

You Can't Get Uptown on the Downtown Train
By Vanda

The lights come up on an empty subway platform on a cold, dark, snowless night in mid-January. The Present.

A loud shrill, shriek comes from the PA. KATE listens intently, trying to decode the stream of static sounds interspersed with other sounds that pass for a human voice.

KATE

What?!

The static sputters into silence and Kate waits. SHE looks for the train. Nothing. SHE paces, trying to keep warm. Gradually HER pacing becomes a rhythmical strut. SHE looks around. Not seeing anyone SHE begins to softly sing while SHE struts. SHE gradually becomes louder, more animated as if an audience sat on the subway tracks. HER amateur status is apparent

I'm just a Broadway baby, mmm, mmm, mmm, poundin' forty-second street to be in a show. Say, Mr. Producer! Mmm, mmm, mmm plus a tube of grease paint and a follow spot! I'm just a Broadway baby, mmm, mmm, mmm, mmm,

The big finish

In a --great--big--Broad--way--

The sound of footsteps come from the shadows behind HER. SHE freezes, faces forward. SHE clutches HER purse, tightly, listening. The sound moves closer. Desperately, she looks for an approaching train

A MAN'S VOICE IN SHADOWS

Gibeeyurmuhee.

KATE slowly moves back toward turnstile away from voice

A MAN'S VOICE IN SHADOWS

Gibbeeyumuhee.

KATE moves more quickly toward turnstile

MAN'S VOICE IN SHADOWS

Gibeeyurmuhee!

KATE

No! Don't hurt me! What do you want?!

MAN'S VOICE

Yurmuhee.

KATE

What?! Please! I can't understand you!

MAN'S VOICE

GIB-EE-YUR-MUH-EE!

KATE

What?!

A man dressed all in black rushes into the light, toward HER. A ski mask covering HIS entire face, including HIS mouth. Only HIS eyes peer out

KATE

Oh!

MAN

Pointing at HER purse

Pahkuhboo.

KATE

What?! No! Please!

MAN

Pahkuhboo.

KATE

It's my favorite! I couldn't really afford it , but...

MAN

Pahkuhboo! Gibee!

HE grabs for it. SHE hangs onto it.

KATE

No! I've never had anything this nice before!

HE takes out a gun, points it at HER

KATE

Letting MAN take purse

Oh! A, a gun! You...you have a, a... Is that real?!

MAN rummages through purse, takes wallet out, finds only a few coins. HE holds them out toward HER, indignant

I'm sorry. I get paid tomorrow.

MAN

Throwing down coins.

I gonna shoo you!

KATE

Shoo. Shoo? Shoot me?! No! I mean, uh, no one's ever wanted to do that before! Oh, that boss of mine! He wouldn't pay for a car and now look what...

MAN

HE throws HER back against pole

Shu uh!

KATE

Don't you want to get to know me first? I'm very personable. All my girlfriends at the office say.... Well, I guess they're not really my girl friends, but...

MAN puts gun against HER forehead

Oh! Time! Give, give me time. To, to...fix my lipstick!

MAN

No!

KATE

Oh, oh, puh, please! My, uh, uh purse. There.

HE grunts indignantly as HE moves to get purse.

Keeps gun poised on KATE. Hands purse to HER

Oh, thank you. You're so kind.

Fumbling in purse

All, all thumbs today! My fingers! Won't, won't...These gloves!! I can't, can't...

Struggles with balancing purse and taking off gloves, throws gloves on ground, rummages in purse for lipstick

There it...!

Drops lipstick on floor

KATE (cont.)

Now, look what I've done?! Nothing ever works right!

MAN picks up lipstick, extends toward HER

Oh! How kind of you, but... these fingers. Would you?

MAN, grants indignantly. Then, applies lipstick to HER lips

Oh! Yes! Yes! That's...That's good. Mmm, very good.

MAN withdraws lipstick

It's over? So soon?

MAN puts gun back on HER forehead

No! I mean, uh, uh not, not like, like... Like... like this...

*Cautiously puts HER hand over the barrel of the gun
As SHE touches the gun, SHE emits a cry of deep
release*

Oh!

SHE guides the gun down HER face

Mmm. Yes.

*Down HER neck to HER shoulder, HER breathing
becoming more and more labored.*

Oh! You're going to, to shoot me. Oh. No, No. Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

This is so, so...Oh, I've never felt so...

Wriggling hips, throwing off scarf, opening coat

Oh! Oh! I'm getting so, so warm. Oh, I'm boiling up! OH! OH!

MAN

Shtop vat!

KATE

Wriggling more

Oo, my, my body, it, it...

MAN

Struggling to pull gun away

Gibbee my gun!

KATE

KATE holding on tightly.

Oh! Oo! Oo!

MAN

Gibbee!

*Unable to get gun away, HE lets go of gun, runs toward
shadows. KATE holds gun, carelessly pointing it in
HIS direction.*

KATE

This is real. Isn't it?

MAN

MAN falls to HIS knees, cowering, HIS hands up in the air

No!! Dough shoo, lay-hee! Pwease!

KATE

Kate.

MAN

Wha'?!

KATE

My name. Kate. What's yours?

MAN

Wha'smywha'?! Wash where you point...No! Shtop! Dough tush vat!
You wan'... I fink I hab shum in...!

Patting HIS pockets

KATE

What are you doing?

MAN

Muhee! For you!

KATE

Muhee? Muhee. Muhee. Oh! Money! I don't want money.

MAN

No? Ven, wha' do you wan'?!

KATE

Well...what's your name?

MAN

Oh, no, none a vat.

KATE

You look like a John. So that's what I'm going to call you.

MAN

No! Dough do vat, lay-hee! Okay?!

KATE

Kate. So, John...

MAN

I told you nah to...

KATE

Are we friends yet?

MAN

No! I dough nee' friends.

KATE

Yes, you do. Why else would you be here?

MAN

Tryin' to do my job!

KATE

No. It's destiny.

MAN

Deshiny? You fink so? Nah. Vat's crazy. Deshiny, huh?

KATE

It must be. I take this subway home at this hour every time I work late, but you never tried to rob me before.

MAN

Hmm. You know, I ushually work vuh uptown shide, but today... Just a shange of pace, I faught I'd work vuh downtown shide.

KATE

Is this the downtown side?

MAN

Yesh.

KATE

But I live uptown. You see? This is fate. I'm not supposed to be here, either.

MAN

Weawy?! Wow!

KATE

Yeah. Wow. Kind of spooky.

Switches gun from right to left hand, extends HER hand to John

KATE (Cont.)

Well, John. It's a pleasure to meet you.

MAN

Uh, Kay', since we're friends now, would you mind nah pointin vuh gun a' me.

KATE

Oh! I'm so sorry. I completely forgot.

Pointing gun away from HIM

So tell me, John. Are you a real robber?

MAN

O' course!

KATE

Gesturing with gun. MAN's gaze follows gun.

Jeepers. I've never been this close to a real robber before. What an exciting life you must lead. Hiding in shadows, stalking victims, creeping up behind them.

Acting out the scene

They hear you, but can't see you. You inch closer, closer. Sensing your nearness in the dark, their heart pumps--pump, pump. You draw closer. Your heart pumps-- pump, pump. In mutual terror, both hearts pump. Pump! Pump! Your finger on the trigger, sweating, you jump from the shadows. They scream.

KATE screams. MAN covers HIS head

plead, beg for their miserable little lives. But you can't listen or the moment will be lost. You raise your gun.

KATE raises the gun

And in that terrible glorious moment before you pull the trigger...

SHE points the gun directly at MAN

you are alive!

MAN

NO!!

KATE

Tell me about it, John!

MAN

Huh?

KATE

No. No, don't tell me. Show me.

MAN

Wha'?

KATE

Shoot me.

MAN

Wha'?!

KATE

Yes. This'll be perfect. Before, when you held the gun against me, I stood precariously balanced between... between life and, and death. It was, was... A flood of...of sensation. I was alive! Here, John. Take the gun. Shoot me.

MAN

No!

KATE

But you promised!

MAN

Vat was afore I knew your name.

KATE

What's my name got to do with it?!

MAN

Pwenty!

KATE

You take this gun and shoot me!

MAN

No! If you wanted me to shoo you, why'd you go an' tell me your name?! Huh?! Why?!

KATE

Forget my name and...!

MAN

Forgeh your name?! An' how do I do vat?! I knew I shouldn't've shwitched shides! Uptown people are eashier to rob! They're used to it! Wha' was I finkin' shangin' shides?!

KATE

Stop complaining and shoot me!

MAN

No! I canneh shoo you if you wan' me to!

KATE

Why?! Is that another one of your stupid rules?!

MAN

Yesh! An' it's nah shtupid! How would we live in a shuhciety without wooles?! Huh?! How?!

KATE

Gesturing wildly with gun

Throw out the rules! I'm sick of them! Up at 6:53. Eat bagel with schmeer at 8:18. Catch subway at 8:22. Sip water at water cooler at 8:58 and an half! And mind you, it is sip. Never gulp! Always sip! Why?! Why shouldn't I gulp if I want to?! Why didn't I gulp this morning?! Big, noisy sloppy gulps! Why?! Why didn't I gulp?!

MAN

Well, vat wouldn't've been very lay--hee -like.

KATE

Who cares?!

MAN

You should! Wha' would people fink? It's good you didn't gulp!

KATE

Why?

MAN

Because vere are shum fings you just dough do.

KATE

Why?!

MAN

Because vat's vuh way it ish!

KATE

Why?!

MAN

Shtop it! Shtop it! Why are you doin vis to me?! I'm vuh robber! Me! You are just vuh robbee!

KATE

Oh? Is that all you think of me? After all we've been to each other. And I thought you cared.

MAN

I do! I mean,uh...

KATE

You do?

MAN

Well, uh.. You're okay. As robbees go.

KATE

Oh, you like me better than just some ordinary robbee.

MAN

Well, uh, I dough know avout...

KATE

Come on, John. Admit it.

MAN

Well...Okay.

KATE

Okay, what?

MAN

Okay, I like you.

KATE

How much?

MAN

Dough push it, Kay'. So, uh, Kay' you wanna geh outta here? Geh a beer?

KATE

We can't. You have to shoot me.

MAN

Nah vat again! (Beat) Uh, Kay'... why... why do you, uh... wanna... die?

KATE

Die?! I want live. Every pore of me awake and throbbing! No more walking around in this perpetual sleep! John, take this gun! Make me alive!

MAN

Not taking gun

Buh...

KATE

Stop thinking! Do it! Make me alive in this moment!

MAN

Okay! Okay! Shtop yellin at me! Jeesh, I hate vat. Do you hab any idea who you're talkin' to? Huh?! I worked my way up from pockuh pickin' wifout one ounce of help from anyone! Do you have vuh shlightest idea of wha' pockuh pickin is like?! No, you dough! How could you?! Hab you efer puh your hand into shum shranger's gooey pocket?! No! O' course nah! How could you know avout vuh scummy fings vay puh in vere. I'm nah just shum ordinary run-of-the-mill robber, you know. Oh, hell, wha' would you know avout it! I gotta geh outta here.

Starts to exit toward shadows

KATE

Pointing gun directly at HIM; too calm

No. Don't go.

MAN

Stopping.

Kay'. You wouldun. It's me-- John. Naah. You wouldun.

HE starts to move toward exit

KATE

John. I would.

HE stops

MAN

Kay'?

KATE

I'm sorry, John. But I will have my moment.

MAN

Wha' momen'?!

KATE

That one sacred second in which you and I meld into a single act so horrible it becomes beautiful. You shoot me or...I shoot you.

MAN

No! Go bah! Go bah!

KATE

I have no intention of going back. What do you look like under that mask? Are you... ruggedly handsome or... or are you, maybe... grotesque. Horribly, horribly grotesque, mutilated, deformed. I have to see you!

MAN

His hands fly to HIS face, holding onto the mask

No!

KATE

I'm going to take that mask off you. Put your hands down.

MAN

NO!! Viz nah ha'enin!

KATE

This is happening, John. It's happening here, now. This can be our moment. Let me take your mask off or else I'll...

Pulls back hammer of gun

MAN

NO!!

Takes HIS hands down

KATE

Approaching , tentatively reaching toward mask

Yes! Yes! Oh, John, I...Chills, running through me. I feel so, so.... Soon I'll see you.

Tears HIS mask off and quickly covers HER eyes

I can't look. I have to. I must. I, I...

Slowly uncovers HER eyes. MAN stands awkwardly as if HE were now naked. HE has a pacifier in HIS mouth

MAN

Uh... Hi, Kay'.

KATE

(Pause) What is that thing in you're...? Oh, John. A pacifier?
Oh, John.

MAN

Wha'?!

KATE

Well, there goes my moment.

MAN

An' wha's vat shupposed to mean?!

KATE

Well, I can't be expected to have any kind of a moment with a
robber who, who...Oh, look at you. You are such a bitter
disappointment.

MAN

I am nah! You take vat bah!

KATE

And if I don't, what'll you do? Drench me in spit from your
pacifier?

MAN

Hey! Novody talks to me like vat! I'm a visuhs kiminel!

KATE

Vicious?! Hah! You're a marshmallow!

MAN

I warnin you!

KATE

Oh, I am so scared. Help. Help. Big scarey robber, don't hurt
me.

Snatching pacifier from HIS mouth

Oh, give me that thing.

MAN

HIS whole body begins to shake uncontrollably

NO!! Ka, kate! Give, give...Oh, God, what, what... I,
I...nee, need...

*Grabs gun out of HER hand, HIS arm and hand shakes
as HE points it at HER*

KA-KATE!!

KATE

OH! Uh, uh, uh...

*Despite the shaking, HE throws HER against a pole,
holding HER there, shaking gun pointed*

MAN

Where, where ya wan, want it, Kate?! Huh?! Ya, ya wan, want it here?!

Tears open HER coat, puts gun against HER stomach
Huh?! Here?! Here?!

KATE

*Breathing coming in quick gasps of terrified
excitement*

Oh! Oh! Oh!

MAN

How 'bout, bout here, Ka-Kate?! Shoo, shoot ya here?! Huh?!
Huh?!

KATE

OH! OH! OH!

MAN

Here! This wha, what you want, Ka-Kate! Right?! Right?!

KATE

Uh...! Uh...!

MAN

Here goes!

KATE

No, John, don't!

You Can't Get Uptown on the Downtown Train is a play in one scene. To receive a complete reading copy, and for other contact information, please visit the You Can't Get Uptown on the Downtown Train information page (click your browser's "Back" button, or visit: singlelane.com/proplay/uptown.html)