

Bus

fiction by Marina Lazzara

The dew is rather warm considering the fog, I could find words to describe it, but instead I caress the flies on my eyelids and spread the morning newspaper across the bus station floor. I make the flies advance with caution, take chance to spare me their flights. The flapping is my stomach. I'm hungry. The joy, their back legs. It's a gamble that you're gonna reach a place that somehow renews you, and there's an aftermath that forces that feeling. Being or becoming. Coming or going. A knowledge. A trendy technology. Something exotic like a masquerade or trees.

When leaving the city, even in the grounding of the city, the first person to leave has to touch her forehead with her left thumb and decrease her rage by a few punches. Road trip games. Time tests. Final and wandering sidewalks like luck... It can be noon in the morning yet incredibly vinyl in the way that I stretch it on and over me. Fitted, sly and imaginable although so real the shape of everything, I expose myself to a dream at the same time the sky lightens up. It's five-fifteen, no seventeen in the morning, and I'm not ready to rise. I'm traveling up an escalator to a bus going North.

Redwoods.

A quick silver smell of tar comes up from the floor ventilation, and I just inhale and believe it's my nature.

I expect this ride to give me everything. The hump-top rooftops, the dirty deeds of all the fucked forces of the pigeons who at first never even belonged here. The feel of the urban air stoning me with the openness of all that outside getting ready for all those trees, trees- Almost like watching fire horizontally and melting into the building next to it and deciding to lean into something but not quite sure yet what that something is. But I expect something.

While I wait I practice fountains by first practicing my spit and then making it look as though that spit is a fountain without giving away the fact that even the fountain isn't the same kind of fountain that's made by spitting, or a reason, that is, for anyone around me to believe I know anything at all about fountains. This is relatively easy to do.

Please pass time back down now please, will ya?

In this bus station, people wander past windows, check themselves out, hold luggage. There's a window display for those who sneak a peek. Assuming we all rely on our peripheral vision in moments of extreme confusion, an illusion of being part of a bigger picture, like glass reflecting from one side of the street to the other, a theater town, a reflection of myself folds into reflections that fold, of course, into other reflections. A work day for these drivers.

Yet a window scene for seasonal change is only a display that squares off dull psychology. No matter how often anyone walks past the bus station's window, they still seem old-fashioned, dull, a swollen look of boredom in their eyes. Even gadgets don't make anyone seem more modern, more progressed, more user friendly. Even the slick phones, briefcases, laptops, pagers. None of these things make anyone more accessible. Water trickles down glass. Window sweeps. Obscene, old victories snooze in the station's boughs. The hunter knows the deer has enough blood in its brain to dye its own hide after dying. There are no traces of wounds or pranced tracks here.

Ah. On board. Incurable, the way the seat spreads down the back. There's junky breath in the rear lighting the mildew of the transient porta-pottie, and the jet blue ammonia smell behind our ears is bigger than my fountain, a year-long spout in the rain. The world is becoming 3-D anyway so why bother with how incredibly perfect one can spit their water from one side of the bus to the other like a fountain. But I'm gonna practice this and time the streetlights to my spits, yet nothing's gonna make the lights turn any faster, or any greener for that matter except a woman's joke about the bus driver and his hat, on fire like it often almost is whenever he shifts at the fuller intersections. When the cars pass I imagine burnt sienna rain drifting over the outside window of my room, so full of light when the dark hits the wetness of the glass like shapes & phrases.

Dim grey-green glow coming up from the bottom right side of my seat.

I begin to master the fountain on board by not using my hands to help push the water from the back of my neck. Only by tilting back my neck could I perform the needed arch after drinking the water down, leaving half of it deep but not past my Adam's Apple. It has to do with the tongue extending the same motion outward as my neck would want to do if it was longer. My hands, for once, were idle at my sides and to keep me from losing control, I'd often set them in my pockets, safe there from wanting to help as always in some tightly maternal manne. "You really should give yourself a break from that

phone, "I say passing the Man on my way to the bathroom. "I read they're finding cysts the shape of cell phones in the ears of heavy users." "Really?" he says dialing. "Don't you have to practice spitting or something?" "Well," I say as I walk on. "I do have to pee. That's like spitting."

Child with a Play Station, all night long
Child with a Play Station, keeps playin' that song
Keeps playin' that song
Isn't there an old saying about how it takes an entire corporation to raise one child? Or is that tribe? An entire corporation to raise one tribe?

It has to do with timing. A point at which things begin to click. I gotta time my transport down the hill and see now as this moment of riding. How important is having anything if you begin to believe it makes you live better?

Today was a dry day. A man and a muzzled dog came on after the bus driver took a vote so they could come aboard. As long as he kept the muzzle on the dog was the basic idea. The man agreed the dog didn't know how to bark. The dog, he said, was deaf and that was why he stomps his right foot twice on the ground when he wants his attention. We thought that was something we'd keep an eye on. How loud exactly, we asked, is the stomp? (Was it louder than a phone ring A Play Station? Was it louder than the laptop booting up?) The man said he was never one to wait and bargain. He would take his chance on a more compassionate busload. We had to take his word that the stomp wasn't very loud or tell him to leave right then. And we did. They did. He left right there and then. The dog never made it up the steps. The bus driver waited anxiously near their luggage with the open luggage door. We gave him the signal. The man and his dog walked away. As he went back to the driver, he forgot to shut the luggage door. I noticed it right away. Didn't say a word. I wanted to see some baggage fly.

The message comes and it's simple. He just says Fuck and I pull my ankles in from the aisle to get out of the way. He's walking to the bathroom pushing a pointed stick into his palm. The draft down my legs is incredibly reminiscent of the bus station itself. It's another fixture but the same light and we keep rolling along. The man with the voice behind me tires earlier tonight. The battery dying, he talks louder with each syllable and for a



Mimna Eloranta

moment, looking through his window, he is alone. But I hear his knees knocking on my seat. It's not quite dark so I don't think it's time to sleep. Nothing behind my eyes treats me to visions, and so at this point in the trip my ideas are tiny sonnets to the ceiling, dusty lime-green and peeling orange paint exposed in the corners near the window seams.

Where cell phone conversations are background noise, my yawn is attention. Deep in the heart of the motor, a sound grows consistent. The mousey sly of the engine alarms itself only at the sight of future street lights, but in the meantime, while moving close out of dark morning, it can be quieter than its daylight noise. But I'm overcome by closure, or lack of stretch-space and natural noise so that suddenly without warning, my mouth opens out a yawn that turns every head in front of me to look for me, the sounder of that sound, and everyone behind me to stretch their necks upward for me, the face of that sounder, and with slight shakes of their heads, my fellow passengers drop, tired and contagiously disgusted, to their neck tilted, head-dropped, sleepy postures.

Meanwhile, I don't allow the man behind me to put his feet too far up my ass as I sit there in front of him pretending to sleep, pretending to push sleep weight back in his direction. It's okay really, he's just being superstitious. If his phone rings, his legs stay stretched to accommodate his pocket size. He tells his next caller about his fashion future vision. How fashion will be designed to hold personal communication devices, cell phones, palm pals, slips of velcro, a dot com uniform. I think how that's already being done when he says,

“Oh, it’s already being done?” In the illusion of the conversation, he really could be talking to me. By the time he hangs up, I know so much about him: his dislike for seafood, his lack of social life, his mother’s maiden name, his itinerary of meetings for the upcoming week.

Brakes like a quake rumble and shake. A sense of insecurity flows through me. I don’t have enough to do.

In a world of beeps and buttons, fountains are unique, utterly ultimate.

I start moving around to empty seats. A change of perspective is always good for the depressed. Change inspires growth. Growth provides some bloom. When I find someone who’ll talk to me, the first question is often the same: What do you do? Now does this mean what do I do each day, what do I do for a living, what are my future goals, how do I spend my time? I automatically answer this question at first with “Write poetry”. There’s often a giggle, a browraised smile, and a further explanation of “No, really, I mean for money?” Gradually, as the question stays the same, I begin to answer with “I breathe.”

At one point, I fantasize about stealing his phone. This comes to me after we pass through a small town with a bank that displays a sign reading “Celebrate Convenience.” Inside this bank is also a dry cleaners, a post office and a coffee shop. The phone man likes this. Thinks it makes the world a *better* place.

We begin to reach my destination. It feels almost impossible that I’ll feel differently once I smell that smell, that open ended, somehow hollowy freshness that comes when fewer buildings surround you. A smell reminiscent of mornings before all the years of nicotine and cars. A smell that works the mind as much as the body. But still in this bus are the bus smells. The false air, the mingling body odors, the smells of time passing while space sections out as a long vibrating line the windows frame. I’m on the last lap like the horse races, a moment that rushes for some but for me, I would rather the horse and his rider be taken over by gravity and fall in that last turn while other horses jump spontaneously, or trip like drunk cross-country skiers whose large leggings get snagged up with each other. That last lap when the four muscled knees of the horses seem to vibrate in midair. One horse falls to the side but never to the ground. In the illusion through dust, the bystanders see the running horse ride the air directly above the tracks, halfway on its side, when the left ear flaps down and sweeps the land. The precision of ride the expert jockeys take and the rugged trained strength of the horse’s body, add in the power of motion and speed, spice it with time, and

rarely do they fall. Gravity is overcome. The audience faints upward and almost silences. Smells are not a gamble. It is what you smell. Time is a gamble. It never smells.

At this point, I’m bored. That last lap, as I’ve said, bores me. The phone man becomes more obnoxious with my boredom, or else is catching up before he departs. The calls persist, speed up, take more time to complete. This man can’t be alone with his thoughts, invades my thinking. That phone will be mine to burn, I declare to myself. That phone will be mine.

I practice my fountain a few times arching over my extended legs and aim for the now empty seats across the aisle. This is my last chance to practice so I change my direction and calculate how to distract him. I succeed in annoying him, spray his laptop cover with my work, feel moments of boredom bliss, watch him turn off the phone in frustration and position his body on the seat to ward off my flowing charms. My fountains spray and flame like burning water fires and the busload, as if watching a yawn, focus on our display. He is wet and insane with my habit but eventually I run out of water. He laughs so hard he unknowingly drops his phone at my feet. I kick it toward me, reach down to pick up something I never dropped. Shove it into my bag.

The bus driver’s monotonous voice informs us we’ve reached there. Someplace different at least than where we were. Phone man grabs his briefcase from above his head, leaves the bus in laughter.

I take my bag from beneath the bus, grateful that it never flew out miles back. Walking toward the lushness of green, the path of my sanity, I stop to gather my thoughts and view the treetop arches in their place.

Like the feel of the feet after rollerskating for hours, the hum of his voice stays with my ears. The afterthought of a beehive alive in my brain. His thoughts stay with me so I try forcing it out by singing out loud when from my bag a ring echoes, a dysfunctional bird out of its nature here. I answer and it’s him talking on, but this time directly to me. “Give back the...” and I’m spooked, spooked by the continuation of our spaces still colliding, and like a bad horror flick I again like a child hide my ears in the heat of my palms and slam the phone receiver back into its body. This time there is no strategy, no bets to make or gambles to digest. I just dig a hole next to a Sequoia where looking up brings rays of dark branches into thin snowflake shapes on the light blue sky. I dig and the ringing rings. I bury it and there is still ringing. I walk into the green deepness, get small while the trees stretch up. I am tiny when the ringing finally stops. ●

Intersection Theater

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Photos: Chris Carlsson and Michelle Cheikin

