

Tracks

Bianca Shannon

2009

The long line of lights flickered above where the train passed in the dark tunnel. It was four am and Maggie sat on the wooden seats that were placed about five feet from the platform. Her feet were pressed flat on the cement floor, palms resting on the two seats on either side of her. She was feeling for the vibration the train made when getting nearer.

The lights flickered on and off again and this time they stayed off, left Maggie in complete darkness for a minute. She was used to this. She's been at this subway stop since seven that night and the lights hadn't worked properly yet.

She stood up from the hard brown seats, immersed in darkness and walked straight ahead. Walked until she felt the small circular bumps under her feet that signified the start of the track and the beginning of the long fall to the trash covered lanes. She could hear the quick movements of the rats below her, tiny nails tapping at the metal tracks, their sharp black, stained fingers scratching through the thick layer of mud that coated the once silver lanes, the scurrying over plastic bags that had once been someone's trash, but was now a source of music, a piece of furniture, a constant in these little animals lives.

The lights flickered on again and the mud-stained tracks were empty. No sign showed that something lived under there. The rats had all returned to their hide outs in the cement walls, awaiting for the next moment of darkness to come.

Maggie inspected the tracks closely, looking for clues that indicated that the rats were really there. She saw the little nail marks left on the metal tracks. Thin scrapes which looked like what a needle would do to a person's dry skin. She also saw a white translucent, plastic bag that lay between the two tracks. Her mind flashed instantly to the sound of the nails running across it. She could imagine their plump, grey bodies resting on it, rotating in circles, sniffing every inch of it. The fact that she could see this bag made it all real to her. It was like studying the Egyptian pyramids and then actually seeing them as they stood in Egypt. One could finally be connected to a world that was only talked about, seen in pictures, unreachable.

She smiled softly and tilted her head slightly to the left, her chin jutting out. She was thinking about the rats and the unknown world they lived in beneath her and she wanted to know more about it, be part of their lives, touch them. She wanted to be like that plastic bag. Wanted their stiff little nails running across her body, puncturing her skin like a needle does as they move over her pale lean arms, legs and fleshy middle.

The lights went off again and Maggie was standing at the edge of the tracks. Her breathing became heavy and her body stiff. She knew they would come out and she'd be close to them, she'd be able to hear them right below her, just a foot away from being part of them. She could almost feel their cold nails across her body.

A shuffle below, tick-tick-tick-tick, the noise of a plastic bag being moved, chewed on. They came out of the holes on to their home. Maggie's heart started to beat fast and loud. It was as if it was calling out to the rats, asking them if she could be one of them. They responded in return, moving over the bag, tapping over the metal lanes and making a strange squealing noise that sounded like wind passing through a tiny crack in a window.

She couldn't hold back any longer. She moved closer to the tracks, shuffling her feet forward across the raised circles until she could feel her weight on the balls of her feet where the drop to the tracks began. She leaned forward, feeling the gravity pulling her body forward and then leaned back again, the gravity working the opposite way. She found her balance again and kneeled down, feeling for the edge of the platform with her hands, brushing over the raised bumps and grabbing the edge of it, palm split in half by the small circles and cold smooth cement of the inside of the track walls. Their squealing strengthened and the shuffling noise of their claws seemed to double in volume. It almost sounded as if they were calling for her, cheering her on, "come to us, come to us" it seemed they were saying in their small windy voices. Come to us.

"I'll come to you," Maggie responded aloud and she leaned her head and upper body over the platform and closer to the tracks. She took a deep breath in and inhaled the air around them. It was moist and soft, the air moved through her lungs lazily, sticking to her, attaching to her, seeping through her.

She was almost there, almost in their world. She shut her eyes and allowed herself to take in the last moment she had as the person she was: the person without the tracks, the person not submerged in this different world, not awake.

Her hands pressed harder on the raised bumps, holding all of her body weight, and she flung her legs in front of her, sitting on the ledge of the platform. She could feel the cold from the cement walls on her calves through her jeans and it excited her, it was like a sign to her, the sudden change in temperature, the sudden reaction her body felt, Good things were going to happen, things that would make her feel again. She wanted more, more of that immediate sensation. Her clothes were a barrier between the two worlds. they were holding her back from feeling, entering herself into the life of the tracks.

Her shoes came first. She reached down and slipped them carefully off her feet and placing them to the right of her. Then the jeans. She unbuttoned them and pulled the zipper down, making a strange mechanical noise in the midst of the natural sounds of the rats. She then reached for the hem at her ankles and tugged at them once. They fell accidentally into the tracks, moving slowly down the wall and the steps of the rats quickened to them. She followed step with her underwear, shirt, bra and finally socks but she made sure that they were neatly placed to the side with her shoes. It looked almost like a person had vanished in that one spot and nothing remained but their clothes.

When she was completely naked, the girl slowly slid down the side of the wall, feeling every rough bump from the unevenly spread cement. The cold walls made her shiver and her skin began to react. She smiled as she slid farther down and spoke in a soft whisper to the rats under her, "I'm coming."

The tracks smelled like piss and feces and Maggie inhaled the air with no hesitation as if it was part of her everyday. The wet brown mud slid between her toes and she leaned down, touching her feet and smearing the mud up her legs. She could hear the hesitation within the rats' steps. They seemed unsure at first of this other body in their territory but as Maggie began to cover herself in the mud their sharp clicks from their nails neared her. Their squealing began again and she was almost put in a trance. Moving by their noise, she slowly laid herself down between the tracks lanes. Her frail, milky body fit perfectly between them. The brown mud inching up her sides, her blonde hair turning brown from the wet mud. She held on protectively to the silver lanes on either side of her, as if she was scared that something would take her away from this perfect place.

The parts of her body that were not yet covered in mud acted like a light in the dark tracks. She fit in almost perfectly as another creature living there, but the random places of white skin that shone through the brown acted as a reminder of her human state. The rats began to near her body, starting at her feet. They inched around her carefully, smelling her thin frame that was covered in mud and beginning to mount at her toes. First they pushed her toes with their wet black noses, seeing how this strange thing would move. When her toes reacted as they wished, moving slightly and then returning slowly to the position they began in, the rats climbed upon them, struggling a bit between her toes and falling through the cracks. When they finally made it on to her legs they began to move around her entire body, marking away the mud that was on her and revealing her white skin.

There were about eight rats on her now and Maggie made no movement, it was as if she was completely enveloped into this world, and she was their toy, for the rats to do with what they pleased. Her hands still clung on to the silver lanes, but they began to shake now, not from her body, but from the tracks. A train was coming and a vibration began in the metal lanes. The rats stopped their movements and seemed to be frozen in time. They raised

their little black snouts up in the air, feeling for the breeze the train would make. Maggie still didn't move, she was part of the tracks now and belonged to them. The vibration strengthened and her hands began to bump the lanes, being thrown up and down. The rats were in the same position as before, frozen on her body. More rats started to appear, coming out of their hide-outs in the walls and running down from other parts of the dark path. They all started to climb on her, covering almost every inch of her and she began to slowly sink into the mud. Her lips, which were one of the only areas not covered by the rats, began to turn up, forming a sly smile that disappeared only in the slow submergence underground.

The last thing Maggie saw before the rats had completely pulled her underground was the light from the train coming toward her.

The train moving forward slowly, lighting up the dark path and exposing Maggie's blue jeans on the side of the tracks where they had fallen in. The lights above then turned on, and if one would look close enough, one would see the smiling sapphire blue eyes of the girl slowly seeping into trash-filled lanes, and the outline of plump rodent bodies under the mud surface on top of where she had been. The train lazily passed through and in its passing took with it Maggie's jeans, ripping hem at the knees and splitting them into two sections, dragging the separate pieces along in its slow journey down the lark lane into the black tunnel that lay ahead.

As the train passed through the station and when all that was left of it was the yellow light of its tail, a soft sigh was heard from underground. It was a sigh of pleasure of fulfillment. A long sigh that eventually trailed off deeper beneath the tracks, muffled by the thick mud.

A brown pair of leather slip on sandals rested besides a neatly folded T-shirt, a bra, socks and underwear. They lay on the yellow platform, strangely close to the edge. Any sudden movement that would stir the air around them would likely crush the orphan clothes into the dark tracks.

fifth Estate

Bianca Shannon
Tracks
2009

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/380-spring-2009/tracks>
Fifth Estate #380, Spring 2009

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net