

# Early Morning Intrusion

by Erika Byrne-Ludwig

The bus is a living thing. Its engine its heart, its body our shelter, its driver the hands that take us to our destination. We cling to the bars in the aisles where scents mix and bodies touch, where young couples with knotted fingers, eyes in eyes, tell us that life is beautiful, where older ones tell us that life is hard. Old and young, various cultures, languages, fashions, professions, different sizes and shapes. A small microcosm of the world.

Roads all lead somewhere. So many work or study places to reach. Once off, everyone walks away, knowing exactly where to go, and how to get there. All spread out like a handful of beads thrown in the air. They're unknown to each other, unlike a flock of birds that fly off and stay at close distance from one another before alighting on a branch for rest, wing against wing. So much diversity in this world, in this vast city. A diversity that seems to work, even if it clashes from time to time. The staccato rhythm of the bus prevents me from dozing off.

I meet people in buses and look at their eyes. Gloomy, sleepy, dreamy, cheerful. My own must exhibit remnants of my last dream. Eyes are attractive marbles that you can't touch like hands. They're in their wells and stare at you. Have two people ever made eye contact, standing in the aisles, and ended up in a lasting relationship, I wonder. When I'm in a bus I let myself stray like an animal, wander away from my own life, follow leisurely some passive adventure, both eyes and mind trespassing on other lives. It's early in the morning when everyone is still waking up, and there is a feeling of night not being quite over, of day slowly beginning.

I finally find myself a seat. Happy to have a hard backing that doesn't sway and doesn't sweat against me. Facing me is a couple in their forties. Mismatched is my first impression of them. I meet his

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eyes first. He shifts them and lets them hover around like some fly, undecided whether and where it should land. His tongue flicks out of his pulpy, wet, lower lip, like a lizard's does. His head is massive, his forehead bulging, his body a crudely chiselled boulder. Stretching his legs, he starts ogling me directly with an overconfident look, a belief in being irresistible. I keep my shoes under the seat like two mice hiding in fear. My knees were covered from the start.

I glance at his partner. A small, pale woman. A slender plant lacking some special care. Her head rests against the window like a faded flower in a vase, drooping. A dark shadow around her eye. A purple, red and yellow bruise on her neck. Her scarf partly hides it. A mark, like a big spider, on the back of her hand. She rests. The page of her life is torn. I'd like to read the full scenario, the entire drama, the brutal reality.

He continues to flick his tongue. A smile, a low whistle, seeking attention from me. He ignores the chill my eyes reflect, defies my anger. He likes to set invisible traps and catch prey. Confined in a bus limits his freedom. His straitjacket is on. I imagine his big hands on her, when free, pressing hard, twisting, pulling, punching. And she pleading with him with the eyes of a hurt doe. The palette of colours is regularly revived, I'm sure, and the slender plant tortured.

She's resting against the window. Motionless. Tired of his hunting games, he turns to her, talks, steals a bit of her rest. She throws short replies at him sideways. His voice is low and threatening, his breathing heavy. Her responses slow and brief. Now he is grabbing her wrist and twisting it forcefully. I feel a protest coming up but it remains inside me. She moans, pulls her wrist out of his callous hands. My eyes again pierce his with anger. He lets her go and looks through me. I keep on watching him. It's so easy to loath someone like him. I want my feelings to run through all his veins, flow like a river through him, show him the type of character he is.

Her eyes are now open, looking into the outside world's eyes. Gentler glances. Softer hands. A greener world. I have silent questions. My step into someone else's life is slowly becoming a sad walk. At the next corner the bus will stop and I'll get off. The shadow of her face in my eyes will hurt me for a while.

By pulling the cord, I close the small window into which I had glimpsed. I'll step off the bus and distance myself from their lives. My trip was short. The couple stand up too. He behind me like a brick wall. She behind the brick wall. A draft in my neck plays with my hair, tickles me. His jerky breathing. I walk to the front steps to get off. A hand pushes me. I trip. Lightning flash. I turn round. It's him. He flicks his tongue, grins. I raise my hand. My eyes are fiery. They harpoon his. My lips take over. They get ready. I have to wet them first, oil them. Ready now. No hesitation. The words come out. Well-formed. Loud and clear. With the right intonation. Filled with distaste.

"You bastard!!!".

