

Croton II

I've never been to Croton. I've stopped in Croton. I've waited in Croton. I've heard the words "you must change trains in Croton" said every day over and over. But I've never been to Croton.

I've never been to Croton, that halfway train clot between boom boom megatropolis New York City and P'town Po'town Poughkeepsie, end point incursion to the bottom of the upper Hudson. What was the name before Henry came? The river still flows one way at Croton.

The first time I got stuck not being in Croton, rail plows were plying drifts from the tracks; the hole puncher slipped into commuter comedy working the crammed express; I got the refrain "the train goes nowhere today"; then we started to move.

The second time I got stuck in Croton, I was out of money and out of water. I fell asleep on the train that stopped and woke to see the one across the platform taking off. I begged the ticket guy in the station to fill my water bottle. His arm reached through a crack in the door. I watched the clock hands hold their pose. It is my understanding that time is an inaccurate account of experience.

The third time I got stuck in Croton, I was angry. How many hours would I waste in this goddamn inept junction of trashed rails? I started kicking litter, the cans and papers in the little waiting room above the tracks. I etched curses into the plastic windows with my house keys and crumpled balls of paper from my notebook to distance-throw across the floor. The wire wicker bench made checker patterns in my flesh. My quarter didn't drop. I bashed the telephone. My quarter didn't drop. People gathered; I bashed the receiver into the coin slot and kick slammed the thieving machine. I tried to rip the cord from the body but fell backwards to the ground. Then the train arrived.

The fourth time I got stuck in Croton, I cursed everyone to their faces, the ticket guy, the commuters, the cleaning man. I grabbed the orange hair of a woman walking with Macy's bags up the stairs and wrenched her back down to me then threw her onto the platform ground. I ran inside and tossed my bag at a man walking towards the bathroom. He caught it, leaving no hands free. I punched him in the gut and again in the face. A security guard tried to calm me down. I grabbed his gun from the holster and didn't wait to make any threats or jokes like they do in the movies. I blew his head off. It burst into a million snowflakes that marked us all as survivors. One huge light was a mile off and approaching.

The fifth time I got stuck in Croton, I accepted it as my fate. I sat back on the metal mesh waiting chair, closed my eyes and felt life move through me. I will never come back. I would miss the train but I had reached a decision. I felt peaceful, calmer than I've felt in years.

Now I travel by car. I take the Taconic Highway or Interstate 87. The Taconic started as a trail for horse carriages. I like the curves and the hills. The Interstate is a superhighway. There's nothing much to look at but the ride is fast. Neither route passes through Croton.