

## Two lads on the train by Lisa Conolly

Garth looked at Gerry, “It wasn’t much of a job anyway”. Gerry looked at Garth.

The train watched over them for years. School made them rough and rude – they used to be mates. Now there’s university – Garth engineered – Gerry computed. They weren’t sure now – how to be mates.

The train jostled its human luggage and Garth rumbled on “.. so a job at the Uni bookshop isn’t exactly a pinnacle... I might write for the student mag.”

Gerry didn’t mind when *The Hooter* sounded again.

*Whooooop; Whoop; Whoop; Whoop;*  
*FclassPassengerTrain1902travelled*  
*sssixty miiiiles perhouuur Hoop*

*The Hooter* was a regular guy with a baseball cap – the train had watched over him too – for years – but he seemed too young now. Gerry heard about Tourette’s syndrome on *South Park*. This guy had it bad. *The Hooter* stood near the door looking out, gripping the poles. There were plenty of seats, but he never sat.

*Whooooop: whoooooop; whoooooop;*  
*PclassPassengerTrain1884travelled*  
*ssixty miiiiles per hoouur,..Hoop..*

and Garth kept on “..I did an essay on the history of the railways in Australia – the first class cars were amazing – the Railways Commissioner got the best ride”. Garth knew that Gerry wasn’t really listening, but it felt better to talk. To act. Silence would have mocked him more than Gerry’s boredom.

Gerry nurtured a manly bored slump that made him cool. Garth rattled on with the train.

Eyes and faces twitched every time *The Hooter* went off. The whisper of their clothing rubbing against seats projected their discomfort.



*Two boys on the train, by Lisa Conolly*

*Whooooop; whoooooop, whoooooop, whoooooop*  
*700classGoodsTrain1926travelled*  
*f00oorty five miiles perhoour, hoop*

A woman smirked too loudly into her novel. Garth stared at her. She pulled a face and flicked her hand as if removing dirt from her suit jacket. Garth saw it all. Her face was saying to him ‘well lighten up - it is funny isn’t it?’, and her body said ‘how’s that guy for whacky, and you look a bit whacky yourself’. Garth didn’t like it. The silent mocking was everywhere. It was a telepathic war that couldn’t be fought.

“The only problem with trains is that they carry people.” Garth was clenching his fist and staring while he spoke.

“Huh? Hey mate are you OK?” said Gerry , getting anxious.

Gerry’s fretting helped Garth to feel strong. He had the power to change things.

“The problem with people is they can’t see how fucked up they are. And the people that seem fucked up to everyone else, are actually the least fucked up.”

Garth broke the rhythm of the train and got up too fast. He stood there. It wasn’t his stop. There was no stop here. Too late. He stopped pretending. He would stop the mocking.

Gerry watched – “what ?...”

Garth went over to stand next to the regular guy in the baseball cap. Garth smiled at the guy and spoke loudly, so his words hustled down the length of the train, “I like your hat.” The guy looked alarmed – people often teased him. Then Garth was serious as he spoke “Did you know that from about 1930, the railways provided trains with Baby Health Cars, to help the bush mums? These cars were still going right up to the 1960’s. The Australian railways have an amazing history. I love trains.”

The guy was used to being mocked. The train watched and whirred. The air stopped breathing.

Garth smiled. It was a real smile. The guy could tell. He smiled back. He released his grip on the pole, extended his hand, and announced “Hi, my name is Nicholas”. The soul of every passenger whooped as they watched.

And Gerry saw that Garth might be someone worth talking to.

