

I Mary had never ridden a bus before, not a city bus, not a bus where you stood at a bus stop and buses came and you had to know which one to get on and where to get off. I she had once ridden a bus from Jackson, Mississippi to Denver, Colorado to see the Pope at Strawberry Park. That was the Pope before this Pope and it was a long time ago. I she was no longer Catholic, was no longer anything. I she recalled other buses taking me her back and forth to daycamp as a child and how I she had not liked daycamp, though I she had preferred it to overnight camp. At overnight camp I she cried and got my her period and made the nurse call my her parents to come get me her. There had been other buses as well, tour group buses, buses that took you from the airport parking lot to the airport. But those were shuttles. Mostly, I she had ridden shuttles. You couldn't get on the wrong one.

I she was living in a city now, a city with many buses that could take you many places you might want to go and many places you would not want to go and I she had to figure them out because I she was afraid to drive for the same reasons and some additional ones: I she did not know how to get to where I she was going or where to park once I she got there or if I she had have the right parking pass, if one was required, or whether the meters were active, if there were meters, and whether they took coins only. And I she had just discovered that campus parking was particularly fucked up because you had to back into the space instead of simply nosing in headfirst. You had to put your blinker on and stop traffic and back into the space, all without hitting the cars on either side of you or the bikes flying down the hill. I she watched as others did this, easily, with awe and horror. A lot of them appeared to be freshmen. Their tags said Illinois and Arkansas and New York.

I she was ready to give up and move back home even though I she had left everything behind in a way that would not allow for my her return: I she had dropped out of my her Ph.D. program, broken up with my her boyfriend, and moved out of my her house, leaving my her roommate in a bit of a bind. There was nothing to return to except my her mother. I she could always return to her her mother and she would be happy to have me her. I she also had a father; he lived with my her mother and I Mary loved him, too, but it wasn't the same. We they had gone out to lunch before I she had left, just to the two of us them, and he had made the waitress cry and I she was pretty sure she the waitress had quit because the manager had begun to wait on us them at some point and my her heart had cracked a little. It was small things like this that did it.

It was August, well over a hundred degrees. I she stood and then sat on the hill. It hadn't rained but my her ass felt slightly damp. I she was wearing a dress made of very thin cotton; it was like nothing. The tops of my her breasts were exposed. Why had I she worn this dress? It had been a mistake. There wasn't a bench at the bus stop I she thought I she should be at but was not sure of, only a pole in the ground with a picture of a bus on it, big windows like eyes and a lot of numbers that meant nothing to me her.

I she was in tears by the time I she called my her mother. "I have been sitting on this hill for an hour," I she said, "over an hour, and I'm about to lose it."

"Okay," she her mother said, panicked. "What can I do?"

"I'm about to freak out. I have to get home."

“ Okay, ” she her mother said. “ Let me help you. ”

“ Look up bus routes, ” I she said. “ And tell me what to do. ” She her mother was in Mississippi. I Mary was in Texas. I she did not have a phone that had internet access but a phone that could text and call only. I she waited while she her mother looked up the information. I she was pretty sure she her mother had never ridden a bus at all, not even a sightseeing bus, though I she vaguely remembered one in Paris. I she was pretty sure we they had been on a bus together in Paris, our their heads in the open air, or maybe New York. No, it was Paris, but it hadn’t been an open air one. Our their heads had not been exposed. I she had been to some places by that point. I she had decided to go to some places and had gone to them. The first time I she went overseas, I she cried in the airport because I she was scared to go so far away, to fly over an ocean, not knowing what to expect once I she got there. On the plane, I she stayed awake the entire time while the people around me her took off their shoes and slept soundly until the plane had reached its destination. Then there was Heathrow. I she did not even want to think about Heathrow.

I she did not really cry all that much but only thought about crying. I she was simply recalling the few instances in my her life in which I she had; they were all coming back to me her at once.

“ You need to take the 37, ” she her mother said. “ The 37 should drop you off a block from your house. ”

“ But they all say 37, every one of them! ”

“ They can’t all say 37, Mary, ” she her mother said.

“ Well I’m pretty sure they do. ”

“ How’d you get there this morning? ”

“ I took a cab - I already told you that! But I can’t just be taking a cab every time I need to go somewhere. ”

“ No, ” she her mother agreed, “ you can’t. That could get very expensive. ”

Cabs also made me her uncomfortable. Some of them didn’t take credit cards, only cash, and I she never carried cash. Who carried cash? And some of the cabbies were overly chatty. I she did not like that, but I she also did not like it when they were taciturn or spoke in a foreign language on the phone the whole time. I she liked it when they said a few words of greeting followed by a polite question or two, and then were silent until it was time to pay with a credit card.

The first time I she took a cab I she was twenty one years old, in Atlanta for a Phish concert. I she remembered other things about that weekend: other firsts. The boy I she was with had taken a lot of pictures and I she had not seen them in many years - perhaps I she had never seen them -

but I she could picture them just the same. There I she am is the morning after, sitting on a motel bed in my her terrycloth Abercrombie & Fitch dress.

I she kept her her mother on the phone. She her mother talked about the lunch she had gone to at my Mary's aunt's house and who had been there and what they'd eaten and who had asked about me her and what these people's children were doing even though I she already knew from Facebook. They were getting pregnant for the second and third time and buying houses in the same neighborhoods in which their parents lived. The ones who had gotten divorced had done that years ago and were already remarried. The ones who weren't married were opening restaurants or making six figures. She her mother only told me her about the girls, the women. I Mary was in graduate school again. Still. I she had boyfriends who would not become husbands.

She her mother asked if I she wanted to go to a cousin's wedding in Memphis and I Mary asked how I she would get there and whether she her mother would pay and if I she could have my her own room. Meanwhile, other buses passed. They said 1 and 17 and 43 and other numbers that were clearly not 37. I she must have missed four or five 37s at that point and they must have gotten backed up because there really had been a lot of them, a glut. And then a 37 came, and, seeing me her on the hill, slowed. I she ran down the hill and hopped on. I she showed the man my her ID, which I she had been told would allow me her to ride for free.

Swipe it there, he said, indicating where to swipe it. I she swiped it. It beeped an angry beep. Swipe it again, he said, slower this time. I she swiped it slower and it beeped a more pleasant beep and flashed green. He nodded.

I she sat in the nearest vacant seat and tried not to look around. My her mother was still on the line. I she told her I she was fine, thank you and goodbye, which was the correct thing to do. I she learned that it was rude to carry on private conversations on the bus. On the bus you looked at your phone or put on your headphones and tried not to make eye contact with anyone because they were also in a transitional space, a quiet space, and one person could throw the entire thing out of balance. Only during South by Southwest was this not the case and then the locals were pissed off and irritated and in most places you shouldn't take the bus, anyhow, because you could walk faster.

The driver made a loop where there weren't any bus stops at all, at least none that I she could discern, and continued on his way. Later I she would find out it was for day laborers, though in all my her time taking that route I she never saw a single day laborer get on or off; it was just a detour we they all accepted without question. Day laborers, I she imagined us them thinking, poor people, followed by a grudging acceptance.

Everything except the immediate few blocks around the house I she was renting from a different cousin was unfamiliar. This other cousin was working in Los Angeles and was renting her place to me Mary for cheap. All I Mary had to do was mail her her mail every few weeks and water her plants but I she had not watered the plants yet. I she had been there a week. The plants would die. The magazines I she would keep. Was I she supposed to mail every coupon and pamphlet? I she read *Rolling Stone*, *Psychology Today*, *Real Simple*, *Time*, and read

about things **I she** never would have read about. **I she** stored **my her** stuff in the guest bedroom and slept in **my her** cousin's room, the king-sized mattress absorbing the weight of **my her** body. It was the foam kind and **I she** wasn't used to it; it made **me her** sweat a lot, but the guestroom was small and made **me her** feel small and **I she** came to enjoy the sweating.

I she got off at the wrong stop, but the right street, and walked. **I she** watched the bus stop at the stop **I she** should have gotten off at. The next time **I she** would know. **I she** was thinking about **my her** boyfriend who was no longer **my her** boyfriend and how **he** wanted to move out here with **me her** but **I she** had decided **I she** needed a clean break, a fresh start. Why had **I she** decided that? **I she** would call **him** and let **him** tell **me her** how much **he** missed **me her**.

I she let **myself herself** into the house and lowered the air conditioner, turned on the TV and put a bag of popcorn in the microwave, everything humming and working and saying hello and welcome: "we're glad you've returned!" **I she** would figure this out, **I she** thought, and **I she** would. **I she** would soon be backing into parking spaces and tooling around the city. **I she** would nearly hit **a very attractive young man on a bike** and **he**'d skid and fall but would catch **himself** before hitting the pavement. **He** would be angry but no harm done. **He** would not ask for **my her** number or become the love of **my her** life, like **he** would in a good story, in a story **I she** could not write. **I she** would become a vegetarian, swim in cold springs with elderly people before everyone else woke up, hike up a pink hill in the wrong shoes. **I she** would know when things opened and closed and how to get there and where to park and what to order and **I she** would have new boyfriends **I she** would not marry. But all of this would come later and take time, and perhaps it would take **me her** longer than it would take other people but there were some who never left home, who never went anywhere at all.