

“Mr. C-----”

by

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Riding the Bus – Part I

Scientists are assholes. I say this partly because on Monday they overtook my bus, but mostly because I just think Scientists are assholes. I'd love to back that up with some empirical evidence that would blow you out of the water, but honestly I'm afraid to tangle with anything Scientology related as I believe they will then somehow trick me into becoming one of them. I don't have any more time in my life for hokey religions.

But getting back to the bus on Monday, this group of Scientist assholes boarded my bus on their way downtown to see someone speak, probably John Travolta. I assumed right away that they were Scientists because they were all carrying copies of that damn *Battlefield: Earth* novel and they didn't look like sci-fi geeks. You see, usually on Mondays I have the bus almost exclusively to myself as I don't go in to work until around 10:30 in the morning. My bus occasionally picks up one or two strays, but for the most part I enjoy the rear of the bus all to myself and spend the time getting some serious reading done.

It all started when this guy saw me trying to pull my book out of my pocket while squished between two other overly large men. He extended his hand to help me up out of my seat as he saw I was struggling with my predicament, but I refused to let some Scientist come to my aid, especially one who looked like this. He had a comb-over that looked like it came all the way from his side-burns and the kind of glasses that lead you to

believe he couldn't see six inches in front of his face without them. I myself was losing my hair, but seeing someone worse off than I was always brought me feeling of glee, so to let him get the better of me by assisting me in my moment of need was just too much. Realizing my reluctance for aid he began a new approach by engaging in an open dialogue with me. This is how they get you.

“So, are you going in to see John Travolta speak?” he asked.

No. I couldn't let this man engage me in discourse, I needed to avoid this at all costs. I coughed into my hands and spat something on the floor in between his feet. I then opened my mouth as if I was about to say something, and as he leaned in expectantly I instead hocked something really juicy halfway onto his left shoe and half on the grimy bus floor. He shuffled away from me, wiping his shoe on the leg of some unsuspecting teen probably ditching from school.

I told you Scientologists were assholes.

The Guy at the Hot Dog Stand

On Tuesday I decided to take a long lunch as it was a beautiful spring day and I wanted to enjoy the fresh air. I crawled down the market street with everyone else pretending to be at their desks and gazed into shop windows at things I never had any intention of purchasing. As the foot traffic pushed me down towards the end of the block I crossed the street to the opposite side, always afraid that some sudden surge from the crowd would push me into the scientology shop on the upcoming corner. I'd had enough of them on Monday to last a lifetime, and I was always afraid entering the shop would somehow

convert me. What if I saw something in the shop that drew my eye, something that begged for closer inspection? Then they'd have me: hook, line and sinker.

As I approach the coming intersection I became enthralled by the scent of hot dogs, wafting out from one of those outdoor vendors half a block down from the corner housing the scientology shop. Debating the possible threat of becoming a Scientologist versus the definite threat of me being unhappy without a hot dog I crossed back over and hurriedly shuffle by the shop doors, keeping my eyes to my feet as I passed by their front windows. Making it past the potential danger zone my mind instantly switched into hot dog mode as I contemplated the ramifications of a foot long on my weak stomach. As I approached the vendor I notice a well dressed man debating with the vendor over something or other, and as it seems I will not get my hot dog until this argument is finalized, I decide to join in and see if I can speed the process up any.

"I think reality television is the wave of the future, my friend" smiles the hot dog vendor, quite obviously pleased with his analysis of the reality television phenomenon. Great, this fight could go on for hours if not carefully approached.

"You might have been a visionary five or ten years ago with that statement, but television is moving on. The reality show may dominate the airwaves currently, but the next big thing is already in the works. The whole market will break and reality television will fizzle into the next big thing, and the next thing you know we'll be laughing at American Idol while watching a VH1 special on it in our thirties", said the well dressed man.

He was wearing a trench coat, and he was wearing it well. I have always thought that the business professional is the only person who can pull off the trench coat successfully. If you're not wearing a suit or something near to, you just look tacky.

“What do you mean, almost over. Reality television is here to stay, my friend” shot back the hot dog vendor, again quite comfortable in what he deemed the correct conclusion yet providing no additional evidence to back his claim.

“Nothing is here to stay. Carson Daly, the icon of MTV, is slowly being phased out as the younger and hipper are sent in to replace him. In five years we won’t even know who he is, let alone Kurt Loder”. The well-dressed man was obviously of the twenty-something generation, what I often referred to as the MTV generation although I myself had never seen the program. With this in mind I became sure that he could debate the changing atmosphere of television for hours, but this had to end now. I was now in desperate need of my hot dog.

“You’re both wrong, and you’re both right”, I began, “reality television in some ways is here to stay. The production costs on the show in comparison to the money they bring in will insure that they are with us for years to come. You just don’t get cheaper than paying one person one paycheck for an entire season’s worth of programming. All you have left are the film crew, editors, producers and anyone else behind the scenes left to pay, and those aren’t the people you read about in People magazine as making the big bucks”, I had never actually read people magazine, but I could only imagine that is what was talked about in such a rag, “But then you have this dichotomy between the professionally paid actor and the off the street potential prize winning actor. By not being a paid professional in the field, and inundating the market with multiple versions of the same concept these people are taking the jobs of the classically trained Hollywood actor, creating a new level of standard by which these Hollywood actors are judged. In order for them to get a job, they must be the best at what they do. They really have to make their mark in order to get a sit-com or drama series. They have to be that much better than the next guy, which in effect produces higher quality

television than when the market was inundated with sit-coms and everyone and their mother had a hy-larious show about how they are exceptional within the confines of the mundane. But these reality programs are just doing the same thing, by forcing love down our throats with the concept of an arranged marriage that is finally acceptable by new world standards. In truth the reality series will never die, just like sit-coms and drama will never die, nor will either stay on top. The world will move on, and sometimes back to what was before but nothing will ever dominate forever.”

Finished with my monologue, and having adequately splashed some distinguished words throughout my speech so as to make myself seem more knowledgeable on the subject, I turned to the hot dog vendor and said “one foot long please, all the fixing’s”.

Stomach be damned.

The Doctor’s Office

On Thursday I met with my doctor for my quarterly check-up. I had been diagnosed with high blood pressure and a shitty stomach the year before. I was off Caffeine, Liquor and Cigarettes, none of which I’d really quit. I had to take this medication every day in order to keep my blood pressure in check, and from time to time I used Zantac to combat my raging stomach. I got to the doctor’s office an hour early, as I always did in the hopes of getting out of there early. And, as always, my name was called some forty-five minutes after my scheduled appointment.

I followed the nurse back to the weight scale, measured my progress and saw that it was once again nowhere near what I had hoped to have lost in the last three months but at least it was progress. I took my seat in my usual room and waited another twenty minutes

before Dr. Miller entered, a pleasant looking lady who was just as likely to be younger than me than older but I was always afraid to ask.

“How have you been, Mr. C-----. I see we’ve lost some weight, but nowhere near as much as I’d hoped.”

“I’ve still been having hot dogs here and there”, I replied.

“What did we talk about regarding hot dogs, Mr. C-----? I thought we had agreed you needed to quit them, just like the Caffeine, Liquor and Cigarettes.”

I fought to hold in a snicker as she mentioned the three sins I still found myself indulging in on a semi-regular basis. How can I quit the few things that bring me any pleasure in life?

“Of course, Dr. Miller. Hot dogs will go the way of everything that makes me happy”, I replied.

“Good, good, Mr. C-----, that is very good. Well, we just have some routine tests to run today, a nurse will be taking some blood samples after we’ve meet, then I need you to fill out a couple of questionnaires about your habits at home, Mr. C-----. How have you been feeling otherwise? What have you been up to?”

“Well, I just recently bought myself a CD player. I know, I know, I’m a little behind the times. But there are all of these kids working at my office now who don’t even remember when CD’s weren’t the mainstay for distribution in the musical market. None of them seem to even remember cassette tapes. I finally decided all of these children couldn’t be wrong and that CD’s were here to stay.”

I felt quite proud of myself for taking the risk on purchasing a CD player. After all, I had only spent 25\$ on it at the local retail outlet. I had decided I would have one less soda a day for the next month to account for the expense.

“You finally decided CD’s were here to stay, eh?” asked Dr. Miller, a slight smile on her lips, “wasn’t it you who was trying to sell me your old laser disc player on your last visit?”

“I don’t see what is so funny about laser discs, Dr. Miller.” I rebutted, ”They were the wave of the future. I can’t see how they got so easily passed up in the market. And I am still selling my laser disc player, at a very reasonable price I might add, along with the entire collection of movies ever put on laser disc.”

I felt quite proud of my collection.

“I don’t know if I have room for twelve more movies in my collection, Mr. C-----.

Don’t you have to turn them over halfway through anyway? How can they not store enough information for a two hour movie on something the size of a record?”

Dr. Miller thought she was so smart. Just because she was a doctor and I had almost graduated and currently worked in sales analysis she always thought she was better than I was. I was becoming more and more upset at our discussion regarding my purchase of a laser disc player, which Dr. Miller obviously saw as a fluke on my part, and I began to bite hard into my lower lip as I became more nervous in her presence.

“What’s wrong, Mr. C-----? I haven’t upset you, have I?” asked Dr. Miller, most likely responding to the grimace I could feel growing on my face.

“Why would I be upset” I shot out, spittle falling from my lip. Regrettably, I knew I should have remained silent, as she always became apprehensive when spittle flew from my mouth, but of course I didn’t stop there, “just because you don’t understand the genius involved with the laser disc player doesn’t mean I have to put up with your cavalier attitude. I happen to be very content with my laser disc player. It is only due to unfortunate financial situations, which I do not wish to go into at this time, that I am being forced to part with

such a wonder. I'd have you know that the job market is severely depressed at current times, and that someone of my skill level is hard put to make any progress in these difficult times. After all, it's not like my mother paid for my college so I could become a doctor or anything like that."

I immediately wished I had left the end of my commentary to myself. I knew all medical students had their school paid for by their rich parents, but I also knew that none of them like to admit to it or even talk about it.

"Ever the defensive little bugger, aren't you Mr. C-----? I apologize for upsetting you in regards to your laser disc player, but as I've told you time and time again, I am still paying my school debt off some ten years after graduating and will be for close to another decade. As it stands now, I probably bring home almost exactly the same amount as you. I thought you were working out some of your anger with your therapist, you *are* still seeing Dr. Shellings, aren't you?"

She emphasized the *are* like she wasn't really going to believe my answer either way. She always talked down to me.

"Phah, head doctors. Body doctors. What do any of you know? Yes, I'll have you know I am still paying Dr. Shellings an exorbitant amount for her to only tell me I need to not be so angry all the time. I already know that. It raises my blood pressure. I guess I need to come in every time I get angry so you can confirm this for me as well, since us normal folks don't have the know how you doctors do." I realized my anger levels were a bit too high and I was making just as much of a fool of myself as I always did in front of Dr. Miller.

"Are we done here, Dr. Miller?" I mumbled.

"Yes, I think we are. The nurse will be in momentarily to draw some blood. I'll see you again in three months, Mr. C-----".

The nurse knocked on the door almost two hours later to draw my blood.

The Dream

On Friday night I had a strange dream. I was sure I wouldn't remember it past the first few minutes of waking, as most of my dreams fade in that time, but this one stuck with me. At least parts of it stuck with me, none of which I could really explain.

It started with me at an outdoor barbecue with a large tent structure next to the grills. I think it was work related, but I don't remember any of the faces of those at the barbecue. But seeing as we had had a barbecue event last summer that looked similar to the barbecue I was at in the dream I assumed it was my coworkers surrounding me. I had forgotten my smokes back at my car, which was parked up and over a hill near a housing structure that held some bathroom units inside.

After climbing the hill and retrieving my smokes, and making a pit-stop at the bathroom, I returned to find the barbecue tent decimated by a Giant Elk with huge horns. He was terrorizing those who had made it out of the tent by circling them in a wide arc, blowing huge rivulets of steam out of his nostrils. The steam trailed back around his head and swirled up and around his huge antlers, leaving a trail of smoky steam behind him.

I stepped forward and challenged the Giant Elk; yelling insults at it as I waved my cigarette about my head in an attempt to capture the same effect the steam had on his ferocious visage. I felt no fear, as this Giant Elk would not have the better of me. I noticed that part of the tent had fallen into disarray and formed what appeared to be a boxing arena, into which I leapt with reckless abandon. The Giant Elk followed my lead, entering the ring

from the opposite corner and assuming a stance on its' two back legs as we began a round of bare-knuckle boxing.

Having never bare-knuckle boxed before, I was unsure if we were really in the same league and thought briefly about calling for a timeout while the judges voted upon the legitimacy of our match, but then I was pretty sure I could take him. He jabbed to the left, which was easily blocked by a quick juke and followed with three decisive blows from my right hook, which in my opinion has always been my better fighting hand. The Giant Elk seemed shaken, but not defeated as he blew even more steam in my direction. It seemed as if his nostrils were a pair of geysers, shooting out relatively odorless steam in thirty-second intervals as his half of the ring became clouded with his clingy breath.

Feeling I had to represent my side accordingly, I took the time to light another smoke in the hopes of filling the entire ring with a haze. This proved to be an almost fatal mistake on my part, as the Giant Elk took the momentary distraction of my first puff off that wonderful cigarette as a moment to strike. Cutting to my left, the Giant Elk landed two good punches, one across my abdomen and the other across my temple. While I was temporarily stunned, the Giant Elk made the greatest mistake any showman can make as he began to work the crowd. Feeling the match essentially over, as he had bare-knuckle punched me in the temple with a hoof, the Giant Elk was not ready for my sudden assault on his kidneys. I jabbed repeatedly into his back with as much force as I could muster.

The Giant Elk soon fell to my assault form behind, not being able to withstand the mighty blows I reigned down upon his unsuspecting backside. I stood triumphant; a new smoke alight in my mouth, as those I assume were my coworkers raised me up above their shoulders.

The Head Doctor

On the following Monday I had an appointment both with Dr. Shellings and someone named Dr. Felsp, a guy who ran a sleep clinic through my hospital. Dr. Miller thought some of my agitation might stem from insomnia, which I occasionally suffered from. But my appointment with Dr. Felsp wasn't until this afternoon and my appointment with Dr. Shellings was set for 9am. I made it into her office at 8:07, but of course it was well after 9am before I actually got to sit down with Dr. Shellings. Even head doctors can't keep an accurate schedule.

I met Dr. Shellings the year before after a rather unfortunate incident in which I referred to Dr. Miller in a totally unprofessional manner. Dr. Miller, debating my sanity, asked that I begin sessions with Dr. Shellings in order to establish a healthy mental side of my person to go along with the healthy physical side she was confident would form out of our new relationship. Dr. Shellings first met with me every other week for the first six months, but we have since relegated our time together to once every six weeks or so, something the both of us are much more agreeable with.

Dr. Shellings is one of those self-made women. She has a husband, I've met him a couple of times, but she is always quick to point out *her* accomplishments in a conversation. She believes that her husband in some ways compliments her distinct nature, but was in no way responsible for forming the creature that now sat before me. She was very particular in all of her motions, you could tell she thought through all of them in advance. Actually, she most likely thought through three or four possible options and then went with the most alluring, at least the most alluring in her mind. She had this way of setting her hands out upon her knees over crossed legs that you could tell she practiced in a mirror at home.

“So I bare-knuckle boxed a Giant Elk the other night. Despite a few embarrassing mistakes on my part, I came out on top.” I began.

“I can only assume this was in a dream, Mr. C-----. How was it that you came to best this woodland creature?”

I could tell she didn’t believe me. Not that she disbelieved my bare-knuckle boxing match with a Giant Elk the other night, but that I was the one standing at the end of the fight. She believed I had some inner weakness, and that I only portrayed myself with a gruff exterior because there was really just a nervous child on the inside who was afraid of the world. Or some bullshit like that.

“He was messing with some shit that didn’t belong to him so I taught him a lesson” I replied.

“I see. Do you see any reason as to why you would be bare-knuckle boxing a Giant Elk in your dream, Mr. C-----?”

“I already told, because he was messing with some shit that didn’t belong to him,” I didn’t usually have this dirty of a mouth, but it really rubbed her the wrong way and I always tried to throw in as much foulness as I could without overdoing it. I didn’t want her to think I had a problem with foul language or anything.

“What I meant was, do you see any reason as to why it was bare-knuckle boxing that you were engaging in? Doesn’t that seem a little odd to you?”

“I think it’s pretty odd that a Giant Elk would be messing with some shit that didn’t belong to him.”

“I see, Mr. C-----. Perhaps we will start somewhere else. Has anything happened in the last few weeks to upset you? Do you have any idea what it means, you besting a Giant Elk in a bare-knuckle boxing match?” she asked.

“What, like man vs. nature or some shit like that? I guess so, yeah, it was me kicking nature’s ass. Which seems a little out of character for me, what with my being so environmentally concerned and all. I ride the bus, you know. Anyway, I don’t know why nature chose a Giant Elk as their champion, it didn’t seem like much of a challenge to me.”

“No, Mr. C-----, I don’t mean man vs. nature. At least not exactly. I see it as you always needing to conquer everything. So you don’t have to fear it anymore. Do you see what I’m getting at, Mr. C-----?”

“Not really. I don’t see how a Giant Elk represents me needing to conquer something in order to conquer my fear of it. That seems a little far flung to me.”

“Where as bare-knuckle boxing a Giant Elk is entirely within the realm of possibility for you.”

She always made me look crazier than I really was.

Riding the Bus – Part II

So I had to take the bus to work after seeing Dr. Shellings because I couldn’t afford to take the entire day off for two appointments. I ended up still having to take half a day, but this meant that I could use that other half a day to waste more time with Dr. Shellings on some future date. I hopped on the 14, but with only twenty or so odd city blocks between the clinic and my office I didn’t really have enough time to pull out a book and read. Several stops later, this attractive lady I sometimes chatted with hopped, and after giving me a brief smile she sat down at the front of the bus.

At the very next stop this whack job with one of those man bags gets on. You know, those messenger bags that all the cool guys wear around town now. He must have

been from the University as he was wearing a tan tweed coat with brown elbow patches. The only people I had ever seen wear tweed coats were professors or the guys who spent all their time fawning over professors. He also had one of those little pony tails, the kind that are totally unnecessary as the hair is barely long enough to be pulled back and forms this little ball at the base of his neck. I can already tell I won't like this guy, but he chooses to sit next to the lady instead of me in the back of the bus.

He attempts some light conversation with her. When she smiles but shakes her head in disinterest, promptly displaying the filled ring finger on her left hand, this yahoo doesn't get the idea but instead opts to change his approach. He digs into his man bag and pulls out a beaten up journal, a journal that went on sale for the first time four weeks previously at the local independent bookstore. I know this because I pre-ordered twelve of them, and mine only arrived five weeks ago promising to be the earliest release and not for sale to the general public until the following week. The only way a journal could age like that is through years of abuse or two hours of aging by a pony-tailed tweed coat wearing asshole.

So he begins to write in his journal, sticking his pencil in his mouth like he's deep in thought over the next masterpiece he will soon be writing. Have you ever tried to write on the bus? I can barely read for all the bumps and jolts, and writing is out of the question. But this guy is going to have the lady believe he is so into his work that he can withstand the mighty jerks and tugs of the city bus.

My stop approaches and as I move towards tweed jacket I loosen the lid on my coffee mug in preparation. I plan my approach perfectly, tipping into the back of his seat as the bus lurches to a stop and spilling my coffee out and onto the blank page of his journal.

"Sorry man, but at least it'll add to the mystique" I snort out as I lumber down the front steps of the bus.

The Sleep Clinic

I'm not called in until a good forty minutes after my scheduled appointment, but this time it's alright because there are about forty pages of documents I have to fill out before I can meet with Dr. Felps, who I spent the first thirty minutes calling Dr. Felsp. Apparently I received this packet of information in the mail a week ago, when my appointment was originally scheduled by Dr. Miller. It is made clear to me that I was to fill it out before coming in to see the doctor. Feeling the weight of the bullshit that is the health care system on my shoulders I grit my teeth and begin writing as quickly as I can.

I have to answer a whole slew of questions. Things like:

1. Do you Sleep on your stomach, side or back?
5. Do you do other things in your bedroom, or do you use it exclusively for sleep?
18. Do you ever remember your dreams?

I really don't see the reason for half the questions on the survey; most of it ends up being repeat information anyway. But this Dr. Felps is supposed to be an expert in the field of sleep, so I figure what the heck? Maybe he can help me out.

After finishing the surveys I am escorted into a small room where I spend another hour answering most of the same questions orally with a girl that looks to be about half my age. Eventually curiosity gets the better of me and I ask her how she is affiliated with the sleep clinic.

"Oh, I'm not associated with the sleep clinic in any way really, I'm just on a rotation and I got stuck with this clinic for six weeks. My focus is in child psychology, this is just to get my basics out of the way and to create a more well-rounded doctor out of myself."

“So you’re not a sleep expert?” I ask.

“Oh no, that would be Dr. Felps. He’ll look over my notes and be in to see you in a few minutes. Can I get you anything?”

“No, no, I’d rather just see Dr. Felps as soon as he can spare a minute from having his med-students grill me.”

“Oh, yes than” she replies, seeming to miss the point of what I’ve said to her, and exits the room.

I wait another thirty some minutes before Dr. Felps enters the room. He reads what I can only assume to be the notes taken on me for another five minutes, stands, puts his hand on the doorknob and says “Yes then, Mr. C-----. Nothing appears to be out of the ordinary with your sleeping patterns. Take this receipt with you to the front desk and the nurse there will have some insurance forms for you to fill out. Thank you for stopping by the sleep clinic.”

The nurse at the front desk gives me ten more forms.

The Guy at the Hot Dog Stand, Again

It is Thursday and yet another beautiful day. I skip out a little early for lunch once again and head down to the open market street. It is not long before my venture causes my stomach to begin to rumble, and realizing that I am once again in the vicinity of the dreaded Scientologists must also mean that I am in the vicinity of my favorite hot dog vendor. Noticing a large crowd in front of the scientology shop I opt to take the long route, as I can discern no clear path through the crowd. I retrace my steps back up the street and around the block to approach the hot dog vendor from the opposite direction.

As I step around the far corner and finally get my first glimpse of meat by-product heaven, I notice the well-dressed man approaching from the crowd of potential Scientologists. We are equa-distance to the hot dog cart and both begin an accelerated swagger towards the prize as we judge each other's convictions from across the red and white umbrella adorning the side of the cart. Obviously my desires are stronger as I have been out in the crowds for over an hour, unfortunately the well-dressed man has the advantage of youth on his side and reaches the cart some time before me. As I come within earshot of the vendor and the well-dressed man I hear they are once again discussing the merits of reality. Deciding I really can't handle putting these two in their places once again I continue on past the hot dog vendor without even glancing at his delicious offerings for the day.

Maybe I am eating to many hot dogs after all.

The Scientologists

Having proven myself victorious over the more base desires in my life, and basking in the light of this turn of events, I don't even realize where I have led myself as I become trapped in the middle of the group of Scientologists. I attempt to squeeze free, but the crowd holds me as they talk about John Travolta and L. Ron Hubbard, and I am swept into the storefront by the masses as it reopens after the lunch hour. As to why a shop would close for the lunch hour I have no idea, these Scientologists are assholes after all. Their reasons are their own.

I try to keep my perceptions locked in as I stare at my feet, but I quickly realize I have lost track of the front doorway in the ensuing melee and I must look up in order to get

my bearings and thus find a way out of this hellish trap. The second I move my vision up to eye level I am greeted by a youngish looking girl who steps forward.

“Hello, I don’t think I’ve ever seen you in here before, can I help you with anything?” she asks.

“muh...wher...I need to...” I mumble, unwilling to begin an open dialogue with my proposed enemy. I quickly dart for the exit, but she steps back in front of me.

“You look like you could use some water. Why don’t you stand right here and I’ll get you some, ok?”

Unable to see the flaw in her logic, as I am rather thirsty, I decide to wait for the promised glass of water. She takes several minutes to return, and eventually I grow bored and pick up the first book I see in front of me.

Riding the Bus – Part III

One week later, and halfway through *A Very Strange Trip* by L. Ron Hubbard, a haggard man approaches me at the bus stop and asks if I can spare a quarter. I shake my head no but instead offer him the book, holding it out open to the page I am reading. He takes the book and sits down next to me, paging through it.

“Where’d you get this?” he asks, lifting the book slightly in my direction.

“The Scientologists. You know, those guys aren’t half bad. Full of shit, but they’re not half bad.” I reply.

He rips a page out of the book and plops it down on top of the now closed book, reaching into his coat pocket and pulling out a pouch of what smells like cherry tobacco. He sees my interest, and raising one eyebrow in my direction asks “Can I roll you one, pal?”

“Nah, they’re not half bad at all.” I say as I smoke the sweetly scented tobacco and lean back against the bus stop bench.