

OUT OF SYNC

by Liane Fazio

His reflection smiled at him, but he hadn't moved a muscle.

He turned, expecting someone behind him. There were only commuters boarding the train, mindlessly shuffling in to find a seat. Standing in the middle of the car, he gripped the grab handle tighter, swiveling as he let others pass by.

Bong. The doors closed. With a jerk, the train moved slowly, and he glanced out of the corner of his eye at the window. The tunnel outside was black; the car's lights were harsh. In the glass window, his reflection appeared clearly, mingled with the faint outlines of his fellow passengers.

His reflection was staring at him full on.

He rubbed his neck, stretching it from side to side to look behind him again. The other riders were either on their phones or reading books or newspapers. No one was looking out the window.

Rain smeared the world outside; the car lights ghosted across the glass. Nonchalantly, he took out his phone and opened the camera app. He moved with the bouncing train, more languidly than necessary, and came to face the window. Raising his phone, he took a picture of his reflection.

Keeping his head down, acting like he was playing on his phone, he looked at the picture he had just taken. There: his reflection, smiling. A phone in its hand, aimed at him.

Is he taking a picture of me?

What the hell am I thinking? A loud laugh escaped him. An elderly woman eyed him and tutted her disapproval. He smiled at her and looked away. Straining to see through the other passengers, he couldn't get a clear view of the opposite window.

The train slowed, coming to the first stop. The doors opened on his side, and he kept his eyes in front of him, watching people get on and off. He tapped record on his phone. As the train pulled away, he quickly spun to face the window and stuck his tongue out.

The reflection didn't. It tilted its head and wagged a finger.

He stared, mouth dry, in disbelief.

The elderly woman sneezed, making him jump. She blew her nose. He watched her reflection in the glass. It stayed motionless.

“Excuse me,” he said, panicking, as he pushed and tripped over people in the crowded car. Inside the vestibule, he stopped and took several deep breaths. The tiny space was noisier and rocked harder.

Leaning against the wall, he realized his phone was still recording. Closing his eyes, he held it up to record the window in the door.

The train slowed again for the next stop. He waited until the doors opened to bring his phone down and open his eyes.

More commuters entered the vestibule, and he had to flatten himself against the wall to let them pass. The scent of cool, newly fallen rain brought him back to reality. Once the train set off and he was alone again, he stopped recording and hit play.

The video showed only him: phone out, facing forward.

Chuckling, he replayed it again. The same: him, filming the window. What a fool he was, thinking his reflection was not reflecting *himself*.

Idiot. Get a grip.

The vestibule door opened. “I’m sorry, sir, but you can’t ride here,” the conductor said.

“I just had to make a phone call,” he said, smiling.

The conductor, frowning, looked him up and down. “Well, make it quick.” He opened the door to the next car and went through.

“Yeah, I will,” he said out loud.

Pocketing his phone, he opened the door to the next car. Straddling the threshold, he looked at the window.

His reflection wasn’t walking into the next train car. It was watching him.

No. Not possible. He stopped with one foot in the next car. The train rocked violently as it made a turn. He bounced inside the doorframe and hit his head.

In the glass, his reflection laughed at him, arms crossed over its chest, unmoving as the train clattered on.

Is he mocking me? he thought.

A child’s laughter filled the confined space.

“Hey, mister!”

He spun around. A small boy leaned near the open door.

“He’s laughing at you!” the boy giggled.

“You... you can see him?” he asked, frightened.

“Duh,” the boy replied.

He stepped into the car, the door shushing closed behind him. “Where is he now?” he asked.

The boy peered around him. “There,” he said, pointing to the window.

“What’s he doing?”

“Waving at me,” the boy said. “Hiya!” he yelled, waving past him.

The boy’s mom grabbed him and sat him firmly in his seat. “What are you doing?” she scolded.

“That man asked me...” the boy started, but his mom wouldn’t let him finish.

“What have I told you about talking to strangers?” she asked.

“But...” he whined.

“Stop looking at my son!” she yelled. People in the car turned around.

He held up his hands and said, “Ma’am, I really need to talk to your son. He saw...”

“He’s five!” she yelled and pulled her son closer, shielding him with her arm.

A big, burly man two rows ahead stood up, glaring at him. Nodding at the boy’s mom, he opened the door and stood in the vestibule for a minute.

The rhythmic click and sway of the train eased his thoughts, and soon he decided what he should do.

Keeping his eyes closed, riding the gentle waves of the rails, he felt the train slow. It wasn’t until he heard the door shush open that he opened his eyes. He spun quickly and pushed through the throng of commuters to exit the train.

He caught his breath as he leaned against a pole on the platform. His heart pounded. It wasn’t until he heard the hiss of the train door closing that he turned to watch it begin to pull away.

The boy was standing in the window, smiling and waving at him. He let out a breath he didn’t realize he was holding and waved back at the boy.

The boy's smile dropped. Shaking his head, he pointed at him. Confused, he patted his chest.

The boy shook his head, pointed again, his eyes not on him. He was looking at someone just behind him.

He felt a gentle breath on the back of his neck.

The boy waved once more.

Then the train was gone.