

MOUTHS OF BUMS

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INT. NEW YORK SUBWAY STATION. MID-MORNING

A MAN and a WOMAN wait as a sparsely populated subway car pulls into a station. The Man is in his mid-fifties. He wears an expensive pinstripe suit. His companion is much younger. As the man strokes her back, he feels something odd and pushes back her long hair to discover the store tag still attached to the dress.

MAN

You thinking of exchanging it?

WOMAN

I thought you might change your mind.

He shakes his head. He won't. She spins for him.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

So you really like it?

He does. He tugs at his cheek.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

The train comes to a halt. The doors open.

MAN

Pinching myself.

She laughs. They enter.

CUT TO:

INT: SUBWAY CAR. CONTINUOUS.

WOMAN

You better believe it.

As they enter the carriage. She unclips the tag and flings it on the ground.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Because now there's no going back.

MAN

Anything you ever want, I will give you.

WOMAN

Thank you.
(off the dress)
And thank you.

They sit facing the front of the train. Just before the doors close a hand forces them to open.

The hand belongs to a BUM who steps into the carriage. He looks in his late thirties but could be much younger. He is short, stocky and dishevelled.

TANNOY

(Muffled)

Stand clear the doors please.

The doors close properly this time.

BUM

Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Man rolls his eyes and places a custodial hand on the woman's thigh.

MAN

Here we go.

BUM

I am sorry to disturb you. My name is Carl Vengat. Six months ago I was an officer on active duty in the US Army, then I was diagnosed as HIV positive.

MAN

(Muttering)

Give me a break. An officer?

He looks around at the Bum.

MAN (CONT'D)

That guy was not an officer.

WOMAN

How do you know?

The Man gives her a knowing look.

BUM

I was discharged from the army because of my condition, and now I am homeless. My family don't want to know me, the few friends I have left still serve our country overseas.

The Man shakes his head in disgust.

BUM (CONT'D)

I need food and shelter for the evening. Any assistance you can offer me would be greatly appreciated.

He wanders down the aisle, holding out a tatty takeout cup to the few passengers. One of them pllops in a quarter.

BUM (CONT'D)

Thank you so much.

The Man and Woman can feel him getting close.

WOMAN

Let's give him some money.

MAN

What? No.

WOMAN

Didn't you hear what happened to him?

MAN

It's not true.

The Bum approaches them. The Man shrinks and tries to avoid eye contact. The Woman is disappointed in him. She reaches for her purse. The Man balks.

MAN (CONT'D)

You don't have money to waste on him.

WOMAN

You just said you'd give me anything I ever want. Now the first thing I ask is too much for you.

The Woman reaches over with a couple of dollar bills. The Man blocks her with his hand, fishes in his pocket and plops some coins into the cup. The Bum looks into the cup. He seems dissatisfied. He pushes the cup back towards the Woman to get her money too.

MAN

Would you look at this guy?

The Woman reaches back towards the cup with her money.

MAN (CONT'D)

No, no, here you go.

The Man blocks the Woman's hand again and reaches into his jacket pocket to pull out a fat billfold. He flicks past the bigger notes, and peels off a ten dollar bill. He puts it in the cup.

BUM

(To Man)

Thank you.

WOMAN

(To Man)

Thank you.

The Man throws up his hands in defeat. The train has pulled into a station. The Bum walks between carriages.

MAN

Ten bucks and change. I just got rolled.

WOMAN

You did the right thing.

The doors open.

MAN

Honestly, if you took the subway more -

WOMAN

What do you know about taking the subway?

MAN

Touché.

ANOTHER BUM enters just before the doors close.

BUM 2

Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry to disturb you -

MAN

Here we go again.

BUM 2

My name is Carl. Four months ago I was on active duty in the US Army. Then I -

The Man's eyes boggle. He gets to his feet and spins around.

MAN

Then you were diagnosed with HIV.

WOMAN

Sit down.

Pause. The rest of the people stare at the Man and Bum 2, who are facing each other in an awkward stand off.

BUM 2

How did you know?

MAN

Because I've heard it all before.

BUM 2

What?

MAN

It's a story you've made up to take advantage of our collective guilt about this country's treatment of its veterans.

WOMAN

Sit down.

BUM 2

I didn't make it up.

BUM 2 steps forward towards the Man, who holds his ground.

MAN (CONT'D)

Then someone else made it up and you copied it.

Bum 2 seems truly offended.

BUM 2

You don't wanna give, you don't gotta give. But you got no right to be a jerk.

MAN

You're the jerk. I've got to tell you, I'm the head of a financial ratings agency, so I hear tall tales every day, but what you're doing is repugnant.

BUM 2

Repugnant?

MAN

Level with me, do you guys have some kind of performing arts school, where you all get together to hone your carriage pitches? Cos if you do, you need to start a class on scheduling. Your friend just got ten bucks out of me for the exact same story.

BUM 2

Huh?

MAN

Ten bucks and change. He was HIV positive too. He got discharged from the army. You forgot the bit about being an officer.

BUM 2

Do I look like an officer to you?

MAN

No more than he did. Oh yeah, he didn't look like a Carl either, but that was his name too.

BUM 2

Carl Vengat?

MAN

Sure.

WOMAN

Yes.

BUM 2 is staggered.

BUM 2 (CONT'D)

Sergeant Carl Vengat? Was here?

WOMAN

Do you know him?

MAN

(To Woman)
It's all an act.

BUM 2 (CONT'D)

Where'd he go?

WOMAN

Through there.

MAN

You know what, I'll take you to him, let's go.

But BUM 2 has thrown his takeout cup to the floor, spilling about a dollar's worth of change. He rushes to the door that goes between carriages.

MAN (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

BUM 2 disappears through the door. The Man stops at the door between carriages. The Woman joins the pursuit, as do a couple of curious passengers. The Man tries to stop them.

MAN (CONT'D)

We're not meant to (go between carriages)

She shakes her head in disgust and goes through. He follows.

CUT TO:

INT: SECOND SUBWAY CARRIAGE. CONTINUOUS.

MAN and WOMAN enter to find BUM 2 speaking loudly and clearly to the other passengers.

BUM 2

Did Sergeant Carl Vengat just come through here?

A CONFUSED PASSENGER points through to the next carriage. Through the window, we seem BUM 1 doing his speech.

BUM 2 (CONT'D)

Carl!

BUM 2 leads what is now a procession of curious passengers, headed by the Woman. The Man tries to keep up.

CUT TO:

INT. THIRD SUBWAY CARRIAGE. CONTINUOUS.

BUM 1 and all the passengers in the third carriage stare at BUM 2 and the small condensed group crowding in behind him.

BUM 2

Carl.

BUM 1 is struck dumb.

BUM 2 (CONT'D)

Carl. It's me.

BUM 1

Carl?

BUM 2

What are you doing, man?

BUM 1

What are you doing?

BUM 2

They discharged me.

BUM 1

What?

BUM 2

I'm positive too.

BUM 1 is distressed by this news. BUM 2 puts a hand up to quiet him.

BUM 2 (CONT'D)

We were kids, man we didn't know what we were doing.

BUM 1

I'm sorry.

BUM 2

You should be. After everything we had you just walk out of my life? You never get in touch?

BUM 1

You have to forget about me. I don't exist. I hate myself for what I did to you.

BUM 2

Yeah. Well I hate you too. I hate that didn't give me the chance to forgive you. I hate how you left me on my own to deal with the world. I'm half of me Carl. Without you I ain't half full, or half empty, I'm just half.

Bum 1 approaches BUM 2 and embraces him.

BUM 1

Shh. Shh. It's OK. At ease soldier.

Bum 2 kisses Bum 1. Slow and tender.

MAN

Oh. My. God.

The crowd claps. Woman dabs her eyes and turns to the man.

WOMAN

Give them some money.

The man reaches into his wallet and pulls out his fat billfold. He hands the whole thing to BUM 2. Other people start opening their purses and cleaning out their wallets.

MAN

(To Bum 2)

Sir. I'm an idiot. Please forgive me. And thank you for your service.

People are handing money to BUM 1, who collects it in an astonished daze.

BUM 2

We don't want your money. Carl, give it back.

BUM 1 looks flustered and begins to offer money back.

BUM 2 (CONT'D)

Thank you folks, thank you, but we've got each other now. We don't need your pity anymore.

No one will take their money back.

MAN

On behalf of us all, we insist.

BUM 2 holds up the billfold to BUM 1. There's hundreds of dollars more. The Man turns to the gathered passengers.

MAN (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm sorry to disturb you. I recently accused both these men of lying. The truth is, the only liar on this train is me. I took the subway so I wouldn't be seen by anyone I know. I have too much money, and too much time on my hands, and it's made me into a deceptive, cynical person. My companion here is very beautiful, but she is not my wife. I'm not asking for your sympathy, I don't deserve it. I just want to start telling the truth.

BUM 2

OK, man, we'll take your money.

MAN

Thank you.

The woman tries to support him. He shrugs off her approach.

MAN (CONT'D)

I need to go home to my wife.

WOMAN

I know.

The train pulls into a station. Everyone seems awkward.

BUM 1

This is my stop.

BUM 2

Then I guess it's my stop too.

MAN

God bless fellas.

WOMAN

And good luck.

BUM 2

(to the Man)

Stay true, man.

The Man waves them a fond goodbye.

CUT TO:

INT: DIFFERENT SUBWAY STATION. CONTINUOUS.

The Bums stand together holding hands, waving back to the well-wishing passengers.

The train is gone. They look at each other for a moment. Then they drop hands. Bum 1 spits.

BUM 2
What's wrong?

BUM 1
You stuck your tongue in my mouth.

BUM 2
We just cleared hundreds of dollars apiece.

BUM 2 hands Bum 1 half the bills. BUM 1 hands him half his fistful of cash.

BUM 1
The first thing you need to buy is a toothbrush.

BUM 2
You're welcome.

BUM 1 walks off.

BUM 2 (CONT'D)
Wait wait wait. Where you going?
We just found the perfect pitch.

BUM 1
I'm not an actor man. I don't tell lies.

BUM 2
Wait up. Are you telling me that story's actually true?

Bum 1 stares daggers at BUM 2 and walks off. Bum 2 looks confused.

THE END.