

The Dollar Line

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Chapter 1 - The Station at Dawn

The station was scarcely more than a wooden platform and a weathered shack that leaned as if it were exhausted from the weight of the world. Yet it thrummed with life. Mothers with children, boys clutching satchels, and men in threadbare jackets murmured nervously as they awaited the arrival of the Dollar Line.

I stood among them, ticket in hand, noting the quiet desperation in the air. No one smiled freely; no one relaxed. Hope here was always measured, cautious, like a bird perched on a frozen branch.

The conductor arrived with the precision of a man accustomed to routine. He was thin, upright, and had a moustache far more confident than his expression.

“One dollar,” he announced, voice clipped, yet with a hint of pride. “One ride. One chance. All passengers at their own risk.”

The crowd shuffled forward. Tickets were collected, bags stowed, and the train lurched forward.

And then I saw it.

A team of workers sprinted behind the train, lifting rails as the wheels passed and laying them in front. The track moved from behind to ahead, a frantic, impossible cycle.

Passengers whispered nervously, some laughing weakly. Logic had no place here. Only hope - tenuous, desperate, and fragile. It was a train for the poor, or “people just trying to make it day to day” as I liked to word it.

Chapter 2 - First Impressions

I sat beside a young mother holding her daughter, Rose, no more than seven. Her hand was warm against mine for a brief moment, and I realized she clung not only to her child but to the illusion of safety this train offered.

“I’ve never been so frightened,” she whispered, eyes fixed on the swaying carriage. “But it’s all I can afford.”

“Neither have I,” I admitted. “And yet... here we are. I’m sure it’ll be fine though, don’t worry too much”

Beside us sat a man named Thomas, whose hands twitched constantly. He murmured about a job in Prospect City, a factory that might finally pay enough to live. The boy next to him, barely sixteen, stared at the floor and whispered to himself, as if speaking louder might summon disaster.

The workers outside moved with a grace born of exhaustion. One young man, Eli, caught my gaze and nodded briefly. His hands trembled slightly as he carried the rails from the back of the train to the front, but his eyes were steady, determined.

“This is madness,” I thought. “And yet somehow, it works... barely”

Chapter 3 - Ten Rails and Counting

At a brief stop, I asked the conductor, “How many rails do you have?”

“Ten,” he replied, as if this simple number explained everything.

“Ten? That’s... impossible.”

“Not if you believe in determination,” he said with a faint smile. “The rest is muscle, sweat, and a touch of luck.” He said with a laugh, focusing on the small margin of tracks ahead.

The passengers exchanged glances. Hope, already precarious, now seemed to hang by a thread. Yet none spoke of abandoning the journey. Prospect City gleamed in distant posters and promises, and even the tiniest shimmer of possibility was enough to keep them seated.

I realized then that the train was more than transport; it was a measure of faith, of courage, of desperation. Who was I to judge, I was a passenger myself.

Chapter 4 - The Crew

Eli introduced me to Calder, the foreman, a man with a limp and an air of reluctant authority.

“We keep her moving,” Calder said, wiping sweat from his brow. “If we stop, they panic. If they panic... well, then we all stop. This train is held together by duct tape, and unless we bust our asses, you people wont be going anywhere anytime soon. The Dollar Line runs on non stop hard work daily, there can never be an off day.”

The other crew members were just as weary: one missing a thumb, one with a permanently bruised shoulder, one with eyes always scanning the horizon. Each bore their burdens silently, carrying rails that weighed as heavily as the passengers hopes.

I asked, “Do you ever resent them, the Dollar Line corporate entities I mean?”

Calder laughed softly, a sound like gravel. “Resentment doesn’t build tracks. But hope... that might. I’m here for the people that ride this train, that’s it. I’ve been in their spot before, without the Dollar Line all these people would have no way to get to places to make a living”

Chapter 5 - Motives and Memories

On board, I learned the stories of the passengers.

The mother with Rose was fleeing a city that had no clinics, no jobs, no future. She whispered to her daughter, "We'll be safe soon." She was moving to Prospect city to make ends meet to support her daughter and give her a better life than she had.

Thomas, the nervous man, kept rehearsing questions for an interview he might never reach. He quite often clutched his cross necklace around his neck, praying the Dollar Line would get him there safely.

The boy, quiet and pale, had a notebook filled with sketches - maps of the city, of a life he had yet to live. It wasn't one he could afford, but in his sketches he could live his wildest dreams. It would be enough to pass the days and give him pops of hope to keep going.

Even I found myself watching them, wondering how I had once thought of myself as alone. In a carriage like this, everyone carried someone else's hope along with their own. It was a moving train of people who just wanted better for themselves. I even found myself dreaming of what my life could be once we got to Prospect City, if we did.

Chapter 6 - A Near-Derailment

Rain began to fall in sheets. The tracks became slick, the rails heavy with mud. One misstep - and the train could topple.

It did not take long for disaster to nearly strike.

The carriage lurched violently. Passengers screamed. Bags flew open, spilling meager possessions across the floor. The train shuddered, swayed, and groaned.

Calder's voice called from the rear: "Hold fast! Don't panic!"

When calm returned, the conductor announced: "A minor vibration event. Please remain seated. Our tracks are still intact and we will continue to move forward to Prospect City"

No one laughed. No one left. Survival sometimes demanded faith, even when reason screamed otherwise.

Chapter 7 - The City Ahead

Through the rain, posters glimmered: *Prospect City - Ten Miles Ahead. Your Future Awaits.*

The conductor made a show of optimism. “Ten miles. A short walk for some. A lifetime for others.”

Eli muttered, “If we stop now, it’s over. Ten miles or ten thousand, it’s all the same without rails.”

As I sat in my seat looking through the cracked windows of the Dollar Line, I wondered to myself how many people came before me. How many people were out there barely hanging on. How many people were one de railment away from it all being over.

Passengers exchanged nervous looks, some gripping tickets, some gripping children, all gripping onto something they might never reach.

Hope, however flimsy, was a rail of its own.

Chapter 8 - Breaking Point

A storm of mud and wind arrived that evening. The trackmen faltered. Rails slipped. Eli collapsed, half-dragged by a fellow worker propping him up. But the workers did not stop, they dragged rails back to front, over and over. The rain, the mud, the cold gnawing at their bones. I had to commend them for this, I'm not sure in their position I could do this work daily. It was grueling, but I guess they were helping thousands move towards better lives.

The train slowed. The passengers watched in tense silence as the impossibility of the situation became apparent: ten miles from their destination, the crew could lift no more rails. They were exhausted, their strength falling by the minute and the mud making it impossible to move quickly. It was an unusual rainfall for this time of the year. Of course, I just happened to be on the train today when the skies opened.

Some wept quietly. Others cursed softly under their breath. The mother held Rose tightly, whispering, "Almost there... almost there..."

Even the conductor seemed unsure how to proceed, as he scratched his soot covered head and adjusting his hat.

Chapter 9 - The Choice

The train stopped, ten miles short of the city's shining silhouette.

The passengers and workers lifting rails were exhausted and trembling. Everyone now faced a decision: wait for a company that would send no help, or attempt the impossible themselves. The walk was ten miles through an absolute swamp of mud fields.

Eli rose first, hoisting a single rail over his shoulder. Calder looked at him and said, "Are you mad?"

Eli smiled faintly. "You and me both know the Dollar Line isn't sending any help, we've got to make this work. If they won't build a way, we will."

It started with one passenger asking if he could help, then like dominoes everyone else hopped off the train joining the fold.

One by one, passengers and crew joined outside, lifting rails, laying them ahead, and walking toward the horizon. The impossible task became shared, and for the first time, the train felt like it belonged to them.

Chapter 10 - Forward at Last

By dawn, the first piece of self-made track carried the engine forward. Cheers erupted quietly not of triumph over the company, but over their own fear and doubt. The stalled train from burned out workers was now moving, through teamwork and shared goals. They had to all push forward if anything was ever to change. No one on this train wanted to stay in their current lives and yearned for something more. Prospect City offered that, they had to make it by whatever means necessary.

The mother with Rose held her daughter high, smiling through tears. Thomas laughed, finally free of worry. The boy in the corner sketched the progress, marking each rail as if it were a victory. The rain, mud and weather now covering everyone on the train and they inched towards Prospect City.

I stood among them, realizing that progress, in the end, is not given by corporations or promises. You're not promised anything, you need to take control of your life and make something happen. The Dollar Line offered dirt cheap rides for the chance at something better and stayed on brand. Life belongs to those who refuse to remain stranded, who carry their own rails, and who walk forward together.

Eventually the train came to a stop a few feet from a gigantic wooden sign reading "Welcome to Prospect City". They had made it as a team. It didn't guarantee that all the passengers would have better lives, but at least now they had a chance.

For the first time, the Dollar Line was not merely survival - it was hope, motion, and life itself.

Authors Thoughts

Life is often a train with barely enough track laid before us. We live paycheck to paycheck, moving forward inch by inch, carrying burdens that sometimes feel heavier than we can bear.

Yet even in such precarious motion, we find courage. We lay the rails ourselves. We hold on to hope for the sake of those we love. And though the journey is uncertain, the act of moving forward-step by step, dollar by dollar-becomes its own triumph.

Sometimes survival is not about reaching the destination but about refusing to be stranded.