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## Bus Twins

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### **Abstract**

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"I was sitting by the window staring through the fogged and dirty glass when the bus came to a halt. It was dark and I hadn't paid attention to who had boarded until he was halfway down the aisle. I realized he was headed for the eat next to mine. His hair was short, his coat long and a few sizes too big for him."

### **Cover Page Footnote**

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# Bus Twins

By Pamela Rubens

I was sitting by the window staring through the fogged and dirty glass when the bus came to a halt. It was dark and I hadn't paid attention to who had boarded until he was halfway down the aisle. I realized he was headed for the seat next to mine. His hair was short, his coat long and a few sizes too big for him.

He sat down.

"What took you so long?" he asked.

I was startled for an instant, until I realized he wasn't talking about me, but about the bus.

"I didn't know we were running late," I said.

He was staring at me.

"What's your name?" he asked.

I told him. My voice was a whisper.

"What is it?"

I said my name again.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"I'm twenty," I said.

"I'm seventeen," he said. "My name is Lester."

He put out his hand and, hesitantly, I shook it. His hand felt soft and pudgy, like a baby's.

He got up and went to the bathroom in the back of the bus.

Suddenly I knew where he was from. There was a small mental hospital back a little ways and I was sure that's where the bus had stopped.

I suddenly felt very warm in my winter jacket.

"I had to take my medicine," he said, as he sat down.

For the first time I looked at his face. As he spoke, he seemed to focus his eyes not on me, but on something to the side of me, as if he was blind. But I remembered he had put his laundry bag of belongings on the shelf above with no difficulty, and had found the empty seat next to me with equal ease. Still, the vague look in his eyes made me uneasy.

"You're pretty," he said to me. "Do you have a boyfriend?"

I was glad that it was dark so he couldn't see the smile crossing my face.

"Yes," I lied.

"Well, I guess I can't be yours then," he said.

"Do you know what time it is?" he asked.

"No, I don't," I said.

He reached across me and turned on the overhead light.

He was staring at his wrist, but he wasn't wearing a watch. I noticed a birthmark on his hand shaped like a half-moon. He was staring at it.

"It's two minutes after nine," he said.

I asked him how he knew that.

"The mark on my hand," he said slowly. "When it changes color, I can tell what time it is."

I turned my head, looking out the window into the night.

"My mother took me to the circus," he said.

"Did she?"

"Yeah, you should see what I got,"

Before I could say anything he stood up and reached for the sack above us. After a few minutes of groping inside it he pulled a small toy from the bag.

"It's a sword," he said.

I stared at it for a second or two in silence. It was cheap and gaudy, made of plastic. I wanted to cry. He was so excited about it.

I looked out the window again.

"Are you tired?" he asked me.

"Yes," I said.

He put his hand on my leg.

"Don't worry," he said, patting my knee, "we'll be home soon."

He removed his hand from my knee and took my hand. I quickly pulled it away.

He leaned his head back on the seat.

"I guess you have a boyfriend."

He began to hum. I was annoyed, and worried that the other passengers might turn around and look at us.

He began to sing. "You ain't nothin' hut a hound dog, cryin' all the time."

"Do you like Elvis?" he asked.

"No," I said.

He stopped singing.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

I told him the name of the city.

"Yeah, but where?" he asked.

"In a house," I said.

"I live on West Hill," he said. "Where's your house?"

I thought quickly.

"By the airport," I said. It was close enough.

"How are you getting home from the bus sta-

tion?"

"I have to call somebody when I get in."

"Well," he replied, "if you don't have anywhere to go, you can come to my house. My mother won't mind. We even have a couch you can sleep on."

"Thanks," I said, "but it's okay."

He looked disappointed.

The bus pulled into the station at ten o'clock.

I hoped that Lester wouldn't follow me as I got off the bus, but he grabbed his sack and got off before me. When I stepped down and looked around, he was gone, finally gone, and suddenly, I missed him. I felt there was something more I could have, should have said to him.

I searched for my suitcase, found it, and headed for the door, warmth, and the nearest phone.

He was gone, and I hadn't even said good-bye.

three weeks

broken down into five-hundred

phone calls

uh. . . well. . . hmmmm. . .

Bye

—Nancy Cuminale