

Cliff Notes from the Underground

(aka: The Perils of Sticking Up for Oneself in Tight Spaces,
With Apologies to Dostoevsky)

by

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FADE IN ON:

INT. SUBWAY CORRIDOR - DAY

A sea of humanity surges underneath the arched ceiling - traffic flows through narrow halls.

HIP HOP blares from headphones.

A TEEN spills a Starbucks latte on the floor.

A BUSINESS WOMAN skids across the foamy tile, eyes glued to her iPhone.

A VENDOR waves above the crowd, passes out free papers.

An MTA OFFICER grabs a copy. He strides along - instantly bored. He crumples the paper into a ball, and tosses it over his shoulder...

...into a fellow commuter's face.

CASPER MITTY - a middle aged scarecrow in a second-hand business suit.

Page One knocks Casper's glasses askew. He recoils; bumps a STOUT WOMAN with a stroller.

WOMAN WITH STROLLER

Hey! Watch it!

(beat)

Asshole.

CASPER

I'm sorry. I didn't...

The woman's face wrinkles in disgust. She rams the stroller over Casper's foot.

He stumbles back. Slips in the pool of latte foam.

Casper pinwheels; long limbs flap for balance. He dives to his left. Collides with a CONSTRUCTION WORKER.

The worker stops in his tracks and glares. His body blocks the corridor. A logjam of PEDESTRIANS in his wake.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER

What the fuck?

CASPER

I'm, uh...

CONSTRUCTION WORKER
You got a problem?

Casper shrinks. Completely cowed.

CASPER
I was trying to get to work, you see...

CONSTRUCTION WORKER
'Cause you got a business suit, I gotta
get out of *your* way?

PEOPLE peek around the man's imposing shoulders - blink
at Casper with accusing eyes. An IMPATIENT COMMUTER whips
off his headphones.

IMPATIENT COMMUTER
(to Casper)
Get outta the lane, asswipe! We all got
places to be!

CASPER
(stammers)
You don't understand....

CONSTRUCTION WORKER
Why? 'Cause I ain't educated?

A lynch mob vibe in the air. ANGRY MURMURS everywhere.

CASPER
Please. Just let me explain!

The construction worker shoves Casper.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER
Scrawny ass pussy.

SNICKERS ripple through the crowd. The construction
worker storms away.

CASPER
(internal V.O.)
I'm *not* a coward. That's not fair!

The flow of traffic resumes. Casper dodges obstacles;
jostled by commuters in both lanes.

CASPER
(internal V.O.)
Oooof! Ah!
(ducks under a backpack)
Pheewww, too close!

He limbos under an arm...

The crowd parts... The down escalator for the train swings into view - just a few feet away!

Casper's eyes light up. ORCHESTRAL MUSIC ground-swells.

Casper struggles frantically upstream, leaps through the crowd like a human trout.

CASPER
(internal V.O.)
Come on. Almost there!

A TEEN THUG steps into his lane, and lumbers toward him. The world shut out by huge headphones.

Casper veers left. Then right. There's no room on either side.

A burst of sudden courage. Casper squares his jaw, and forges straight ahead.

CASPER
(internal V.O.)
"Pussy" huh? I'll show them!

The thug looks up spots Casper. Keeps lumbering.

Casper dodges a WOMAN IN HEELS. A Prada purse ricochets off his head.

The walking space narrows. Casper wiggles through the narrow space...

...advances towards the teen. Nervous eyes on the boy's meaty face.

CASPER
(internal V.O.)
Why must I be the first to move aside?
Why shouldn't it be him. Not me?

Fifteen feet. Ten. Then five.

COLLISION ALARMS wail in Casper's mind. Contact in Four. Three. Two. One...

A CHILD collides - CRUNCH - with Casper's knee. He winces in agony. The thug shoulders him aside. A triumphant sneer on his face.

Casper reaches the escalator, and hangs on for dear life. He glances back towards his assailant.

The teen flips Casper the bird. The escalator descends.
A middle finger's the last thing Casper sees.

INT. SUBWAY PLATFORM - LATER

Casper waits at the edge. A nervous wreck.

A BUM roots through a trash bag. Scratches his groin with filthy nails.

Casper averts his eyes.

HAWWWWKKK. PHTTOOOO.

Casper looks back at the bum. Then down at his shoe. Spit drips into stroller scuff marks on the leather tip.

Casper looks up in horror. The bum shrugs.

BUM
I was aimin' for the tracks...

INT. SUBWAY CAR - LATER

Casper balances on the edge of the seat - squeezed between two COMMUTERS.

He stares across the aisle and reads a public announcement. Obsessively.

The poster depicts a pristine car. Even prettier commuters. A headline reads: "Be Considerate of Fellow Passengers. Don't Litter. No Music or Food Allowed!"

Casper SIGHS at the filthy floor.

CASPER
(internal V.O.)
You're not a coward. You just don't want to make a scene. There's nothing wrong with that. Is there?

SNOOOOORE.

The MAN ON HIS LEFT nods off. His greasy head drops to Casper's shoulder. He starts to drool.

Casper edges away. The BEARDED MAN TO HIS RIGHT elbows him back. Flutters a newspaper in his face.

Casper squeezes into a tiny ball.

CASPER
 (internal V.O.)
 A few more stops. I just have to be
 patient.

A PUNK GIRL plops down across the aisle, a MP3 player
 clipped to her micro skirt.

She cranks the device. SCREECHING MUSIC fills Casper's
 ears.

He stares at the poster above her head. Then back at the
 girl. Meaningfully.

CASPER
 (internal V.O.)
 She'll get the message. Won't she?

The girl shoots him a look.

PUNK GIRL
 (sarcastic)
 You wanna take a picture?

CASPER
 Well, no. Not really.

PUNK GIRL
 Well, you're starin' right at me.

The bearded man lowers his newspaper. Squints at Casper
 suspiciously.

CASPER
 It's not that. The music...

The girl whirls around in her seat. Appeals to the
 train's captive crowd.

PUNK GIRL
 He was lookin' up my skirt!

BEARDED MAN
 (to Casper)
 You peepin' at her? She's young enough to
 be your daughter!

GRUMBLES of disapproval. Everywhere.

The man to Casper's left lifts his head; attached to
 Casper by an unbroken string of drool.

LEFT HAND MAN
 Don't touch *me*, pedo!

Accusing eyes swivel Casper's way. The train slides to a stop. Casper cowers in his seat.

The bearded man and the girl bustle towards the exit. The girl stomps on Casper's foot for good measure.

PUNK GIRL
 (to the Bearded Man)
 Can you believe that? A girl ain't safe
 these days!

BEARDED MAN
 Yeah. Perverts are everywhere.

Casper looks around for sympathy. The man to his left moves away.

The train fills up quickly.

The doors slide shut. Train engines engage. A numb Casper stares again across the aisle.

CASPER
 (internal V.O.)
 The whole world's gone crazy!

A HUGE MIDDLE AGED MAN settles in to Casper's right.

A TATTOOED TEEN flanks his left side.

Casper's stuck in between.

The teen pulls out a sandwich, and munches loudly in his ear. CRUNCH CRUNCH CRUNCH. Sauce drips on Casper's lapel.

CASPER
 (internal V.O.)
 You're not a pussy. Say *something!*

He opens his mouth. The words won't come. Just awkward, growing... silence.

COUGH. The middle aged commuter leans across Casper's lap. He glares at the teen, points to the sign.

COMMUTER
 Don't be an asshole. Put that away...
 before I shove it up your ass!

The teen eyes the commuter's massive size, and packs his sandwich away. He glares at Casper silently. Hostility oozes from every tattooed pore.

CASPER
(to the commuter)
Thanks!

The man pats Casper's shoulder amiably.

LARGE COMMUTER
Today's generation. No fucking manners.
Us old folks gotta stick together. Don't
we?

Casper smiles. The commuter digs in a pocket, turns away.

Casper glances back at the poster. Photogenic faces beam
satisfaction back at him.

CASPER
(internal V.O.)
See? There are good people in this city.
There's no need to make a fuss.

He wrinkles his nose. Detecting... something.

Casper glances back at the commuter. The man's lit a
cigarette. Smoke billows in Casper's face.

CASPER
(internal V.O.)
Dammit.

The teen grins viciously.

Casper hangs his head - defeated. Smoke quickly obscures
his view.

FINAL FADE OUT: