

**CARLOS ANDRÉS GÓMEZ**

**Belief**

*Hell is REAL. Judgment Day is coming! REPENT!* the placard screams in cartoonish, fire-fonted lettering. He clutches it, rigid and unmoving, as though it is his last surviving friend. Not his best friend. But the only other one to make it this far. Or maybe it is his wife of twenty-three years, the spark long gone but the comfort of what is known calming the knots in his chest.

And I am curious about where this man goes to rest. He, dutiful spouse that he is, continuing mostly out of fear of having to figure out being anyone else. What quiet place cradles him as he closes his eyes to lie down? What summer meal makes his face light up? What song does he belt out twice and doesn't care who hears? I want to hear that song. I want to hear it bloom from his tired mouth.

I want to hear his fractured story. What has left him by himself, with me and the big-breasted Latina woman we just caught each other checking out. We made eye contact. I was defensive. Wanted, at first, to scream, *I'm not that guy, asshole! And fuck you and your dogma.* Then, I noticed how softly his eyes were soaking me in, just wanting to feel a momentary brush against his chest. Know there is still touch.

On a rainy Sunday at 9:38 p.m. on this empty C train going local to Brooklyn, none of us are ever as good as we wish we were. I am proof. So is he. We are disappointed in who we have become. But he's not trying to be good right now. He's just tired. Looking for anything to help carry him under the East River and up to the 4th floor walkup and onto a half-deflated mattress. Jesus has been asleep.

The doors open and his body twitches to move but cannot. We make eye contact again. And I know he wants to tell me something. Maybe hold out his quivering palm and smile, finally. Maybe tell me his entire shaking story, even the boring parts in between. Maybe he'll pull out the faded album of frayed pictures in his back pocket. His body is softly singing a chorus of *Save me, brother. Save me, please, oh merciful God.*