AT RISE: An old woman is sitting across from a young man. Her hands are tightly woven around the purse in her lap. The sound of, the train whooshing through the tunnel echoes in the theater. The lights are blinding yellow – almost surgical.

The man has his legs spread wide; he is leaning forward with his elbows resting on his knees. He’s unkempt. He has his hands loosely closed around an object that continually drips on the floor. A bloody hammer lies on the seat next to him.

Blood seeps through his fingers. His clothes are covered in it, as are his hands. His neck is smeared with a bloody handprint and he has flecks of blood dried on his face and matting his hair together.

The two sit in this stand off for a while – the man caressing the object, not focusing on the woman at all, and the woman watching his every move in utter terror.

The train suddenly screeches to a halt and the doors open. Neither of them move. After a few seconds the woman stands and takes one step.

For the first time the man looks up at her. His eyes are deathly cold. He reaches one hand towards the hammer and curls his fingers around it. She’s frozen for a few seconds until the doors start to close. His hand uncurls from the hammer and goes back to fiddling with the unknown object.

A shout is heard off-stage.

YOUNG WOMAN

 Wait, wait! Hold the door, please!

The old woman instinctually puts her arm out without taking her eyes off the man. A young woman runs on stage and practically dives onto the subway train. She rams into the old woman, knocking her purse to the floor. It skitters right into the blood puddle at the young man’s feet. A rosary, among other objects, flies out of the bag and lands in the puddle.

The woman doesn’t notice as she bends to pick the items up. She shoves them back in the purse. The old woman gingerly takes her seat as the doors shut loudly. The young woman attempts to dust off the purse. She hands the old woman the rosary.

YOUNG WOMAN

Oh I’m so sorry. I didn’t even see you. I’m really late.

She notices the blood on the purse and blanches. She looks at the floor and sees the blood trail. She hands the purse to the old woman who takes it readily. The old woman places a shaking hand on the young woman’s arm.

OLD WOMAN

 It’s ok. Really. Please just sit.

She tries to convey so much with this single phrase. The young woman’s entire demeanor has changed. She nods and sits one seat down from the old woman.

The man has been staring at the young woman this whole time. They sit in silence for a little while. The man has stopped looking at the women. The women exchanged looks until the young woman begins to get fidgety.

YOUNG WOMAN

 (to the man)

 Are you ok? Do you, do you need some help?

The old woman steels herself for something bad to happen. The man looks up and opens his hands. A human heart lies cold and dead in them. He massages it as if attempting to revive it. The young woman looks like she’s going to vomit.

YOUNG MAN

You’re the first person to ask me that. Am I ok? What do you think? Do I look ok?

YOUNG WOMAN

 Well – I just…

OLD WOMAN

 What do you want?

Her voice breaks the tension in the room. It’s meek and gentle and afraid.

The young man is actually surprised by this question.

YOUNG MAN

 Someone to understand.

YOUNG WOMAN

 What happened?

The man looks down at the heart and squeezes it forcefully. Blood drips to the ground. It splatters his shoes. He doesn’t say anything for a while. The silence is just long enough to where it gets awkward. Then, he speaks. He continues to look down.

YOUNG MAN

Did you know that 1 in 25 people are born without a conscience? It’s called Antisocial Personality Disorder. Basically, all the things you’re born with that make you human, they’re just not there. You have no regard for human life - no guilt, no remorse. Only aggression. Supposedly there are two types of people with this disorder. Psychopaths and Sociopaths. Movies have completely romanticized this but they’re wrong. It’s nothing glamourous. Psychopaths are born with it, sociopaths are develop it. And for those lucky enough, those few that have both, we’re just screwed.

OLD WOMAN

 What does that have to do with anything…?

He looks at her threateningly.

YOUNG MAN

1 in 25 people have Antisocial Personality Disorder, right? Well 1 in 1300 of those people commit murder at some point. That’s a much smaller number. So it makes me wonder, what makes them change? What takes them from merely living without a conscience to acting on their rage? What takes them from 1 in 25 to 1 in 1300?

BEAT

Well, I was reading about this recently when I saw this theory. The Dark Triad theory. Basically it says that when someone has that disorder, coupled with narcissism, it’s pretty much inevitable.

They are quiet for a while. The message repeats, saying that the train will be fixed momentarily. The young woman looks at her watch edgily. The old woman seems completely fed up with what’s going on.

OLD WOMAN

I don’t understand! Why are you telling us this? Why does it matter?

The young man looks up, a snarl etched on his face. It fades away almost instantly. It’s replaced with a sickeningly sweet smile.

YOUNG MAN

(His tone progresses throughout the speech until he’s practically yelling.)

Maybe it’s because one day, someone, anyone woke up and decided he couldn’t fake it today. He couldn’t pretend to care about anybody else for one more second. But it’s not like he could just stop living for a little while. So he went to work, kept his head down. And then his boss decided to yell at him for something that wasn’t even his fault!

Beat.

And the rage was back. The teeth-grinding rage. He had never felt it like this before. It was like something broke inside of him. He could feel his eyes filling with blood and his tongue burning holes in his cheeks. But it’s not like his boss knew, he just continued to yell, spitting cigarette ash into his eyes. Something changed then. He became calm. A terrifying kind of calm. And he liked it. A lot.

The old woman’s phone rings within her purse. She looks at it, he looks at it, the young woman minutely signals to the old woman not to answer it.

The old woman holds the phone in her hand, her finger hovering above the answer button. The ringing silences eventually. Everyone is still.

YOUNG MAN

 (He begins to squeeze the heart again)

So, when he finds himself outside the yellow house with the picket fence and the family asleep in their beds, he’s not surprised. It feels so natural for the hammer to be buried so deep in his boss’ brain that he can see the metal gleaming from the inside of his mouth. It’s as if his hands were made to end life. To snuff it out like a candle. Like the candles he used to run his fingers over as a child to feel pain. To feel anything. He can feel now. He can feel the blood run down his fingers. He can feel the heart beat in the chest, feel it slow, feel it stop. So he does it again to the wife. And again. But something feels wrong. He places the children in their beds, their arms crossed over their chests. This is wrong. But it doesn’t feel like that.

 (He pulls the heart to his chest)

He never meant to be this way. He was just a man. How could that change so quickly? How can he go back? Does he want to? So he gets on the train to go home but when he reaches his stop he can’t possibly get off, go inside, go to bed. So he stays. Thinks. Waits for a sign.

At this he looks to the young woman almost imploringly. As if asking her to help him. The old woman isn’t buying it. The young woman puts her hand over her heart. She seems entranced.

OLD WOMAN

 (She’s having none of this)

That’s a nice story.

YOUNG MAN

 (He is pissed that she isn’t scared)

What if there’s a chance that he meets an old woman on the train, at night, and the doors are locked, and the train is stuck between stations? Or the chance that she doesn’t answer her phone when she should have. The chance that he can give it another shot to see if this hunger is real.

As he speaks he starts to stand, his body angled towards the woman. For the first time the old woman realizes the gravity of the situation. She tries desperately to shrink into her seat. He towers over her. Then, when he’s satisfied that she’s scared, he turns to the young woman.

YOUNG MAN

 (His tone is less angry and more inquisitive)

Or maybe the chance that a young woman gets on the train, too. A woman naïve enough to ask him what’s wrong. Sweet. Caring.

 (He sneers)

This is the first time the man seems not like a child who spilled their drink. He is showing his true colors. He can’t hide it anymore. Not for another second.

YOUNG MAN

Or maybe it’s not a need at all. Maybe it was a one-time thing. Maybe he can just go home, sleep, and go back to the caged person he was.

The women visibly relax. He’s still standing.

YOUNG MAN

Why not make them go through everything he’s gone through in the last few hours. Let them feel it. Maybe he could feel it too.

At this, with the heart in one hand he reaches into his jacket with the other and drops a bloody hammer on the ground between the two women.

Why not let them play the game? Who lives, who dies? It’s not up to him this time. Only one of them gets off the train. Can they live with the guilt? He can.

He sits back down and raises the heart to eye level and places his forehead to it. He closes his eyes, inhales deeply. He opens his eyes again and his lips curl into a smile.

He brings his hands back down and tips his hands, fingertips towards the floor, palms up. The heart crashes to the floor in the puddle of blood. He keeps his hands like this, as if praying. Blood drips down his fingers.

The women look at each other as if he can’t make them do this. As more time passes they begin to realize that this is the situation. Their glances alternate between each other and the hammer.

The train finally starts and begins to move again. An automated message thanks them for their patience. The women sigh as if this cruel game is over. The man has been watching them intensely. He kicks the hammer closer to them.

YOUNG MAN

 Time’s up.

Both women look at each other and get down on their hands and knees to grab the hammer. Both their hands clasp around the handle.

Lights fade out.