

was that man who checks every inch of the track? What was that man dreaming about when he should have been checking the track?

In Delmore Schwartz's haunting short story "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," a grown man watches a movie of his parents' courtship. His father wears a tie. His mother wears a hat with feathers. They are trying to impress each other. They ride a streetcar to Coney Island. They ride a merry-go-round, reaching for the brass rings. Then they stand on this same boardwalk, looking out at this same ocean, when his father asks his mother to marry him. Just at that moment the narrator stands up and shouts at this movie screen: "Don't do it. It's not too late to change your minds, both of you. Nothing good will come of it." This is the feeling I have looking at this moment now. Stop the movie, there on the boardwalk. I feel like shouting at myself through the years. But this is what you can't do. *Don't do it. It's not too late to change your mind.*

For now, though, my date buys a large bag of Nathan's French fries, and I wonder how on earth he can eat after what we have just been through, and the crowd is enveloping us with stuffed dogs, and blown-up alligators tucked under their arms, and the sun glistens in the sand, and the sky is as blue as the cotton candy sold by vendors and for now, I am enchanted by the unknown territories of another person, and of the city itself.

RUCKUS FLATBUSH
Jonathan Lethem

THE MANHATTAN BRIDGE is spring-loaded and cars tilt off like bad pinballs aimed with deranged precision at the Williamsburgh Dentist's Bunker Tower and then score, lighting it up with a honking buzz that makes you need your braces tightened again—rubber-band my jaw and start over. Junior's, a Tang wedding cake permanently on fire, smoke and scorch wreathing from the upper banquet hall windows. A guy with teeth the size of manhole covers bites into a cheesecake and pastrami on latkes triple-decker and a chunk of translucent pastrami fat falls sizzling off the curb melting the black tar and causing a swerving wreck between a block-long mafoso stretch limo and a Philip Guston garbage truck with a real dead cat strapped to its grille. Three siblings in identical bowl cuts emerge blinking from the Department of Health, each with freshly fitted Medicare spectacles, identical plastic frames, three Swifty Lazars in Moe haircuts. Mom tugs them across and they get stranded like ducklings on the median line. The wind smashes the hands of the Tower's

clock off-line like Dr. Seuss fingers, today is Pluterdag,
twenty-five o'clock on Ruckus Flatbush!

May not be a crack in everything but there surely is in
Brooklyn and you're falling in, scabbling fingers finding
no purchase, help, somebody, I got wedged in Butt Flash
Avenue!

Serial killer's picking off the end of the line at the DMV
renewal window and nobody notices.

Harry M. Octopus Institute of Practically Nothing Any-
how. One-Year Certificate. One flight up.

WE FIX U GOOD.

Third Degree, Fourth Degree, Butt Flash Extension.
South Pockmark Avenue. Corner of Pock and Butt.

Eight-foot tall man in a perfect Malcolm X suit selling
whole leopard skins and persimmons oil and cobra venom
incense and a table of books by some conspiracy wrangler
named Napoleon Fung gets hungry for a Jamaican meat
patty wrapped in coco bread. Wrap that in a slice of pizza
and cough out a chicken bone you didn't even know was in
there. Drumstick bones in an accumulating heap teeter
down the subway portal. The city bus skids off Butt Flash,
onto Full-Time, doomed pedestrians swept up by its Soy-
lent Green people-catcher depositing them in a jumble
onto the Albeit Squalor Mall escalators—going up!

Never Street, Jape Street, Doubtful Place, Murder
Avenue. Stifle, between Bums and Hurt.

Soar into space or use Google Maps to make sense of

this place, read the smashed black orbs of sidewalk gum
like an aerial map of disease vectors, urban dismay, or
merely the exhausted moment when the wrung-out blob of
xylitol spills from your lips. Chew Ennu! Rise higher, now
sight the workmen's gloves scattered in the gutters with
their fat smashed canvas fingers resembling popped corn.
Were their hands lopped off? Higher now, a distribution of
church spires confesses the forgotten plots of acreage and
silence, Brooklyn a planet of towns, plow it up and start
over. Dime Savings Bank was a fieldstone to begin with,
biggest ever. Shifted it out of Manfred Von Bergen's farm.
Metrotech, a meteorite, fell in the '70s, they started scrap-
ing out windows. Plane crashed on Schumer's Horn in '81,
folks were living in it the next day. Yo Mama included!

Turn left on Tightwad. Place you want is on Living
Stoned. Off Smear. Talk to a guy I know. You don't even have
to say my name, he'll know I know you. No, you'll know
when you see him. All taken care of. You talk he talks all talk
no trouble. Cash only! No checks!

This place don't look like much but it's legendary and
nearly historical. They kept slaves on Doubtful Place, so I
heard. Black ones. I remember when they tore down that
theater. They had to close Grim Ugly Plaza because a tidal
wave of rats ran east. Hey, don't take my word for it. You
could look it up or alternately go fuck yourself.

The Aggravated Antic.

Parhetic Street.

Dude snatched a purse and they chased him all the way down Hurt to Why Cough. Dude lived in the Why Cough Garbage.

Guy crawls blinking out of the Lost Isolation Rail Road terminal with a blue Dodgers cap on his head with the visor ripped off, sort of like a Dodgers beanie or yarmulke. White beard down to his scabby knees, covering his crotch, maybe this guy's Rip Van Brooklyn! Nothing covering his ass, though. Hey, Rip, get some pants! That's no Fertile Crescent!

This Times Plaza? Rip asks the nearest passerby.
Thefuckkeryu tokkinbout?

Where is my pawnshop where is my newsstand what's that weird rectangle building full o' gizmos this is not my beautiful intersection go fuck yourself where you been sleeping all this time, old freak? Time don't stand still! Get some pants and cover yer ass!

You ain't seen nothin' yet!
To the Moon, Alice!

Fuggeddabouddit. Gofuckkalampost. Musteatapleofshit. Welcome to Brooklyn!

Rip Van Calamity creeps for cover into the Doray Tavern ("Where Good Friends Meet"), a bar like a black hole, daylight bent and broken at its threshold, full of Mohawk ghosts, guys that fell off in-progress skyscrapers chasing a falling half-a-ham-sandwich and ending up embedded to their sternums in Manhattan concrete sidewalks. Here at the Doray they paint the whiskey black. Not the bottles,

the whiskey. The ghosts pour shots and chasers down their neck holes and welcome Rip with a hearty hoist of a glass. His kind of people, and he theirs.

Used to work in the then I worked in the that was when I lived in the before all the then after I worked in the then I used to sleep in the before they filled in the hole in the I used to be able to hide in the catch a few zzz's in there sometimes before they filled it all in.

Fuggeddabouddit, Fuggedda, Fugget.
I already Fuggot.

Problem with people these days money. Problem with money these days people. People with money these days problem. People with problem these money days.

The higher you go there you are.

To the moon and all I got was this goddamn parking lot.
Beautiful shadows everywhere.

You like it so much, you live there!