

Every Day

Every day was the same, the same 5:23 PM bus, the same people on it. I always made it with just seconds to spare, leaving me disheveled and out of breath as I boarded. I like to think it made my life more exciting, though it really had much less to do with me spicing things up than having a perpetually warped sense of time. *Three minutes before the bus comes, that's plenty of time*, I often thought, consistently failing to consider that I still had to pack up my things, make it down five stories and cross the street.

If nothing else, my continual dance at the fine line between on time and “better get your hiking shoes on because it is one long walk home” left me with a very good sense of balance. I'm not just speaking metaphorically either. Unlike me, the bus drivers were quite punctual, and I'd still be sifting through my bag at the front of the bus trying to find my pass when they'd pull away from the curb. I developed such skill at this balancing act that I am to this day convinced I could best anyone at the art of standing on a moving bus while not holding onto anything or looking at the road. Yeah, I got that good.

However, I never endeavored to spend my entire trip standing, balancing expert or not, and would eventually make my way over to my seat. And it was *my* seat; at least as much as any piece of public property can belong to an individual. Since I had started taking this route back in the fall, it was where I had sat-- that was just the way it was. Everyone had their seats. Sure, here and there certain people would get antsy and feel the need to sit across the aisle, but aside from the occasional anomaly people generally stuck to their spots. The same people, the same route, the same time, the same seats.

Now, after a while I couldn't help but get slightly curious about my fellow passengers. Only so long can a person ponder the origin of the stain in the chair adjacent or imagine images out of window smudges before eventually turning to the obvious source of entertainment that is other people.

This is not to say I talked to them-- no, this was a silent bus. Like some unwritten rule, there was no eye contact and there was certainly no talking. In a way I almost developed an appreciation for it. However stifling this environment may have been for prospects of conversation, it made up for ten fold in promoting observation. And that's exactly what I did.

For example, there was the woman in the front, always looking sharp in dress suits. She exuded confidence even while doing nothing more than staring out the window. I almost immediately decided she was in law or business. I could picture the high-rise apartment she was headed back to, complete with elegant decor and pet cat named Demeter.

Then there was the man who sat two seats away. In contrast to the woman in front he had a rather haggard look to him. This is not to say he was unkempt, he just seemed tired, like life was slowly but surely grinding him down. He would read the paper, though this seemed to only add to the crease in his brow as he flipped through the articles. I couldn't help but imagine he was the sort of person who wanted to fix the world but didn't know where to start.

Truth be told, it had not been my original intent to give my bus-mates stories, but it had happened almost spontaneously. I found I couldn't observe people without trying to give name to the things that drove them; if I didn't then I wasn't so much observing

them as I was just taking note of their actions and appearances. I like to think there's something philosophical in that, in the distinction between what a person is and what a person does.

In any case I couldn't help myself. Every day I would run to the bus, play "find that bus pass," do my dance with inertia and gravity and flop into my seat where I would continue to catalogue the passengers.

The teen in the back with the headphones? I decided he was actually quite shy behind the spiked hair and the tattoos. The man with the bike was an easygoing person; he always seemed at peace with himself. The lady with the books was great at multitasking, but she clearly loved the moment of peace the bus ride gave her. I continued until I had gone through everyone. And it was with both satisfaction and disappointment that I realized I was done.

The bus rides were less interesting for a time after that, my gaze often falling out the window for inspiration. *Hmm new graffiti-* or - *What a cute Collie!* were but a few samplings of the many and diverse things that caught my attention, giving me a moment's reprieve from the humdrum that had once again become the bus ride. I endured about a month of this before *it* happened.

Glancing back in after noting a particularly vibrant blue car outside, I happened to look towards the front of the bus. More specifically at the woman in the front of the bus. More specifically still at what she had in her hands.

She was knitting. My business woman/lawyer was knitting, and quite well at that.

Needless to say this flew in the face of the life story I had given her. Not to imply that people in law and business don't have the right to knit, perhaps many of them do, I

wouldn't know. However, I had been certain that the woman before me did not. She was not the type! And yet apparently she was.

It was really rather hard to believe that the red ball of yarn perched in the woman's lap could so rapidly destroy what I had so carefully put together. But it did. With every stitch made, I felt the comfortable familiarity with the people around me come undone.

By the time my stop came, I felt as though I had been stripped of something special. I had *known* those people, or at least had the illusion of knowing them, and then with the enlightening flick of a knitting needle they were strangers once again. This was somehow far more demoralizing than it had any right to be.

It certainly made the ride home much less enjoyable. What was there to enjoy about a silent bus ride with the same people, in the same seats, on the same route, at the same time? It had been mediocre to marginally pleasant before I had imagined up a sort of camaraderie, but after my lackluster epiphany it just seemed lonely.

Here were people that I saw every day, with their own lives and their own stories, and I would never know. They would never know either. We were all remarkably separate.

This new, far more dreary, outlook towards my mode of transport didn't do much to help my boarding on time either. I found myself cutting it closer more often than before. And by "cutting it closer" I mean those few desperate gallops and firm attention getting smacks to the bus door as it begins to pull away. Hardly an ideal way to end the day.

Progressively daunting possibilities of future lateness began to lay themselves out before me-- running after the bus in a futile attempt to make it stop, forgetting my papers as I hurried out the door, missing the bus altogether and being forced to hail a cab. None of these were particularly pleasant scenarios, especially the last one. I had never really understood how-- nor been required-- to hail my own cab and as a result, managed to develop a strange sort of phobia towards it.

It seemed a grim future indeed. And yet as it turned out, none of these misfortunes befell me. No, the misfortune that came down on my head was one so improbable it never occurred as a possibility. And why would it have? I was fantastic at bus balancing.

Of course like any other day I was rushed, and like any other day there was a game of hide and seek with my bus pass, and like any other day I made my trip down the aisle toward my seat. But I never reached it.

About halfway there I fell, not a trip or a stumble, but a full out, face-meets-floor kind of fall. It hurt. A lot. Though, as is often the case in public, my pride stung far more than my face, and I hopped back up with a sheepish smile as though I was no worse for wear. I wished I could have said the same for my papers.

Like some warped projectile they had managed to fly free of their clips and scatter themselves to rather remarkable distances. I can't say I much appreciated my paper's knack for aviation at the time-- I was far too busy focusing on the many pairs of eyes I could feel on me as I knelt back down to begin picking up the wayward sheets.

But then something beautiful happened. The silence suddenly wasn't so silent anymore.

“Are you okay!?”

“My goodness!”

“Here, I’ve got that.”

“Your face, you poor thing.”

“Let me.”

I was taken by such surprise that I hardly had the sense to say thanks as my fellow passengers converged around me. They got my papers for me; the man who read the newspaper gave me a tissue for my bloody lip. All of them, every single one of them, cared.

I laughed when I got home that day, I laughed because I cried, and I cried because people are wonderful. I couldn’t help but feel ridiculous and enlightened all at once as I sat in my apartment with my bruising face, swollen lip and a feeling of euphoria.

Every day was the same, the same 5:23 PM bus, the same people on it. It was a silent bus, and that was okay, because it was an amicable silence. I never learned the stories of my fellow passengers, or even their names, but that was fine too, because I knew who they were. I met them the day I fell.