

Do-Gooders

By Elizabeth Chalecki

SCENE: Nighttime, under a railroad bridge over a river. Two people are hiding there, wearing all black, their hair covered with black knit hats. One is holding a detonator, the other a cell phone. They are clearly waiting for something, though they seem a bit nervous.

Narrator: In the very early hours of the morning, two people are waiting under a railroad bridge in the darkness, high over a river. They are members of a climate activist group called Earth Guardians, and their code names are Otter and Stingray. They're tired of all talk and no action from politicians, and they have decided to take matters into their own hands.

Otter: Man it's cold. *[no response from Stingray]* I'm tired and hungry, when does this train come through?

Stingray: You mean the train of earthly destruction?

Otter: Dude, it's a coal train, not something from a Nicolas Cage movie.

Stingray: Whatever. *[Stingray looks at the cell phone]* Nothing yet. Hawk will let us know when it's on the way.

They wait a bit longer.

Otter: I don't understand why we don't just blow the bridge now. Either way the coal can't get through. Why do we have to wait until the train is right on it?

Stingray *(with an overly patient air)*: Because if we blow it now, they will just reroute the train another way. We have to take out the bridge and the train at the same time. Hawk and I set the charges so we only blow a few places and the weight of the train does the rest. This way we let them know Earth Guardians are not messing around.

Otter frowns.

Stingray: What?

Otter: Well, there's people on the train, right?

Stingray: Only a few engineers, no passengers.

Otter *(looks up at the bridge)*: Yeah, but . . . we didn't give them any warning.

Stingray: Yes we did! We warned them. We told the power company that if they continued make bank off of climate destruction, all their operations were fair game. Hawk said so publicly on the Earth Guardians website. Anyone on this train knows what they're doing.

Otter: I guess. *[he seems unconvinced]*

They wait a bit longer.

Otter: What do you think we'll use for power in the future?

Stingray: Not coal. [*Otter looks at him*] I dunno, wind, solar, something that doesn't heat up the planet. Or nuclear fusion. Y'know, smash hydrogen together to make helium, like the sun.

Stingray mimics sucking in helium from a balloon.

Stingray (*in a super-high helium voice*): Coal executives can rot in hell!

Otter snorts with laughter. They wait a bit longer.

Otter (*looking down into the ravine*): The train's going to make a mess.

By now, Stingray is exasperated.

Stingray: OMG, what's with all the negativity? This train you're so concerned about is carrying 12,000 metric tons of high-sulfur lignite coal to be burned in a power plant that gives little kids asthma for miles downwind. Tomorrow and every day afterward, there will be three more trains just like it, each carrying 12,000 metric tons of coal. The governor is in bed with the power company and won't do shit about it, and the planet gets hotter and hotter.

Otter: What about the little kids' parents, didn't they complain?

Stingray: Ha! Yeah, the local community protested when they built this plant. It got built anyway. Later on, doctors testified at the statehouse that the asthma and emphysema rate in this area was off the charts, and that just resulted in them moving the trains from day to night so people wouldn't see them.

He looks directly at Otter.

Stingray: But when this bridge goes boom and a train full of coal lands in the riverbed, they will see that.

Otter: I still think it's going to make a mess. What if you're a fish? You want a coal train landing on you? [*Now Otter pretends to suck in some helium*] Oh no, we're killed by a coal train!

Stingray: Dude, that's lame. And yes, I feel for the fish. But think of the fish of the future who won't have their lakes and oceans warmed up and acidified.

Otter (*shouts down to the river*): All fish leave!

Stingray: Shut the hell up, you idiot! You're going to give away our location.

Otter: To who? You think there's someone else out here at this hour?

Stingray (*looking around*): Maybe. If I were the power company, I would have stepped up security.

Otter: You think they're scared of us? [*he is clearly skeptical*]

Stingray: Look, Hawk made enough threats on social media that if they don't know who we are, their security is incompetent. So let's not tempt fate by yelling out where we are, ok?

Stingray turns back to the phone, as Otter examines the detonator.

Otter: Have any other ops been found out? [*Stingray doesn't answer right away*] Did anyone get caught? Stingray?

Stingray: Nobody who knew what they were doing. [*he reconsiders*] Okay, yes, some stupid college kids got arrested trying to glue the locks on all the cars at a Hummer dealership, but that was in the middle of a city and I'm pretty sure they were drunk. [*looks at Otter*] You're not drunk, are you, Otter?

Otter (*loudly*): NO! [*to himself*] no -t very much.

They wait a bit longer.

Otter: Ok, but . . . hear me out. What if it's not your fault that the train is carrying coal?

Stingray: What do you mean, "not your fault"?

Otter: It's just ... like, if you're trying to support a family, maybe this is the only job you could get. I mean, maybe you don't want to do this, but you've got kids to feed and jobs around here are scarce.

Stingray (*sighs*): Otter, look at the bigger picture here. The only way we are EVER going to get off of climate-destroying fossil fuels is by making it economically ruinous to use them. As long as politicians get bought and sold by big corporate donors, that won't happen in a legit way, which means we have to make it happen however we can. I'm sorry about these people on the train, but they're part of the system that makes it possible for the wealthy and powerful to screw over the rest of the planet. So ask yourself this: a few people die now, or hundreds of thousands die later in the next heat wave?

Suddenly the cellphone beeps and Stingray checks it.

Stingray: Ok, Hawk says the train's on its way. It should be here in under five minutes, but we'll hear it when it's approaching the bridge. Then it's boom time!

Otter: Yeah, boom time! Ok, except I don't wanna go to prison.

Stingray: What?

Otter: Maybe there's something legal we could do, like a peaceful protest or something?

Stingray: A protest? Are you serious?

Otter: Yeah, march with signs and stuff, that say, like, COAL SUCKS and THERE IS NO PLANET B. Y'know, take to the streets! Power to the people! [*he throws his fist in the air*]

Stingray: Why do you think anyone would pay attention to you when they didn't pay attention to the mothers of sick kids? Besides, we tried "peaceful protests" [*Stingray puts air quotes around the phrase*] and the governor rammed through some law that said anyone blocking traffic is a terrorist and the police can do whatever they want. So they fired tear gas and rubber bullets at us!

They wait a bit longer, Otter nervously fidgeting with the detonator. Then a train whistle is heard in the distance.

Otter: Ok, are we, like, totally sure this isn't an Amtrak?

Stingray: The Amtrak comes through three hours from now. Only it won't, will it, if there's no bridge! And yes, before you protest, it's a bummer for the commuters. But it doesn't change what we have to do.

Otter: I'm just not sure we're doing the right thing...

Stingray: Otter, why did you even join this group?

Otter: Well, I really care about the climate, and . . . there was this girl.

Stingray: You joined because of a girl?

Otter: Yeah, she was all, "let's change the future" and stuff, and I thought it would make me look cool and she might go out with me, but then she went and got an MBA in Sustainable Development or something.

Stingray: Sustainable development is fine, but it isn't gonna fix the problem all by itself. We need a carrot-and-stick approach, and we're the stick. [*chuckles to himself*] An MBA...

The train whistle is heard again, much closer this time.

Stingray: Ok, get ready.

Otter gets ready to push the detonator, and then takes his hand off the button.

Otter: I'm young, man, I don't wanna spend half my life behind bars when you know whatever we do won't change anything.

Stingray: "Won't change anything"?

Otter: They'll just send more coal trains to more plants around the world! Politicians and power brokers control everything! I hate it, but what can we do?

Stingray: Otter, we're doing it! Push the button or give it here!

Stingray makes a grab for the detonator and as they both get their hands on it, the ACTION FREEZES.

Narrator (to the audience): Ladies and gentlemen, you decide how this play ends.

Students discuss whether they should blow the bridge and vote for ending A or ending B

ENDING A: THEY BLOW THE BRIDGE

ACTION RESUMES

Otter: Get your hands off, I got it.

He turns away from Stingray as the train whistle blows right overhead.

Otter: God, I hope we're doing the right thing.

Stingray: Now!

Otter pushes the button on the detonator and four charges blow. Nothing is heard for a moment, then an ominous creaking noise gets louder and louder. As the train crashes down into the river bed, Otter and Stingray brace themselves against the noise and the shaking. A huge dust cloud rises from the place where the train has landed.

Stingray: And that's how we strike a blow for climate justice!

Voice offstage: Hey, you two up there! Don't move!

Otter (to Stingray): We gotta get outta here now!

They run offstage.

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ENDING B: THEY DON'T BLOW THE BRIDGE

ACTION RESUMES

They struggle for the detonator, and Otter grabs it away from Stingray.

Stingray: Dammit Otter, the train's right here! Do it!

Otter: No! I just don't see how we fix this problem by killing people. We need to find another way.

Stingray tries to grab the detonator again, but Otter throws it down into the gorge.

Voice offstage: Hey, you two up there! Don't move!

Stingray: You moron, that had our fingerprints on it! We gotta get outta here now!

They run offstage.

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