

# RECOGNITION

## By Patrick Gabridge

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ISBN 1-60003-552-3

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**CHARACTERS:** (2f)

TANYA MONCRIEF: 23. A graduate student.

ALLISON BECKHOFF: 30s-40s.

VOICE OF A TRAIN CONDUCTOR: (over loudspeaker)

**TIME:** Now.

**PLACE:** Boston.

**SETTING:** In a car on the Green Line of the T (Boston's subway).

**PRODUCTION NOTE:** A lot of this play is about awkwardness, boundaries, and proximity, all within a public space. Don't be afraid of uncomfortable silences.

**A NOTE ABOUT THE CREATION OF RECOGNITION:**

*Recognition* has an interesting creation story. I was taking part in the "T Plays," a festival sponsored by the Mill 6 Collaborative, here in Boston. Our assignment was to write a play set on the T (Boston's subway system), inspired by what we experienced on the day, actually writing the play itself while riding the T. We had just one afternoon to ride the trains and write the play and then turn it in for rehearsals starting right away. I rode the Green Line, a trolley like train that passes just by my house. I spent all afternoon on the train with my notebook in hand, and wrote this play.

In a way, though, I had a head start, because right before I got on the train, my wife mentioned something odd that had happened to her while on the train a few months earlier. She'd been riding along and thought she'd seen someone who could have been our daughter's birthmother (we have two adopted children), whom we've never met. My wife determined that it wasn't her, but we were both left wondering how either of us would have handled the situation if that had really been the case. Thus *Recognition* was born.

**PRODUCTION HISTORY:**

Little Fish Theatre Company, San Pedro, CA, 2010

Rapscallions Theatre, NYC, 2009

Boston Theatre Marathon, 2009

Mill 6 Theatre Collaborative, Boston, 2009

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**SETTING:** A subway car on Boston's green line (the T). This can be represented with chairs.

**AT RISE:** A young woman, **TANYA**, in her 20s, dressed for a conference, but not expensively so, sits on a seat on the T. A name tag from her conference still hangs around her neck. In her lap rests a briefcase or bag and a stack of papers that **SHE**'s looking through. **SHE** often looks up, to see which stop **SHE**'s at. There might be other people on the train (if there are extra actors available), but the car is mostly empty. **TANYA**'s seat is in an empty row of seats near the middle entrance of the car.

**ALLISON** enters--**SHE**'s in her 30s-40-- a canvas bag in hand, and sits in a single seat, facing **TANYA**, on the other side of the entrance doors, 2 rows back.

**ALLISON** sees **TANYA**. A look of recognition. Tries not to stare, but keeps coming back to her. Notices **TANYA**'s name tag. Tries harder to read it, without seeming too obvious, but **SHE**'s very interested.

**ALLISON** shifts forward to the next seat. **TANYA** doesn't notice her yet. **ALLISON** keeps trying to get a better look at the name tag. Certainly **SHE**'s read it by now, but **SHE** keeps looking.

**TANYA** looks up and their eyes meet. **ALLISON** smiles at her and **TANYA**, after the slightest delay, returns the smile.

**ALLISON:** Here for the APA conference?

**TANYA:** Um. Yeah.

**ALLISON:** I have a friend presenting there. Doris Schuman.

**TANYA:** Oh, right. She's supposed to be great. I think she's presenting tomorrow.

**ALLISON:** You're... young for a psychologist.

**TANYA:** Internship. Grad students don't usually get to go. I was lucky.

**ALLISON:** Good for you. Did you have to travel far?

**TANYA:** Um. Yeah. From Madison. Wisconsin.

**ALLISON:** Madison. Wow. Wow. U.W. That's where we lived before Boston. My husband finished his degree there.

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TANYA: He's here now?

ALLISON: At B.U. Teaching.

TANYA: Good for him.

*(Silence. ALLISON can't take her eyes off TANYA. TANYA is starting to notice.)*

ALLISON: The conference is at Hynes Convention Center, right?

TANYA: I have to pay for my own lodging, so I was trying to stay cheap. Someone recommended a B&B in Newton. I didn't know it'd be so far out.

ALLISON: Yes, it goes way out there. *(beat)* How old are you? I'm sorry. I'm so nosy. Ignore me. Just... You... Look. You seem so young, even for a graduate student.

TANYA: I'm 23.

ALLISON: Right. Right.

*(The train stops. TANYA looks up at the map above the doors. Any extra passengers should exit now.)*

ALLISON: Which stop?

TANYA: Newton Centre.

*(The train resumes motion.)*

ALLISON: Oh. Wow. Next stop. Almost there. You'll be... Are you enjoying Boston?

TANYA: Yeah. It's great. Nice change. The people have been friendlier than I expected.

ALLISON: It has a reputation, I know. But there are so many of us transplants. I think it's mellowed. You married?

TANYA: Me? No. Just trying to take care of myself right now. That's all I can handle.

ALLISON: But things are working out?

TANYA: Um. Yeah. Sure. I guess so.

ALLISON: I'm glad.

TANYA: Well, this is almost my stop. It was nice, ah, meeting you.

*(TANYA stands and moves to the door. ALLISON stands, too, very nervous.)*

ALLISON: Tanya Moncrief from Madison.

TANYA: What? Oh, the name tag. Yeah.

ALLISON: I know who you are, Tanya.

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TANYA: Excuse me. This is... I'm getting off here.

ALLISON: You placed a little girl up for adoption five years ago.

TANYA: You have the wrong person.

ALLISON: I know it's you.

TANYA: No. I'm a graduate student. I'm... I'm not... You have the wrong person. I don't know you.

ALLISON: Why didn't you come to the meeting at IHOP? We waited and waited.

TANYA: You're confused.

ALLISON: I know it's you.

TANYA: I have to go.

*(The train stops. The doors open. TANYA moves to leave and ALLISON reaches out for her.)*

TANYA: Don't touch me.

ALLISON: I'm--

TANYA: I have to go.

ALLISON: Her name is Emily. She looks just like you. I have photos.

*(TANYA is paralyzed, stuck in the doorway.)*

DRIVER: *(over speakers)* Stand clear the closing doors, please. Clear the doors, please. Off or on, Lady.

*(TANYA steps back into the car. The train resumes motion. TANYA takes a seat and ALLISON sits right behind her.)*

TANYA: I've missed my stop.

ALLISON: Sorry.

TANYA: You're not supposed to know my name.

ALLISON: The hospital screwed up. We got the original records from the birth, and they forgot to cross out your name. Even the name wouldn't have... But when I saw your face, I knew. And Madison. So many times I wondered what you'd look like, what she'd... I've searched the internet. I knew you were out there, somewhere. And then I saw you. It's like looking at her, what she'll look like. Grown. I never knew what she'd... And then to see you.

TANYA: What do you want from me?

ALLISON: I... To say thank you. For our daughter. Emily is smart. Stubborn. Beautiful. Thank you.

TANYA: I didn't do it for you.

ALLISON: Right. I didn't mean--

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TANYA: If I wanted to know you, I would have come to the meetings. I shouldn't have said yes, but you kept... If I wanted to know you, I would have answered the letters. The agency sent them to me. Until I asked them to stop.

ALLISON: The letters are still there. If you ever want them. It's up to you. I'm sorry. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything.

TANYA: Maybe.

ALLISON: But then you would vanish, and... what would I tell her, later, when she's older? "I saw your birthmother once, on the T, but I didn't say anything."

TANYA: Don't tell her anything.

ALLISON: She's going to want to know.

TANYA: She can't. That's not... It's supposed to be my choice. I'm supposed to have a say.

ALLISON: I know.

TANYA: But you don't care? Why can't you... Respect what I chose and, just let it...

ALLISON: I do. I do. I do.

TANYA: How? How is this... What, what I did, is just. You can't just. See, I have a life, my own life, and it's not spectacular, but it's what I have. I've finished school. I'm. But. There's a... See, for you, it was all just one thing, one big sweep of this, then this, then this. A continuum. Not for me. Before and after. That was before, and this, now, this is after. Do you see?

ALLISON: I do. But when I saw your face, I--

TANYA: I'm lost. Where are we? Where are we?

ALLISON: You can turn around. Just get off, at the next stop. Cross over and go back.

TANYA: This wasn't supposed to happen. Now what? Now what? I have to wonder, all the time, when are you going to pop out, and Surprise!

ALLISON: No. I wouldn't. Don't worry. I wouldn't.

TANYA: I don't believe you.

ALLISON: I'll pretend we've never met. Okay? I take it all back. We rewind. You stay there. I'll move. I'm sorry.

*(ALLISON shifts over across the car. TANYA stares blankly at her papers. ALLISON tries not to look at her. SHE takes her purse out of the canvas bag. Silence and train noises. ALLISON takes a photo out of her wallet, looks at it, looks at TANYA. ALLISON moves back to the seat behind TANYA.)*

TANYA: I don't know you. Remember?

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