

THE TREND STATION

By Mark Kearney

I arrived at the station about two minutes too late and was surprised at how many people were there. The chap next to me glanced at his Rolex watch and then at me.

“Too bad you missed the 6:48,” he said. “Gucci loafers, black strapless gowns, Perrier water. A great season.”

I shrugged off what he said and looked at my schedule. The next one was at 7:04, and I decided to use the time to check out the crowd. They were a strange collection, all seemingly waiting for the same thing, similar and yet different. No one had any luggage.

I poked the fellow next to me, he in his Italian suit, wine spritzer in one hand, reading *The Economist*.

“Is there some reason no one has any bags?” I asked.

“We all have baggage,” he replied. “Mostly emotional. What about you?”

“Samsonite,” I answered.

The loudspeaker began talking. “The 7:04 trend is now arriving on track one.”

“Did he say trend or train?” I asked the man, but I was too late with my question. He and scores of others had rushed madly out to the platform. I tried to avoid the crush as I made my way there to view the commotion first hand.

A man standing in the entrance to a train car yelled down to the crowd. “Black leather, scotch - neat, tummy tucks, hard-boiled detective stories, sushi.”

The crowd funnelled into the car as if drawn by a magnet, everyone staring straight ahead, no one saying anything. They moved in unison, but I was out of step and found myself alone on the platform as the train pulled out.

I walked back into the deserted station to look at the schedule again. I simply wanted to get to the next town, but the schedule didn’t show it. The next train listed was for 7:21. I sat down and waited.

However, just as I started my crouch, the crowd pushed through the doors and back into the station. It seemed to hum with a mixture of exhaustion and anticipation. I didn’t understand.

There were murmurings. “Oh, fabulous, fantastic.” “It seemed so minimalist.” “The Caymans in February? Oh no, that’s so passé.”

I found the man I had seen before. His appearance, somehow, was different. Dark sunglasses, short hair slightly moussed, pleated trousers, some kind of full length fur coat. He was reading GQ.

“I’m looking for this train,” I said, showing him my schedule. “Maybe I’m in the wrong station.”

“Don’t be so gauche,” he said. “The 7:21 is definitely the place to be.”

Once again there was an announcement, the crowd moved forward, and I brought up the rear lugging my suitcase. A different man climbed into the passenger car, looked, and then turned back to the crowd.

“Pony tails, pastel colors, imported beers, fresh pasta, sub-compact cars, racquetball.”

How can so many people move so quickly? How can so many fit into such a small place? I was tempted to go, but something inside held me back. The train slowly pulled out, and I watched it glide down the track.

I kept it in sight, and then it happened.

The train headed back, its lights cutting into the darkness. I stepped back as it chugged to a full stop. Once again the car emptied, everyone tired and excited at the same time.

I walked back into the station when the 7:28 was announced.

“Oh, yes, definitely,” they all cried. “We wouldn’t miss it.”

And they poured into the train, another man calling out to them.

“Doc Martens, earth tones, vegetarian cooking, art deco lamps, thin eyebrows, infomercials.”

This time I climbed onto the car with the rest of them and was just starting to get used to the trip when the train returned to the station and we exited.

Another train came by. “Parlor games, urban condos, loose, dark clothing, thick eyebrows, salmonella.” We climbed onto the train (actually I was pushed), stopped briefly, and got off. Then another train. “Power brunches, zero population growth, surgical implants, nuclear waste, striped pajamas, adultery.” But before we could get on, another train arrived. “Legionnaires Disease, Estonian cinema verité, midwifery, metallic underwear, incest,” was the cry. Then another train, then another. My head was spinning as a third arrived and then a fourth.

I paused to catch my breath when the fifth train pulled in. Someone climbed up to it, looked, and then disappeared inside. A few moments passed as we waited for the next description.

“What do we do?” shouted someone. “Tell us, tell us.” The shouts grew louder as members of the crowd joined in.

Finally, the man appeared, bewildered and panic stricken. He adjusted his designer hip waders and looked out over the crowd.

“It’s empty,” he said. “The car is empty.”

“Empty? Empty?” murmured the crowd. “No, no, it can’t be empty.”

Everyone buzzed and fidgeted, gazing at each other with hungry looks, jostling, sweating, bouncing aerobically. I seized the opportunity and rushed up beside the announcer.

“Emptiness is in!” I cried, just managing to slip away before the now-happy crowd flowed into the train car. The train moved off, and this time I watched as it disappeared down the track for good.

I took another deep breath, picked up my suitcase and headed out of the station. There was a mirror near the doorway, and I caught a glimpse of myself. I wiped a smoked salmon stain off my faded sweatshirt and went home.