

I lifted everything in my life onto the first step. It all knocked together and I worried about the picture of my mother and father, the one where she's smiling up at him and the palm trees behind and the disease hasn't taken her yet and his shirt says beer put me where I am today.

Was that your first time on the three?

Did you miss your usual bus that day?

Were you aware busses even ran through these neighborhoods, street lights busted and forgotten and the only escape from the dark coming from a living room lamp here or there or the headlights of the bus cutting through and illuminating what they could?

It's just that I had never seen you on the three before and I'm sorry I didn't say hello. I was having a day. That was thirteen years ago and I wonder if you still think about it. I do.

I remember you. You sat towards the back and to the left and you weren't reading the newspaper or a book and you weren't listening to music. Do you remember how quiet it was? I knew you were there, thought maybe you really wanted to be sitting in the back in the U-shaped seat, thought maybe you usually sat back there on your normal bus when nobody else was and maybe it made you feel like being at home and maybe you listened to music and allowed yourself to dance a little in your seat.

I'm sorry I didn't say hello. I was having a day.

Do you remember the feeling of being in a bubble, one we couldn't see out of because the lights overhead burned foreign and sterile and we were forced to see our reflections? Somedays I don't want to see myself, but that night I smiled at my mother's nose looking back at me in the window, my father's kind eyes, the scar beneath my lip that I made when I was young and curious about the view from the top of the tree in my neighborhood. I'll never forget what it looked like beneath me and the cheers from the neighborhood kids and how the fall was more painful than I had considered.

Somedays I think about what you thought that day, what you saw. Everything I had was in one bag and I struggled it onto the bus. I wore a long wool coat and when I sat down just behind the driver a few rows back you must have seen the grass dry and stuck to me, outlining me, the evidence of maybe an afternoon spent lying in the park just beyond the tree line. I had my face covered by a scarf that I knitted myself and when I wore it I felt safe and accomplished. You never saw my face, right?

When I showed my bus pass?

When I struggled to get my bag to the safety of the seat cushion? When I pulled the bottle of orange Fanta from my bag of everything and emptied it in one breath?

Somedays I think about what you thought that day,
what you saw.

Did you think me homeless? Jobless? An addict? A crazy? Maybe I've been all of those things in some way, but that day you saw a woman who felt okay and felt the sun shining more brightly and felt the almost winter breeze blow on her in a way she didn't fight. She went to work after waking up early to make coffee and eggs. She went to work and she didn't feel the urge to quit in an explosive manic episode that would have ended with the abandonment of everything she had and a train ticket headed west or east or north or anywhere but the place of boredom and routine and unrealized talent. She smiled through her decent paying job that day. She called a friend on her lunch break. She finished her shift and lit a cigarette and walked to the park and laid flat in the grass on her back just beyond the tree line.

She hadn't used in three months.

She felt okay and she was headed home to her adequately sized apartment to eat an adequately prepared meal and to fall asleep at an adequate time because she had decided that sleep was important and that she'd try a normal schedule. This is fine, she thought.

You saw a woman who couldn't look away from the front of the bus, the headlights illuminating everything it could. Beyond that, darkness.

You need to know that we shared that brief bus ride on a Tuesday before the cold settled in for a few months. You need to know that I think about it often and about how much beauty there is in okay, in you made it through, in this is fine. I'm sorry I didn't say hello. I was having a day.