

JAKE

It means you were in the army.

MAN

Nah, tha's not what it means.

JAKE

Well if you were in-

MAN

SAS. You boys know the SAS?

JAKE

Yeah, but you could've been in the army as well. If you're in a regiment.

MAN

Whassat?

DAN

He's saying that since the army has regiments as well, it could've meant you were in the army.

MAN

(Scoffing) Nah, ah wasn't in the army! Ah was in the SAS, man! Special forces.

JAKE

Right. OK.

MAN

Ah've seen some shite. Seen some shite. Look a' this. (He holds out a leg and rolls his trousers above the calf). See that'? Tha's from a bomb. IED. No' from the Taliban, though. If it were one of them ah'd have had no leg at all. But you know where we were before Iraq?

JAKE

You were in Ireland.

MAN

Tha's right.

He rolls down his trouser leg, settles comfortably in his seat. The train pulls into the station. Doors open, doors close, the train moves on.

MAN

Just been to the memorial of mah boys. Every year, all the families all get together where they're buried. So... (he holds up the wine bottle.)

DAN

Sorry to hear that.

MAN

Twelve o' them. We was in a chinook, you know wha' a chinook is, right? And ah was like, we gotta get out of here now, and they was saying, 'We're one hundred and seventy-five feet up, where we gonna go?', and I said, 'If we don't get outta this chinook right now we're all gonna die.' So you know what ah did? Ah jumped. (settles back smugly in his chair) Ah jumped outta there, landed smack!

He smacks his hands together, hard.

MAN

Face first onto the sand. S'how ah lost me teeth.

JAKE

You didn't.

MAN

Whassat?

JAKE

No one can fall a hundred and seventy-five feet and survive.

MAN

(smiling smugly) Aye, but ah did, though. (loses his smile) And then I look up, and tha' chinook gets hit with an RPG.

JAKE

Alright.

As he speaks, the train draws into another station. The NORWEGIAN enters and sits alongside the MAN, a couple of seats away. He has a well-kempt ginger beard, wears a light grey peacoat over a white shirt, black jeans, and smart black shoes. A small wine-stain dots the shirt under the collar. Out of one sleeve emerges a tattoo of a lion's head that covers the back of his hand.

The train rumbles on in silence for a few moments.

MAN

(to NORWEGIAN)
Tha's tattoos you've got there.

NORWEGIAN

Pardon, sir?

He has a perfect 70s newscaster accent, deep voice, clear pronunciation.

MAN

Tattoos. We didn't have tattoos in the Regiment. Weren't allowed.

NORWEGIAN

(smiling) Nor were we, sir.

MAN

You served in the Regiment?

NORWEGIAN

I served in a regiment.

MAN

Tha' right? (He gets up, moves a seat closer to the NORWEGIAN) Ah was in the SAS, Special Forces.

NORWEGIAN

Oh? Congratulations, sir.

MAN

(Scoffing) Congratulations! Nothing 'Congratulations' about it. Where d'you serve?

NORWEGIAN

I was in the Marinejeger. It's the Norwegian equivalent of the Navy Seals.

MAN

You were in the Navy Seals?

NORWEGIAN

No sir, I said I was in the Norwegian equivalent of the Navy Seals.

MAN

So... (he's a bit thrown by this, but rallies) How long were you in tha', then?

NORWEGIAN

Four years.

MAN

Four years? Mebbe we served in the same places?

NORWEGIAN

I very much doubt that, sir. Different age groups.

MAN

But ah bet you've seen some shite? Ah've seen some shite, ah have.

NORWEGIAN

No, sir. Fortunately I've never been to war.

MAN

(Disbelief) Never been to war! What you spend four years doing for, then?

NORWEGIAN

Mostly it was just pissing about in the snow, to be honest with you.

MAN

Pissing about in the snow! (Becoming outraged) Ah've served in fucking Iraq, fucking seen mah mates get blown up in a fucking helicopter! And you spent four years pissing about in the snow? You're having a laugh! You're telling me you fucking... Are you tryna take the piss outta me, pal?

The NORWEGIAN sits calmly through this, waiting to speak. He extends his hand, palm up, across the seat between them.

MAN (cont'd)

'cause ah tell you right now, ah'll fucking batter you, pal. What you fucking...?

NORWEGIAN

Take my hand, sir.

MAN

Why?

NORWEGIAN

Because -

MAN

Why?

NORWEGIAN

Because I'm asking you to.

The MAN hesitates for a moment, nonplussed. Then he takes the NORWEGIAN's hand.

MAN

(muttering) What are you wanting for me to-

NORWEGIAN

(speaking over him firmly) I think the least anyone can do is take you by the hand... and thank you for your service.

Beat. Their hands stay clasped for a moment. Then the MAN lets go, obviously mollified.

MAN

So you go' tattoos? And a beard? We weren't allowed tattoos. You know why?

NORWEGIAN

As I said, sir, I got mine after I left the force.

MAN

'Cause if you're caught behind enemy lines, right, if you're caught by the enemy, then they're gonna know who y'are.

NORWEGIAN

Quite so.

MAN

An' mah wife won't let me grow a beard. Says it tickles her!

NORWEGIAN

My ex-wife said the same thing, sir. So immediately after we separated, I grew a beard.

MAN

(speaking in unison) You grew a beard!

He laughs, and the NORWEGIAN smiles.

MAN (cont'd)

So you spent four years in the snow? Wha'sat like?

NORWEGIAN

All turtle dick and no balls, sir.

MAN

(laughing) Ah couldn't handle the snow, too cold.

NORWEGIAN

Believe it or not, you get used to it.

MAN

Nah, ah couldn't handle it. Ah was in hot places.
Like Iraq.

NORWEGIAN

Really, sir?

MAN

Aye. (holds up the bottle) Jus' had the memorial for
mah boys. Twelve of them. An' after tha' I went on a
right fucking bender ah did. Been out since Tuesday.

NORWEGIAN

I imagine your wife must be worried about you.

MAN

What?

NORWEGIAN

Your wife. I imagine she must be concerned.

MAN

Aw yeah, probably. But ah don't... Yeah.

NORWEGIAN

Where have you been staying, sir?

MAN

Aw you know, mates. An' a couple hotels.

NORWEGIAN

And you haven't called her?

MAN

Aw, she knows, man.

NORWEGIAN

So you have called her.

MAN

Nah, but she knows.

NORWEGIAN

Well, are you going to go home to her tonight, sir?

MAN

(evasive) Well, it's... Ah don't... You know wha' ah did? She was giving me all tha' (mimes a chattering mouth with his hand), an' ah was like, 'Fine. You want to give me lip?' So you know wha' ah did? Ah cancelled her credit cards.

NORWEGIAN

To what end, sir?

MAN

Wha'?

NORWEGIAN

To what end?

MAN

(laughing, but slightly guilty) 'Cause she was out getting herself a new handbag and the card come back declined!

NORWEGIAN

And did that fulfil its purpose?

MAN

(still amused but guilty) Nah, she jus' came back an' gave me more lip.

NORWEGIAN

I see. Well, you should go home to her. She must be worried about you.

MAN

Aw, we'll see. Ah've been staying with friends, it's fine.

NORWEGIAN

And haven't they told you to go home to her?

MAN

Wha'? Nah!

NORWEGIAN

Why not?

MAN

(confused) It's... Well, there's...

NORWEGIAN

A good friend will tell you not what you want to hear, but what you need to hear.

As they're talking, DAN leans over to JAKE.

DAN

(speaking quietly) We could get off at the stop before. It's close enough to walk.

JAKE

It's fine. We'll be fine.

DAN sits back, biting his lip.

NORWEGIAN

You're not sleeping on benches, are you sir?

MAN

Wha'? Naww, ah wouldn't sleep on fucking benches! Ah book mahself into a hotel!

NORWEGIAN

But why not go home?

MAN

Well... mebbe.

The train begins pulling in to another station, and the NORWEGIAN gets up.

MAN

Oh, you're off.

NORWEGIAN

Yes, sir. This is my stop.

MAN

It's been good meeting you.

NORWEGIAN

A pleasure, sir.

He departs. The train moves on. The remaining three sit in silence for a moment.

MAN

(to JAKE and DAN) Norwegian navy seals! You hear tha'?

JAKE

Yeah.

DAN

Mmmm, yeah.

MAN

Spent four years pissing about in the snow! Can you believe it!

DAN

Mmmm.

MAN

An' you see his tattoos? We couldn't have tattoos. In the SAS, they don't let you have tattoos.

JAKE

Right, sure, whatever.

MAN

You wha'?

JAKE

(tired, quiet) Whatever you say, it's just... sure, OK.

MAN

Wha' you trying to say, pal?

JAKE

It's not real, though, is it?

MAN

Wha' d'you mean?

JAKE

All of this. You weren't in the SAS.

MAN

(getting angry) Ah fucking was, man!

JAKE

Sure, OK.

The MAN gets to his feet, incandescent.

MAN

You saying ah'm full of shite? See how fucking big ah am? Ah'll fucking batter you, pal!

JAKE

(still speaking quietly) I don't believe you were in the SAS.

MAN

Come on, stand up! Stand up! You want to fucking... Stand up!

JAKE remains seated. The MAN grabs his hand, the fingers interlocking as in a game of Mercy. They stay frozen like this for a moment as the train pulls into the next stop. The doors open.

Beat.

MAN

Aww, fuck this.

He sweeps off the train, leaving his sandwich bag behind. JAKE, energised, with a disbelieving smile, looks at DAN. DAN is impassive.

JAKE

Can you... fucking hell.

DAN

(deadpan) Well done.

JAKE

What do you mean?

DAN

(sarcastically) Oh, you really showed him, didn't you?

JAKE

But he was full of shit!

DAN

You don't know that for a fact. And even if he were, so what?

JAKE

So someone should call him out.

DAN

Right. But as our Norwegian friend said, 'To what end'?

JAKE

Because they should. Because he wasn't telling the truth.

DAN

Just leave it.

JAKE

But I -

DAN

Leave it.

They sit in uncomfortable silence. The train pulls into the next stop, and DAN gets up to leave, JAKE following behind.