

STUCK

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FADE IN:

INT. BROOKLYN SUBWAY STATION -- EVENING

Though nobody is listening, a tired and elderly CLARINET PLAYER, 70, works through a listless classical cover. Drops of water fall from the ceiling and land by his side. They are almost on beat.

LEON (O.S.)

I'll tell you what - I've got it in me to pack up and get the hell out this town.

Across the subway tracks, LEON RUSSELL, 31, attractive and narcissistic, sits on a bench. Next to him, blinking in and out of consciousness is an ASIAN BUM, 62.

Leon's attire, while a step up from the bum's rags, hints at poverty. He idly plays with his thumbs, leans in close to the bum, and continues to talk.

LEON (CONT'D)

(to bum)

You know you can get a ticket on the Greyhound, any city you want, forty bucks? No shit! You know how easy I could get my hands on money like that?

The bum opens his eyes halfway, and looks to Leon as if he has just remembered something important.

ASIAN BUM

(in Korean)

My son is going to be a dentist.

Leon ignores this foreign tongue, and continues to play with his thumbs.

LEON

I'll tell you how it's done Grandpa. Listen close. You get an iPod.

(beat)

You ever heard of one of those?

Leon looks to the bum, who has drifted back to sleep.

LEON (CONT'D)

It's a music player. Fancy kind. You can tell someone's got one if they're wearing those little white ear plugs.

Leon motions with his nervous hands up to his ears. A train begins to pull into the station on Leon's side of the tracks.

LEON (CONT'D)

(loudly, over the
train)

You get one of those. An iPod. You get one of those, and you bring it to this guy I know. Charlie. Owns a place not ten minutes away. You bring an iPod to Charlie and he'll give you...

(beat)

Shit. He'll give you up to ninety bucks for a new one.

The train grinds to a halt and the doors open. A small crowd of PASSENGERS exit. One skinny and unassuming PASSENGER, 23, catches Leon's eye. Protruding from the man's pants pocket up to his ears is a pair of white iPod ear buds.

Leon watches his prey walk towards the exit, and leans in to the Asian Bum.

LEON (CONT'D)

I'll tell you what. Ninety bucks'll buy you quite a goddamned Greyhound ticket.

Leon quietly gets up, and follows the ear-bud wearing Passenger towards the exit.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET -- CONTINUOUS

The crowd of Passengers scatter into the street from the subway entrance. The man with the ear buds, clueless to his danger, turns down a residential block. Leon tucks his hands into his sweatshirt and follows quietly behind.

As they continue to walk, the man glances over his shoulder at Leon. Leon, feeling confident, smiles glibly back.

EXT. BACKSTREET -- CONTINUOUS

The ear bud wearing man turns down an even quieter residential street. He approaches an apartment building and reaches into his pockets for his keys.

Leon, without missing a beat, hurries up to his victim. He withdraws his hand, now holding a large switchblade, from his sweatshirt.

The man fumbles desperately for his keys and looks back at Leon. As he notices the switchblade, and his approaching assailant, he nervously shakes the ear buds out of his ears.

EAR BUD MAN

Don't -

Leon smiles as he grabs his victim by the arm. He moves in close, and holds his blade firmly up against the man's side.

LEON

Now let's not make this harder than
it has to be.

The man struggles against Leon's hold.

LEON (CONT'D)

(authoritative)
You stop struggling!

The man continues to try to pull away.

LEON (CONT'D)

Your iPod and your wallet.

Leon gets no response from his victim, save his continued struggle. The man almost breaks free of Leon's grasp.

LEON (CONT'D)

I told you to stop that!

The man does not. Leon swiftly plunges his knife into his victim's side. Instantly, the man stops struggling. Leon withdraws his knife, and stabs again.

As blood spills out onto Leon's hand, the Ear Bud Man crumbles to the pavement. Leon, clearly shaken up, stuffs his knife back into his pocket and looks down at his twitching victim.

LEON (CONT'D)

What's wrong with you man?

Leon glances back and forth. No one is watching. He kneels down and reaches into his victim's pocket. He grabs hold of the device that the ear buds are connected to, and withdraws it -

It's a cassette tape player. Nothing more than a third rate Walkman, ancient and worthless. Leon stares in disbelief.

LEON (CONT'D)

No -

Leon glances at his now unconscious victim as he grips the Walkman in his hands.

LEON (CONT'D)

You've got to be fucking -

A dog barks. Startled, Leon begins to run, his new Walkman in hand.

INT. LEON'S APARTMENT -- LATER

The room is barely livable, almost certainly part of a long abandoned building. There is no furniture. Faded graffiti is scrawled across the walls.

HAROLD, 31, eyes glazed over and right arm tied with a rubber rope, lies blissed out in the corner.

The door opens and Leon enters. He holds in his still bloody hands the Walkman. Harold does not look up.

LEON

The fucking night I had.

Leon heads past Harold towards the bathroom.

LEON (CONT'D)

Guy had to put up a goddamned fight
for a goddamned Walkman.

INT. LEON'S BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Leon enters the rusted bathroom and shoves his new Walkman down on the counter. He turns on the sink, and begins to wash the blood from his hands.

LEON

(calling into other
room)

The people in this city, Harold. I
swear to God.

Leon continues to wash. The water at the bottom of the sink, due to mixture with the dried blood, has turned a dull red. Leon shakes his head and glances at the Walkman.

EXT. CHARLIE'S PAWN SHOP -- DAY

The shop, on the corner of a joyless urban street, has clearly not seen renovation in many years.

INT. CHARLIE'S PAWN SHOP -- CONTINUOUS

Inside, things are a mess. CHARLIE, 41, stands behind a counter looking shrewd and confident. Behind him are several shelves of used trinkets.

Across the counter, Leon stands facing Charlie. He delicately places his Walkman on the counter for the store owner to see.

LEON

(smiling)

It's new.

Charlie eyes the Walkman skeptically.

CHARLIE

If this were Nineteen Eighty Seven.

Leon's smile quickly dissipates into desperation.

LEON

Come on man.

Charlie crosses his arms.

CHARLIE

You know the rules. You bring me
Mp3 players, we do business. Hell,
even the occasional Discman and we
can talk.

Charlie picks up the Walkman and studies it.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

But this? Ain't no one wants to pay
a dime for some old ass tape player.

Charlie extends his hand out to Leon, and gives him back the
Walkman.

LEON

(pleading)

Charlie -

Charlie shakes his head.

CHARLIE

Not a dime.

Leon opens his mouth to protest, but can't find the words.
Defeated, and with his Walkman still in hand, he turns and
heads for the store's exit.

EXT. CHARLIE'S PAWN SHOP -- CONTINUOUS

Leon exits the store out into the city street. He pauses
outside the shop and stares down at the Walkman. After a
few seconds consideration, he puts on the ear buds and presses
play.

Leon glances side to side waiting for music to start, but is
greeting with only silence. Just as he is about to rip the
ear buds out, a piano line begins. Sad, haunting, and slow,
the simple melody repeats.

Leon listens, clearly not getting it. As the piano melody
continues on, he heads down the street.

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE WAITING ROOM -- LATER

Leon sits straight up in an uncomfortable chair, the ear
buds still on, and the piano melody still repeating.

Across from him, a pretty WOMAN, 24, with a huge black eye, reads a magazine.

Leon listens to the melody and stares at the woman. He pulls the buds from his ears and clears his throat. The woman looks up.

LEON

(to Woman)

It's the same song for the whole tape. Just some old piano.

The woman smiles politely and looks back down at her magazine. Leon continues to stare at her black eye.

LEON (CONT'D)

Wish I could meet the man who did that to you.

The woman looks up in surprise. Leon stares into her eyes. Uncomfortable, she turns back to her magazine.

Leon sits for a few more seconds and sticks the ear buds back in. He presses play and the piano melody continues. He leans back in his seat, closes his eyes, and gets lost in the music.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

Mr. Russell.

Leon reopens his eyes to find an overweight RECEPTIONIST standing directly in front of him. He removes the ear buds and looks up at her.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Mr. Russell, we're ready for you.

Leon nods and stands.

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Leon sits in a chair across from a stoic and removed UNEMPLOYMENT AGENT, 32. The agent shuffles through papers and steals a few condescending glances at her client.

Leon, meanwhile, cradles the Walkman in his lap, and tries to put on his best smile.

UNEMPLOYMENT AGENT

Leon Russell. Thirty one years old.

LEON

(friendly)

That's me.

The Unemployment Agent looks up from her papers.

UNEMPLOYMENT AGENT

It says here that you've been receiving unemployment checks for the past sixteen months.

Leon nods.

LEON

Yes ma'am.

Beat.

LEON (CONT'D)

I've been doing like they told me. Fill out the paper work and bring it by every two weeks -

The Unemployment Agent glances down at her papers.

UNEMPLOYMENT AGENT

Yes. I've got it all here.

She leans in.

UNEMPLOYMENT AGENT (CONT'D)

The issue isn't that you've been negligent, but rather, as someone should have explained to you when you first came in, that unemployment compensation is a finite service.

Leon, confused, shakes his head.

LEON

They told me that as long as I fill out the paperwork and bring it by every two weeks I -

UNEMPLOYMENT AGENT

Me. Russell. Sixteen months is the federal limit on unemployment. We cannot legally continue to -

Nervous and upset, Leon has begun to shuffle around with the Walkman in his lap.

LEON

What are you saying?

The agent pauses, fixes up her papers, and looks Leon in the eye.

UNEMPLOYMENT AGENT

I'm saying that we can no longer legally compensate you.

Leon stands up.

LEON
This is some bullshit.

The agent puts out her hand.

UNEMPLOYMENT AGENT
Mr. Russell. Please calm down.
There are several welfare programs
that I can recommend, that I think
could help provide aid. But -

Leon simply shakes his head.

LEON
This is some bullshit.

He turns, and heads for the door.

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE WAITING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Leon, notably upset and gripping his Walkman tightly, storms through the waiting room and past the battered woman. She glances up from her magazine as he walks by.

INT. ELEVATOR -- MOMENTS LATER

Leon stands in the elevator, the Walkman ear buds in his ears. The piano melody plays.

Out of nowhere, Leon begins to kick at the elevator wall with rage. His ear buds do not fall out, and the quiet melody plays on as he continues his attack the white metal wall.

INT. LEON'S APARTMENT -- LATER

Harold, who has not moved from his previous position, snores loudly. The door opens and Leon enters the dank apartment. He holds in his hands the Walkman.

LEON
Harold.

Harold continues to snore.

LEON (CONT'D)
Harold!

With a grunt, Harold opens his eyes and moans. He looks at Leon.

LEON (CONT'D)
I've got to ask you a question.

Harold stretches his arms out and looks up at his roommate with bloodshot eyes.

HAROLD

What is it man?

Leon, Walkman in hand, walks across the room and kneels down in front of Harold.

LEON

Put these on.

Leon extends the ear buds out to Harold, who shoots his roommate a perplexed look.

LEON (CONT'D)

You put these on.

Harold shrugs and inserts the ear buds. Without taking his eyes off his roommate, Leon presses play on the Walkman.

The piano melody begins. Harold listens, a blank look on his face. Leon watches intently.

LEON (CONT'D)

Well?

Harold removes the ear buds in confusion.

HAROLD

What?

Leon leans in.

LEON

Do you know it?

HAROLD

Yeah.

Leon smiles in anticipation. Harold thinks.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

It's uh...

(beat)

It's a piano.

Leon exhales, and closes his eyes.

LEON

I know it's a goddamn piano. I want to know what song it's playing.

HAROLD

Oh.

Harold reinserts the ear buds and listens to the piano melody for a few more seconds.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
Never heard it before.

Leon, clearly on edge, nods. He takes the ear buds back from Harold, gets up, and heads for the other side of the room. Harold looks up at him.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
What's it to you?

INT. USED RECORD STORE -- NIGHT

A dusty and small used record store. A few CUSTOMERS flip through stacks of vinyl. Leon stands at the counter, facing an ugly CLERK, 45. The clerk wears the ear buds, and Leon holds the Walkman.

After a few seconds, the clerk removes the ear buds and shakes his head.

CLERK
We don't have it.

LEON
(worked up)
I don't care -

Leon pauses and tries to calm down.

LEON (CONT'D)
(calmer)
I don't care if you don't have it.
I just want to know what it is.

The Clerk shrugs his shoulders.

CLERK
To tell you the truth I'm not too into that whole ambient, new classical scene. It's pretty hard to put up with, you know?

Leon waves the Walkman in the clerk's face.

LEON
(agitated)
This song has been stuck in my head for -

CLERK
I don't know what it is. I just know we don't have it.

Leon shakes his head.

LEON

I've been to five of these goddamned
record shops today. How is it
possible that none of you -
(beat)
How is it possibly that none of you
can tell me what this song is?

The disinterested clerk can only shrug.

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

Leon, the ear buds in and the piano melody playing, walks
down the same residential street that he followed his previous
victim down.

He reaches the back street where the crime occurred, and
turns down it.

EXT. BACKSTREET -- CONTINUOUS

Leon walks towards yellow police tape. He withdraws the ear
buds as he approaches, and stops outside the apartment
building turned crime scene.

On the stoop of the apartment building, a HISPANIC WOMAN,
55, smokes a cigarette. She notices Leon staring at the
crime scene.

HISPANIC WOMAN

Stabbing. Robbery they said.

Leon looks up at her.

HISPANIC WOMAN (CONT'D)

Guy lived down the hall from me.
Quiet, but nice.
(beat)
He'd always hold the elevator.

LEON

(concerned)
Is he...

The Hispanic Woman nods.

HISPANIC WOMAN

Terrible isn't it?

Leon cannot say a word. The Hispanic Woman motions towards
the pavement below her.

HISPANIC WOMAN (CONT'D)

They haven't cleaned the blood off
yet. Said they'd have a guy in on
Monday.

Leon looks down at the pavement. Sure enough, it is still stained a dark red. The Hispanic Woman tosses her cigarette butt and turns towards the building.

HISPANIC WOMAN (CONT'D)

You take care.

Leon, his face drained white, nods. The Hispanic Woman disappears into the apartment building. Leon stands, staring ahead at the crime scene.

In a sudden burst of anger, he throws the Walkman to the ground. It lands with a crack. Furious, Leon stares down at it, and repeatedly stomps it into the pavement with his foot.

After several stomps, Leon calms himself and takes a step back. The Remains of the fabled cassette tape can be seen through the cracked and destroyed Walkman.

Leon shakes his head, takes one last look, and turns to go.

INT. BROOKLYN STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Leon, his head hung low, limps down the street towards the entrance to the Subway. A light rain has begun to fall.

INT. BROOKLYN SUBWAY STATION -- MOMENTS LATER

Water still drips from the ceiling. The Elderly Clarinet Player plays another unremarkable classical tune.

On the other side of the tracks, Leon walks down a set of stairs. The station is quiet and near-abandoned.

Leon heads for his bench and plops down next to his barely conscious Asian Bum friend.

LEON

(glum)

How's it going?

The Asian Bum opens his eyes and sticks his head in the air as if he is about to say something. Leon waits for a response, but none comes. Slowly, the bum slumps back down.

LEON (CONT'D)

(to Bum)

You remember what this town used to be like?

Leon waits for an answer. It doesn't come.

LEON (CONT'D)

(to Bum)

Yeah. You do.

(MORE)

LEON (CONT'D)

(beat)

Used to be fast. Used to be there
were always things to do, you know?
All night restaurants. Cheap bars.

Leon pauses for his friend to respond. Again, the unconscious
bum does not.

LEON (CONT'D)

You could -

(beat)

You could walk up to a girl on the
street and just start talking. Just
ask her her fucking name, and she
would have something to say.

Across the platform, the old man finishes his song. Leon
shakes his head.

LEON (CONT'D)

I swear. Sometimes I think this
whole city's lost its mind and I'm
the only one still sane.

The old man leans in to his clarinet and begins to play his
next song. It is the melody from Leon's just destroyed
Walkman.

Leon takes a second to register what he is hearing, and then
glances up in astonishment at the elderly clarinet player
across the platform.

LEON (CONT'D)

Hey!

Leon rises from his seat and walks to the edge of the
platform. He continues to call out, trying to get the
clarinet player's attention.

LEON (CONT'D)

Hey!

The song continues, but its performer does not look up. A
train can be heard approaching in the distance.

LEON (CONT'D)

(desperate)

Hey! What song is that?!

Still the clarinet player does not look up. A train pulls
into the station on the side opposite Leon.

Leon turns and sprints desperately towards the subway's exit.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET -- CONTINUOUS

The rain has increased in intensity. Leon bursts out of the subway and spots the opposite subway entrance on the other side of the street. Without looking, he darts into the road.

A taxi comes screeching to a short stop in front of him. The DRIVER bangs angrily on the horn. Leon continues on without even a glance back.

As he reaches the sidewalk, Leon slips on a puddle. He manages to catch himself before he hits the ground. With his balance regained, he darts into the subway entrance.

INT. SUBWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Leon tears down a staircase. The train is still parked at the stop now directly in front of him. Leon watches as the doors to the subway car open.

The elderly subway musician, his clarinet tucked underneath his arm, waits to enter the train.

LEON

Wait!

Leon pushes his way through the Subway entrance without paying.

LEON (CONT'D)

Hey! Wait!

The man does not turn, and steps onto the train.

LEON (CONT'D)

What's that song?!

The doors to the train close just as Leon arrives. The elderly man, with clarinet still in hand, stands in the otherwise abandoned car, his body turned away from Leon.

Leon bangs on the glass in desperation.

LEON (CONT'D)

What's that song?! What's that song?!

Leon continues to bang as the train pulls away. He steps back and stares powerlessly ahead at subway car after abandoned subway car.

Once the train has departed, and the station is once again quiet and lifeless, Leon hangs his head in defeat.

Across the platform, the Asian Bum drifts in and out of consciousness.

From the ceiling, water drips at a steady pace. It lands on the ground next to Leon.

THE END