

LOSING IT

While the Artful Dodger may be long gone, the art of the missing wallet lives on. Following are two accounts from *Atlantica* staff writers **Sara Blask** and **Jonas Moody** on providence lost and saved through the whim and fate of their wallets.

LOST IN MANHATTAN

By Sara Blask

“From Comedy Central’s World News Headquarters in New York, this is *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart.”

I’d waited four months for the tickets alone, plus three hours in line in piss-scented New York City drizzle, just to hear those 17 words that begin every episode of the spot-on parody of TV news pieties. My seats weren’t great in the nosebleed back row, but that didn’t matter.

What mattered was that after what seemed like an eternity plus three hours, I was finally standing in real time in front of the genius comedian and satirist Jon Stewart, host of one of the only TV shows I’ve ever watched with purposeful regularity. Here he was before me, the man watched by 1.4 million Americans a night, who has won nine Emmys and interviewed everyone from Bill Clinton to Ringo Starr. The guest on my night was American Tom Brokaw, the former NBC news anchor whose rich, even voice I remember fondly from my childhood.

The 45-minute taping came and went along with the cue cards, the teleprompters and the perfect method to Stewart’s acerbic madness. I was jazzed, but as the saying usually goes in New York, there’s little time to savor the flavor. Lots of things to do, time to jet home. So off I went, jogging back to the subway five avenues away, leaping over deepening puddles with headphones jammed in my ears blaring Lyrics Born.

I arrived at the stairwell leading underground, pressed pause on my iPod, and as if on cue, heard the rumble of the subway and the shrieking of its brakes. The doors shushed open and I heard the automated voice belching, “Please stand clear of the closing doors.”

I knew I had fewer than 45 seconds to catch the train. No problem, I’d mastered that New York subway card wrist-flick; I could make it with ballerina grace. I fumbled through my jacket, my jeans, my hoodie. I checked in every possible pocket on my



body, remembering that I hadn’t brought a bag to the show.

And panic struck.

Where the *bleep* was my wallet?

No subway card, no cash, stranded in Hell’s Kitchen, my least favorite neighborhood in arguably the worst city in the world to lose your wallet.

I raced back to the studio like Jackie Joyner-Kersey on speed. But it was futile. The studio was deserted, not a soul around for blocks. The one window into the studio was black. I banged on the door like a crazy lady—nothing.

The next day—after filing a police report, canceling my credit and debit cards, and wanting to kick myself in the shins for being so stupid and irresponsible—I decided to venture back to the studio at the same time I knew everyone would be lining up for the day’s show *just* to see if it might do some good. *Just* to see if I could recruit some poor, unpaid and over-worked intern to go check around my seat for me.

I knocked on the door to the studio, gently at first. No response. I knocked a little harder. And harder still. Whether out of sympathy or intended brute force discipline, the door swung open.

The guy who answered first looked at me like I was naked but I didn’t care. I explained my sob story: look, guy, you have to help me. I lost my wallet yesterday, I think it fell out of my jacket at the show. Here’s my ticket stub, this was my seat, please, I’ll pay someone to go look. You’d rather get beer? No problem.

Ten minutes and ten bloodied cuticles later, the man emerged and in his hands—amen, hallelujah, is this what it feels like to be saved?—there was the booty, the little red wallet that made my life go round. Cash and everything else still inside.

“It was right under the seat,” he told me. “Apparently we need to tell the cleaning crew to do a better job next time.” ◻

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

By Jonas Moody

“Let’s get some *snakes*,” Peter sighs in the dogged heat of Paris in July.

“What on earth are we going to do with snakes?” I think to myself. I turn to Hannah, my old college roommate, with a look of utter bewilderment. She is Peter’s girlfriend and ought to be able to decipher his cryptic Austrian accent.

“He’s trying to say he wants to get some *snacks*,” Hannah whispers to me in her teacher-voice.

My friend has become fluent in *Germanlish*. Although she has lived in Paris for two years teaching English, the majority of her friends are surprisingly *not* French. From what Hannah tells me, a Parisian pal is a hard nut to crack, but she endeavors for a real connection with the French.

We attend to Peter’s stomach with hot *croissants au beurre* before taking the metro to Porte de

Clignancourt terminus and the Marché aux Puces flea market in the northern suburbs.

Three years after graduating college in the U.S., Hannah and I find ourselves in Europe—she in France, I in Iceland. We have a shared experience of living abroad: relying heavily on physical humor instead of language to win new foreign friends (I can’t tell you how many times I’ve whacked my head against a wall for a laugh); the mysterious milk that doesn’t need to be refrigerated; and people smoking everywhere—in line at the grocery store, in darkened movie theaters, in restroom stalls, etc.

But even after digesting these old-world idiosyncrasies, our *new-world-ness* remains conspicuous. I am a blatant outsider in Paris. Alone in the metro from the airport it takes three trains before I realize I have to lift the latch on the subway door to

open it. And despite the charming response I’ve prepared for people who attempt to speak French with me (*Quel dommage! Je n’ai jamais appris français* – What a pity! I never learned French), the locals don’t seem to take a shine to me.

Hannah, on the other hand, has studied their ways. She teaches me to order *café crème* instead of *café au lait*, since you get more coffee for your euro. She also opens my eyes to the super secret *carte orange* in the Paris metro, a weeklong pass intended strictly for bona-fide Parisians and not tourists. Accordingly, to get this gem it must be purchased with a passable accent, which Hannah can pull off.

On the train no one talks except for Peter, whose baritone alpine voice booms through the metro car like a Ricola commercial. He briefs us on the code of Clignancourt: “Don’t pick anything up unless it’s handed to you. Offer half of what you expect to pay. Don’t eat meat from the vendors. And above all, hold onto your wallet. The pickpockets here are world class.”

The market is a labyrinth of convoluted aisles boasting 3,000 open stalls where every imaginable knickknack is on display, new and used, authentic and ersatz, legal and illicit. From antelope antlers to Zambian zithers: eBay brought to life.

While I ferret through mounds of footwear and Peter barter for a stunning tapestry of a reclining nude rendered in shag carpet, there are eyes on Hannah. So entrenched in her search, she forgets the cardinal rule, and no sooner has she slipped her billfold into her pocket than she is beset by a blitzkrieg of flea market thieves. Seconds later, into the tides of market traffic they vanish, along with her wallet.

Later, on the train back home, Hannah heaves herself onto Peter with a sigh. With her face in her hands she recounts for us in a tiny voice the horrifying instant of a dozen hands on her person, in her pockets, underneath her shirt, and knowing there was nothing she could do but yell out, in her native English, that futile word: “Help!”

And from the crowd aboard the train they emerge: consolors coming to commiserate—patting Hannah’s knee, “*la pauvre!*” they exclaim, “the poor thing!”, lifting their brows and shaking their heads with pity. One portly man even relates a story—in English, no less—of how his wedding ring had been wrenched right off his chubby finger.

Their sympathetic glances linger and we are suddenly ensconced in a blanket of anonymous empathy from the crowd of Parisian commuters. In the warm glow of dejection and gloom, the fires of camaraderie are kindled. Apparently, *les misérables* love company. ◻

