

THE LAST TRAIN OUT OF ILLINOIS

by

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CHARACTERS

Thomas Grey

Miranda

Mr. Moonshine

Tom McLaughlin

*(The scene is a small all-night diner counter in a train station in Chicago. Behind the counter is MIRANDA, the waitress (late twenties to early thirties), who keeps an unlit cigarette in her mouth through most of the show. Sitting at the counter is THOMAS GREY (late thirties to early forties) dressed in slacks, a white button-down shirt and a loosened tie. He has a half-eaten plate of food in front of him that he just stares at.)*

**Miranda:** You through with that?

**Grey:** No.

*(Miranda shrugs and tends to something else. Enter Mr. Moonshine, a homeless man who is more than a little crazy.)*

**Mr. Moonshine:** Where's my coffee?

**Miranda:** I don't—

**Mr. Moonshine:** I gotta get my coffee! The train is gonna be here soon!

**Miranda:** You gonna take the train, Mr. Moonshine?

**Mr. Moonshine:** Moonshine don't take no train. Moonshine needs his coffee.

**Miranda:** I don't have any coffee for you.

**Mr. Moonshine:** It's the last train! Moonshine needs his coffee!

**Miranda:** Look, you ratty piece of shit, when Kim is here, she might give you free coffee. But on my shift you get jack.

**Mr. Moonshine:** Jack sprat, wolf pack, racing forward don't look back. *(beat)* Moonshine got a dollar, you gotta give him coffee.

**Miranda:** Yes, if you have a dollar, I will sell you coffee.

**Mr. Moonshine:** Moonshine has a dollar. *(He throws himself to the ground, starts to unlace his boot)* Moonshine has a dollar.

**Grey:** Regular?

**Miranda:** He lives down here. He's crazy. Can't you see that?

**Mr. Moonshine:** Keep it in my boot. Safer that way.

**Miranda:** Do you need anything?

**Grey:** No, I'm f— no. Nothing.

*(Enter Tom McLaughlin (mid-to-late twenties), carrying his satchel over his shoulder)*

**Tom:** Hey, what—

*(Moonshine has one boot off)*

**Mr. Moonshine:** It's in here somewhere!

**Tom:** Can I... is he first?

**Miranda:** Ignore him.

**Tom:** You sure?

**Mr. Moonshine:** Moonshine has a dollar! I know he does!

**Miranda:** I'm sure.

**Tom:** Okay. Can I get something simple to go?

**Miranda:** Simple like what?

**Tom:** Umm, like a sandwich?

**Miranda:** What kind of sandwich?

**Tom:** Corned beef?

**Miranda:** No.

**Tom:** No corned beef?

**Miranda:** No.

**Tom:** Roast beef?

**Miranda:** No.

**Tom:** Chicken salad?

**Miranda:** Not that you'd want.

**Tom:** Bad?

**Miranda:** Extremely.

**Tom:** Okay—

**Mr. Moonshine:** OTHER BOOT! *(Starts to take off his other boot)*

**Tom:** - Right, so—I'm sorry, what's with the unlit cigarette?

**Miranda:** Health code.

**Tom:** What?

**Miranda:** I can't light it. It's against the health code.

**Tom:** But—

**Miranda:** Do you know what you want?

**Tom:** Umm... can I get a BLT on wheat?

**Miranda:** Yes. One minute. *(goes in the back)*

**Tom:** Jesus. Goodbye, Chicago, that's all I have to say. *(looks at Grey)* What about you? Coming or going?

**Grey:** Hmm?

**Tom:** Are you coming or going? You know, it's a train station, so one is usually doing one or the other. *(Takes a beat for Grey to respond)* Me, I'm out of here. I have had enough of this city.

**Grey:** Tourist?

**Mr. Moonshine:** Moonshine is gonna have a dollar here.

**Tom:** No, I'm just, trying to... you know, find my place.

**Grey:** Find your place?

**Tom:** Yeah. You know, the right place to settle down. A place that suited me. Thought Chicago might be it. I was wrong.

**Grey:** Didn't suit you.

**Tom:** Not at all. *(extends hand)* Tom McLaughlin.

**Grey:** *(After a pause, he takes Tom's hand, like it's a dead fish)* Thomas Grey.

**Tom:** Hey, both Toms!

**Mr. Moonshine:** EUREKA! Dollar in the boot!

**Grey:** You're a Tom. I'm a Thomas.

**Tom:** Well, so am I, according to my license. But, hey, Thomas, Tom, Tommy, Asshole, Shithead, Fuckweasel. I get called them all. So you from Chicago?

**Grey:** Live here. Not from here.

**Tom:** Don't know how you do it. Too much city for me. I guess I really am a small-town guy at heart.

**Grey:** Really.

**Tom:** Yeah. Upstate New York. You can't just tell people "New York", because they presume the city.

**Mr. Moonshine:** The Big Apple. Sin City.

**Tom:** Las Vegas is Sin City. *(To Grey)* But, yeah, too small there. Nothing for me but the family business. And my brother was already all over that. Workaholic, that man. Acted like the world revolved around the place. You got a brother?

**Grey:** *(snapping)* No, I don't have a brother. I have three sisters: Anna, Karen, Nina. I don't ever talk to them. Anything else?

*(Tom is a bit stunned, and then Mr. Moonshine steps up to them, still in his socks.)*

**Mr. Moonshine:** Let me tell you about brothers. My brother, you know what he does? He writes an epic poem on using Chaos Theory and Quantum Mechanics to bring

together people of all nations. And for that, in one fell swoop, he wins the fucking Nobel Prizes in Literature, Mathematics, Physics and Peace! *(Beat)* You can't beat that!

*(As he finishes that, Miranda comes out with a paper bag. He then turns to a member of the audience.)*

**Mr. Moonshine:** What are you looking at?!?! *(His tone changes to a calm, casual, conversational one as he continues to address the audience. While he does this, Miranda and Tom mime out her giving him the bag and him paying her. Grey stares at his plate some more.)* I'm sorry, that wasn't necessary. Or appropriate. I do apologize. You don't deserve such treatment. I get a little unhinged. You see, I'm burdened with knowing how this will end. I'm not just crazy for crazy's sake. Seeing the future isn't good for the mind. It's a very fine line between being a prophet and a lunatic. But all I'm allowed to tell you is that the last train out of Illinois will arrive in about five minutes, and it's crucial to the resolution.

**Tom:** *(To Miranda)* Who is he talking to?

**Miranda:** No one. He's crazy. He talks to the air.

**Mr. Moonshine:** Duty calls. *(Goes back into lunatic mode)* Moonshine got a dollar! Where's my coffee?

**Miranda:** No shoes, no service.

**Mr. Moonshine:** Where's my coffee? Moonshine needs his coffee, the train is gonna come!

**Miranda:** Put your damn boots on, Moonshine, and you'll get it. *(to Grey)* Are you done with that, sir?

**Grey:** Yes. No. *(beat)* No.

**Miranda:** Are you waiting for something?

**Mr. Moonshine:** Perfect moment. He's waiting for the perfect moment.

**Miranda:** Put your boots on!

**Mr. Moonshine:** I'll show you putting boots on! *(Sits on the ground, angrily starts putting his boots back on, muttering the whole time)* Train is gonna come and I need my coffee...

**Miranda:** Whatever. *(To Tom)* Did you need anything else?

**Tom:** No. I, uh— I guess my train is gonna be here soon. *(To Grey)* Hey, buddy, I'm sorry. I was just making conversation. *(No response from Grey)* All right. *(To Miranda)* Thanks for... everything.

*(He starts to go)*

**Grey:** Tom.

*(Tom turns back)*

**Tom:** Yeah?

**Grey:** You asked me if I was coming or going. I don't know. I think I'm— I...

**Tom:** It's okay. It's just—you looked like you had a story to tell.

**Grey:** A story?

**Tom:** Sitting there, staring at your plate. Everyone's got some sad story to tell, and you looked like you needed to tell it.

**Grey:** Everyone?

**Tom:** Everyone. And they're all grand weepers or grim reapers.

**Grey:** Hmm. Mine's a bit of both. *(beat)* Do you think you're a happy person?

**Tom:** What do you mean?

**Grey:** Do you consider yourself happy? Your life, trying to find your place?

**Tom:** I don't know. On the whole, yeah, I suppose so.

**Grey:** I can't think of a... single happy day. I've been trying to scour my memory for something. From my childhood or anytime. But I can't think of a single happy day. *(beat)* Do you know what the worst thing you've ever done is?

**Tom:** Yeah. Yeah, I know it. I—

**Grey:** Don't tell me. I don't need to know. But you know it. You know in your heart that it is the worst thing you've done.

**Tom:** Yeah. I do.

**Grey:** Knowing that, can you still look at yourself in the mirror?

**Tom:** *(takes a moment to answer)* Most days.

**Grey:** I guess that isn't too bad.

**Mr. Moonshine:** *(muttered)* Not here yet but Moonshine needs his coffee.

**Grey:** I killed a woman today. And her daughter.

*(Miranda's cigarette falls out of her mouth.)*

**Mr. Moonshine:** *(muttered)* I knew it train is coming perfect moment is coming Moonshine doesn't have his coffee.

**Miranda:** Shut up, Moonshine! *(beat)* Oh my god I... Jesus Christ. *(picks up cigarette and lights it)*

**Tom:** Listen, you don't—

**Grey:** Hit them with my car. Went right through a red light. She was crossing the intersection with her daughter and I just—

**Mr. Moonshine:** Wham!

**Grey:** Wham. Just like that.

**Tom:** Uh, umm... were—were you drunk or...

**Grey:** That's the thing. I wasn't drinking or falling asleep or anything like that. No excuse. Just for that moment, as I was approaching the red light, I didn't care at all.

**Tom:** So what did you do?

**Grey:** Just kept driving. Until I came here. Then I decided I needed to have something to eat.

**Miranda:** You're... you're going to have to go. I— we— this establishment does not serve murderers.

**Tom:** Look, you can still go to the police, and they can...

**Grey:** You don't quite get it, do you, Tom? I was halfway through my meal when I saw my own reflection in the plate. And I couldn't bear it. I've been looking at myself for an hour and a half, and I only see something horrible.

**Miranda:** That's because you are horrible.

**Tom:** Miss, please, be quiet. Listen to me, Thomas, you've done something that can—

**Grey:** So, I started to think, and in my life, I've never done one good thing. One decent thing.

**Mr. Moonshine:** *(jumping up to the counter)* Train is coming! No time for Moonshine needs his coffee!

**Miranda:** Get out of here, Moonshine!

**Tom:** I'm sure you have.

**Grey:** Not one good happy thing. I always thought it was just life, that was how it was—

**Mr. Moonshine:** No, no time—

**Tom:** What are you talking about?

**Mr. Moonshine:** Train is going to be here.

**Miranda:** All of you, get out.

**Mr. Moonshine:** Please... no time.

**Grey:** But now it's hit me, in a perfect moment of clarity, that my whole life is meaningless.

*(Suddenly, as if moved by the moment, Grey begins to sing. The song has a course, bluesy feel to it, like something by Tom Waits)*

*Well, I've crossed a wide ocean of time  
And never escaped to tomorrow  
And I know that I never will find  
The answers to all of my sorrow*

*The past is still behind me  
The future, plain as day  
But the only thing that I see  
Is I have but one thing to say*

*I haven't felt one moment of joy  
But I've known a season of pain  
I'm gonna take the last train out of Illinois  
And it's time to catch my train  
I'm gonna take the last train out of Illinois  
And it's time to catch my train*



*(As he finishes, the sound of a train arriving and braking can be heard off stage. He looks off, looks at Tom, then runs off stage towards the train. Miranda and Moonshine just stare after him, while Tom tries to process what is happening. Grey's scream as he is hit by the train is heard)*

**Tom:** Jesus—what... what just happened?

**Miranda:** Oh my god.

**Tom:** Call an ambulance! Call 911!

**Miranda:** Oh my god...

**Tom:** Oh, Jesus. Call 911!

*(Tom runs out)*

**Miranda:** Oh, Jesus. Oh my god....

**Mr. Moonshine:** Moonshine never get coffee on time.

*(Black out)*



