The others waiting to get on the train watched the boy's increasingly disruptive activity askance. Some sighed, some scowled, some ignored. He was invading people's spaces, which Bangladeshis are resigned to as an inevitability of being alive, but most New Yorkers consider tantamount to breaking and entering. But no one said anything. I was about to--because, as my partner has pointed out, I have an aversion to minding my own business--when the boy jumped from one seat to another, but his mother beat me to the punch. I do not know about The Star's policy on profanity but I shall err on the side of caution. She said: "Lorenz, get the f--- back in your seat!" She then smacked him so hard across the face that an angry welt appeared at once.

Everyone was startled, I think someone even gasped. I think that someone was me. But of course no one said a word. People went back to what they were doing as little Lorenz started bawling, his hand on his cheek.

What was heart rending was how he went up to his mother and grasped her leg and looked up at her pleadingly. She responded by saying, "Tsk! Don't even. Get off of me!" and pried his hand from her leg.

That was too much for me and I marched up to her and said, in all my self-righteous, presumptuous glory (the residue of which I still find on me from time to time) and said: "You can't hit him like that. You can't treat him like that, he's just a baby. How dare you?" Yes, folks, I said, how dare you.

She looked at me shocked, and kept silent. Her friend, also young, also Latina, put her hand on my chest and shoved once. Now, of course every one of those profligate straphangers was watching with sudden interest; their New York Daily Posts forgotten, but no one made a move to intervene.

I, now totally unsure of myself, tried to channel what my college girlfriends call ghetto Sharbari, or Sharbreena (apparently I have a touch of the , "oh no you didn't" and am known to get into physical altercations with people who displease me. I think it's a gross exaggeration, I mean there was that one minor incident back in college, well never mind) but failed miserably because I was frankly not in the same throw down shape I was in college and found myself resorting to sheer class snobbery, the mark of a coward. I said, "I realise you think by bullying me you are accomplishing something. But all you are doing is denigrating yourself." *(A note: most snoots trot out the SAT words when they are unsure of themselves. I remember I learned a word that way. Back in grad school I was critiquing someone's short story and she did not like what I said and threw the word "ontology" at me.)

The young lady looked at me like I was mentally ill and shoved me gently again-for good measure.

"Mind your f---'in business," she advised.

"I can't," I said. "Look at him, he's hurt."

We all looked at Lorenz then, who had since stopped crying--and was looking at me like I was nuts as well. I really could not keep quiet. He was just a kid and she had hit him too hard. His tear-streaked cheek was swollen. I had images in my head of his systematic abuse, his mother's drug use, etc, all the usual stereotypes

"What do you know about anything"? His mother said. "Just mind yourself."

And just like that, it happened. Boom! Wisdom. I looked at her then, I mean really looked at her and something in my head said, Sharbreena, you are so out of line. You have no right.

I said, "I am so sorry."

The two girls seemed surprised. I rushed on, "I have a son too. He drives me crazy. Sometimes I want to strangle him, and his dad works a lot....does Lorenz's dad, I mean is he around?"

His mother shook her head.

"It's always up to us isn't it? We have to take care of them."

"Shoot, that's truth," her friend said.

"I know it's hard," I said. "I know." And then I took a chance, I took Lorenz's mom's hand, and she let me. "Please forget what I said."

"It's okay," she said and smiled at me, but she looked terribly sad and suddenly very old. But she was just a child herself in many ways, though I know that is no excuse.

"Can I say something though?"

She nodded warily.

"Please don't hit him anymore. Please."

She started crying then, to my complete surprise, and I hugged her. By then, you can imagine all the useless straphangers were probably wondering when the camera crew were going come rushing out.

The train arrived and Lorenz's mom and I sat together and talked the whole thirty-minute ride. She told me, well everything, and I felt even more contrite. Her friend was still skeptical of me, however, and only grunted at me when they got off the train. Lorenz, and his mom, got off at 125th street in Harlem, and I continued to Grand Central. Before she left, she said, "I love my son. I will try really hard."

I believed her, and I still think she is trying really hard. This is an absolutely true account , though of course, I do not remember all that was said, and a resounding testament, as I said above, of how I can be an unmitigated ass but am trying really hard too.

**Ontology: a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relations of being. (Merriam-Webster, circa-1721)*

And just like that, it happened. Boom! Wisdom. I looked at her then, I mean really looked at her and something in my head said, Sharbreena, you are so out of line.