**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.