

Good intentions, and all that.

by Kristen Tsetsi

The pushing made it hard for her to breathe. Chests and arms pressed into her back and sides, and her own chest flattened too intimately against the back of a girl with red braids hanging down from a military-green cap. All the jostling had her breasts sliding side to side across the girl's back, and a sudden forward thrust of the bodies from behind pressed her closer still. She wanted to apologize--or something--but the red-haired girl didn't seem to notice.

Getting on the bus--and the train, and the Strassenbahn--was often like this in Germany, she'd learned. In the two weeks she'd been staying with Jurgen, she discovered there was no "personal space" or "waiting in line" - not when it came to public transportation. Everyone wanted to get on, wanted a seat, wanted to be first so they wouldn't have to stand. Syl didn't get what the big deal was about standing, but it seemed to mean something here. And if you wanted to get on before the seats were taken, you had to push and nudge your way through all of the pushers and nudgers with the same rudeness, the same pointy elbows and strong shoulders.

"Go, go!" he said. She felt his flat palm against her back and her chest smashed into the--no, not the red-haired girl, anymore, but someone new. A tall blond in a black coat. He turned--angry-faced, at first, but then he saw her. He smiled, and then he forced his way through the crowded, open door and up the stairs. Someone took his place in front of Syl, so she didn't manage to get any closer to the stairs, but she could still see him. He pressed on past the bus driver along with the others. He didn't show a pass or drop money in the tray. Nor did the one who pushed through after him. Or the girl after

that.

The bus driver waved his arms and shouted a lot of words Syl didn't understand, but there seemed to be nothing he could do. There were too many of them.

"Sylwia, you must go. Come! Now!" His hand on her back, shoving.

"Okay. Jurgen--stop. Okay? I'm going. Jesus." *Sylwia*.

There was something in the pressure and the urgency that made her smile, and then laugh. It was like carrying heavy furniture when someone made a joke--the effectiveness of the joke seemed directly proportional to the weight of the furniture. What was it about that?

"Almost!" Jurgen said. "*Warum lachst du?* Up," he said. "Up! You can go!"

Syl squeezed through the door with two others and let them go first so Jurgen would be right behind her. The pressure behind them kept them moving steadily forward. They inched past the driver and Syl looked at the empty, black tray where her money was supposed to go. She glanced back at Jurgen, and he, too, looked at the tray, and then over her head. "We go." He pointed. "There." She looked at the bus driver as they passed and checked her pockets to make sure they were zipped.

So many people.

There was only one seat, and Jurgen let her have it. For another minute, or so, after she sat down, Syl watched more and more passengers--most of them her age or younger, students--ignore the bus driver and his empty money tray. She had never not paid. The door closed and the bus moved. Jurgen stumbled and fell into Syl. They kissed.

"I come right back," he said. He pulled his wallet from his coat pocket.

She said, "Where are you going?"

He jerked his head toward the front of the bus.

"Will we get in trouble for not paying?"

He shrugged.

She watched him weave down the aisle, tight with riders hanging loosely onto the poles, until all she could see was the top of his head at the front of the bus. She chewed the inside of her cheek. She checked her own pocket to make sure she still had everything: phone, money, ID. She twisted in her seat to look for the blond and found him standing in the back with a group of friends. He was the tallest. They laughed about something.

"Hey."

Jurgen, beside her again. He handed her a punched ticket.

"Thank you," she said. She asked again, "Would we have gotten in trouble?"

Again, he shrugged. "I want to pay," he said.

She said, "That's so sweet." She smiled until it felt okay to look away. *Pussy*, she thought. It wasn't a word in her regular vocabulary, and she wanted to admire him for what he did. Part of her did, she supposed. Brown and yellow fields blurred past the window and Jurgen's thigh nudged her arm with the rhythm of the bouncing bus. *Pussy, pussy, pussy.*

