

Leonora from 5:00 to 5:11

As a “bag lady” subjects her fellow subway riders to her personal philosophy and perfectly reasonable requests for a knife, a snapshot emerges of life on the fringes.

Characters:

Leonora: female. Somewhere in her 50s or 60s, old enough to feel worn out by life but still crackling with energy. Her clothes are cheap but don’t lack personality – think patterned leggings and sequined knockoff Uggs. If she has long hair, it’s tied in a sloppy bun directly on top of her head. She carries a long day’s worth of bags.

Pam: female. Young adult to middle-aged. Middle-class, nicely dressed, polite, sheltered, genuinely kind, deeply normal.

Trey: male. Young (late teens to ~30). He enters wearing big headphones blasting music. He refuses to speak throughout the scene, so all his thoughts have to be conveyed by his face and body language.

The scene takes place in a subway car.

At rise: The subway car rumbles softly along. Its sole occupant is LEONORA, who sits there encumbered by bags. She looks exhausted but alert – she always has an eye out for anything that might make her laugh or try to stab her.

The train grinds to a stop and the doors open. PAM walks briskly onto the subway car. Leonora looks Pam in the eye, and Pam smiles politely before looking away and taking her seat.

The subway car lurches into motion. Pam settles into her seat and looks at nothing in particular, prepared to sit out the ride in civilized silence.

Leonora inhales deeply and exhales a long, thin, melodic “Hmmm.” Pam glances over but doesn’t respond.

Leonora: I’m already done with this day, I know that for a fact.

Pam doesn’t respond.

Leonora (cont’d): What kinda number has today dealt you?

It’s as if Pam did not hear. Leonora tuts and pats her hair with affected self-consciousness.

Leonora (cont’d): Oh, goodness, look at me. You must think I’m some crazy homeless lady. Well, it’s not for me to comment on crazy, but I’m not homeless. I live with my husband in Milford. I’m just all of a mess today.

Pam has been duly shamed into conversation.

Pam: Oh, no, of course...

Small awkward silence.

Pam (cont’d): Milford’s a nice area.

Leonora: That it is. We’ve owned our home there since 2009. Bought it in cash right after the bubble burst. And now the value just keeps going up. Of course, so do the taxes. But we wouldn’t want to move somewhere cheaper. It’s such a nice neighborhood.

Pam: Yeah. I go running in the park there sometimes. And there’s a good HomeGoods.

Leonora: My sister-in-law works at that HomeGoods.

Pam: Get out of town! Really?

Leonora: Absolutely. She’s the store manager. Of the bedding section.

Pam: That’s so funny! What’s her name?

Leonora: Suzanne.

Pam: I'll have to look for her. And tell her I met...

Leonora: Leonora.

Pam: Leonora. I'm Pam.

Leonora: Pleased to meet you.

Leonora smiles at Pam and then, readjusting her many bags, sighs.

Leonora: Maybe I'll go see her at the store tonight. I've been out shopping all day, and I picked up a few things, but I still haven't found what I'm looking for.

Pam: What's that?

Leonora: An apron, but a cute one. Like, a fancy one. All I'm finding is these screen-printed canvas sacks that say, y'know, "I'm a Wine Mom." But I want one of those sexy little '50s numbers with ruffles and a bow in the back. I shouldn't have to feel like a frump just because I'm in the kitchen all day. I've still got this figure, and my husband's still got eyes.

Pam giggles.

Pam: How long have you been married?

Leonora: Oh, now you're gonna make me give away my age. Let's just say decades.

Pam: Oh, wow. That's so great! How did you two meet?

Leonora: He came up and met me. I was standing at a bus stop, minding my own. And here comes this man saying, "Excuse me, Miss, but I'm from the Department of Transportation. And you gonna cause a wreck standing by the road in that dress."

Pam giggles harder.

Leonora (cont'd): The funny thing was, I almost didn't take the bus that day.

Pam: It was fate! Isn't it amazing how that happens? Like, I met my husband in college, but I didn't even go to his college. I was up there for one day visiting my girlfriend. Like, what are the odds?! But some things are just meant to be.

Leonora: Mm-hmm.

Leonora says this in an agreeing way, but her expression is a little cool, a little skeptical.

Leonora (cont'd): I didn't go to college. I just worked. I've been working since I was, Lord. Thirteen.

Pam: Oh, me too, I always worked. I waited tables in a diner during summers. And I was an RA. Which basically meant I was the babysitter for the dorm.

Leonora: Sounds like you had your hands full.

Pam: Oh, yeah.

Pam laughs. Beat – a comfortable silence.

Leonora: Hey sweetheart, you got a knife I could borrow?

Small beat.

Pam: What?

Leonora: Just anything sharp, really. I got this thing on my foot – right on the bottom of my heel – I think it's a wart. But whatever it is, it's killing me. Hurts to put any weight on, and now it's starting to bleed. And it's not like I can stop stepping on my foot. So it's gotta come off. But I don't have anything with me like a knife.

Pam: ...I would go to the doctor for that.

Leonora: Oh, I won't bother my doctor for a thing like this. I just need to pop it off.

Pam: ...Oh. Uh-huh.

Pam clears her throat and looks away, busying herself with her phone or drink or purse.

Leonora: I feel like even nail clippers would work.

Pam: No, I don't have anything like that, sorry.

Leonora: Oh.

The train grinds to a halt. The doors slide open. Pam looks around or checks her phone, pretending not to feel uncomfortable. Beat.

Leonora (cont'd): You don't got an emery board or nothing?

Pam: Oh my goodness – this is my stop! I've gotta – Um, good luck with your...foot.

Pam hurriedly exits. Leonora watches the doors close behind her. The train squeaks into motion again. Leonora is alone again.

Leonora resumes the watchful, neutral expression she had at rise. Then she sighs and crosses one ankle over her knee. She wiggles her boot off, revealing a mess of toilet paper wrapped around her foot. The disintegrating toilet paper is bloody under her heel.

At first, Leonora just looks at her foot. Then she starts prodding experimentally at the wart, or whatever it is, trying to see if it might be getting closer to being pop-off-able. She continues poking around until she hits a nerve and sucks her teeth in pain.

Leonora: I hate this thing, I really do.

She leans in toward her heel and addresses the wart (or whatever it is).

Leonora (cont'd): I could've had a half-decent day if it wasn't for you. But don't get too comfy. One way or another, you're going.

Leonora reaches into one of her bags, rummages around, and pulls out a roll of toilet paper. She wraps a new layer around the bloody part.

The subway grinds to a halt as Leonora wiggles her foot back into her boot. The doors open, and TREY enters wearing big headphones that blast his music throughout the car. Leonora watches him take his seat, but he does not look at her.

Leonora puts the roll of toilet paper back in the bag she took it from. Trey is in the zone: scrolling on his phone, grooving to his aggressively loud music. But then, abruptly – his music cuts off. Trey plugs and unplugs his headphones a few times, fiddles with settings, and becomes increasingly annoyed as he realizes his headphones are broken. Leonora watches all this.

Leonora: Sorry for your loss there, son.

Trey ignores this as he continued trying to make his headphones un-dead. Leonora watches him with her eyebrows raised in amusement – she's winding up to have some fun.

Leonora (cont'd): I know you can hear me! That's the problem when your headphones are actually speakers. And lemme tell you, you're in for it now. You might actually have to have a conversation. And if you don't participate in choosing a topic, it could end up being about anything.

Trey shoots Leonora a dark, aggrieved look. First his headphones, now this lady – he can't believe his luck. He stubbornly turns his attention to his phone.

Leonora (cont'd): Well, all right, if you WANT to talk about global warming...

Trey's eyes bulge in annoyance even as he continues burying his face in his phone. Leonora cackles.

Leonora (cont'd): Nah, I wouldn't do that to you. God, that's too sad to even think of. No, we'll talk about something else. Let's talk about...God. You wanna know my thing about God?

Trey abruptly gets up and stomps to the farthest seat in the car from Leonora, which involves crossing directly in front of her. Leonora, who's having a good time, is fully unphased. She just raises her voice slightly as she continues,

Leonora (cont'd): My thing about God – the God people talk about – is this idea of a plan. People just won't hold his planning to a standard. I mean, it's not for me to judge why God would plan for that sweet baby Annie Frank to starve to death out in the cold. But it doesn't inspire a bit of enthusiasm about his plan for me.

Leonora glances at Trey for a response she knows isn't coming. He is slouched deep into himself, scowling into his phone. Leonora goes on in an unhurried, authoritative way, like a professor holding forth at the dinner table.

Leonora (cont'd): "Oh, but that part wasn't God's plan," they'll say. Not any *bad* stuff, not the Holocaust. Well, if that wasn't part of the plan, then neither are all the people whose parents only met when they fled from the war. And what's it even mean to be God if there's people popping up without his say-so? And but then, and this is the worst part, people'll have the *gall* to say it's God's plan for good things to happen to them. Yeah, sure. I'm sure it *is* God's plan for you to buy a big ol' house and get married to the perfect man. It's just too bad for Annie that she pulled a shorter straw.

Leonora pauses and looks expectantly at Trey. He feels her gaze and swivels to face even further away from her.

Leonora (cont'd): No thoughts on that? But I'm starting to think you might not think too many thoughts. Tell you what, it's 'cause you spend all your time inside. I do all my best thinking outside. I wanted to be outside today. It's so nice, with the sun out. But I just needed somewhere to sit. I've got this thing on my foot. And – hey. Listen, I'll stop playing with you. I'll let you alone, if you do me a favor. Let me borrow a knife real quick? I've just gotta cut this thing off my foot.

Trey looks completely disgusted. He puts a hand up by the side of his face, blocking Leonora from view as he burrows deeper into his phone. Leonora's hackles go up.

Leonora (cont'd): Oh, I get it. I'm a crazy homeless lady, right? Well, I'm not homeless. I live with my daughter in Broadview Heights. She just had a baby. A boy. At first, she was trying to do it all by herself, like I did with her. But after a couple months she calls me crying saying, 'Momma, I want to come home.' So come home then, I said. He'll have the two of us, and I'll have someone to watch *Say Yes to the Dress* with.

The train grinds to a stop. Trey leaps to his feet and makes for the door. Leonora watches Trey exit. She says evenly, as if in response to something he did not say,

Leonora (cont'd): Mm-hmm. You too.

Beat. The doors close. Leonora sighs quietly – really just an exhale.

Leonora crosses her bad foot onto her knee and takes the boot off. This disrupts the toilet paper job, which she does her best to pat back into place.

Leonora (cont'd): This thing has got to go. One way or another. Got to go.

Leonora starts picking at the wart through the toilet paper. Then she suddenly speaks in a voice that is a caricature of her mother's.

Leonora (cont'd): "Don't pick! Leave it alone!" Yeah, I hear you, Momma. But it's not gonna get better if I keep walking on it. Don't know what I'm supposed to do about that. I suppose I could hop. Like a bunny. Playboy bunny.

Leonora cackles. Her laugh becomes a sigh that becomes a whimper as she prods halfheartedly at the wart. Then, all of a sudden, she gets mad. She leans in toward her heel and addresses the wart.

Leonora (cont'd): I'm gonna get you! Look at you. Just a crusty little thing. One snip and you'll be gone.

Leonora looks a little pained at the thought and at the word "snip."

Leonora (cont'd): Granted, it's not your fault. And it's not like I want to do it. On different real estate, I'd let you be. But here? We can't have you here. Mm-mm, no ma'am. One way or another, you gotta get gone.

Lights out. END SCENE.