

# Journey

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She looked out the window. It was raining. "Better than snow" she told herself. She didn't mind traveling. It was good to travel once in a while. By road, when someone else was driving. Like now, on the bus back home. It gave you time to reflect, read a book and watch the world go by.

She did have a lot to reflect on. A new start, a new beginning awaited her. She was finally starting on her new career. She would have expected to be sad about what she left behind, but she really wasn't. Besides, she hadn't really loved the man. Not even when she tried convincing him that she did. It was the challenge of it, she realized now, with the benefit of hindsight. She thought of the bet she had won with him, when she first got to know him. The poor guy didn't know she only made bets she knew she would win. He had to treat her to coffee as part of the bargain. She smiled when she thought of it. ST sat there, looking awkward as he tried to make small talk. He was smart, and easily one of the better looking guys in her class. But he didn't make friends easily.

She tried to remember why she insisted on calling him ST, it didn't matter. She always gave meaningless nicknames to her friends, and somehow the names stuck. She had intended to forget about ST after that coffee after having decided he wasn't interesting enough. And then he surprised her. As he was bidding her adieu, he smiled and said 'Happy New Year and good luck on your exams' like he wouldn't be seeing her in class the following Monday. She had smiled evenly and wished him back, and walked back to her apartment annoyed that ST thought he could dismiss her that way. She refused to be slotted, and almost always stung back with a surprise whenever someone tried to categorize her. Or dismiss her.

He didn't see what was coming, of course. In just a matter of days,

she had clawed her way into his life and become his friend. He was nice enough, and she enjoyed the challenge of making him trust her enough to let his guard down.

The rain was slowing down. There was no one sitting on the seat beside her, and she turned, leaning against the window and resting her legs on the other seat. She really did like traveling; she decided when one of her favorite songs started playing on her iPod. It never failed to surprise her that some songs had the ability to take you back to a specific time and place in memory, every single time. A beautiful movie, a carefree laugh with a friend or a first kiss.

Her smile faded as she thought of that first kiss. It was nothing like what she expected. She had expected all thought would cease and she would be sucked up into the moment. She wasn't. She sighed as she remembered the disappointment. As she looked out the window, she wished the ride could go on for longer. The view of the countryside was beautiful, she was listening to music, and was comfortable. What more could she possibly want? Clichéd as it sounded, the journey was more enjoyable than the thought of the destination. She wasn't sure if she was ready for what awaited yet. She was always the first to admit she never knew what it was that she wanted. But she always knew when she didn't want something, right away. And she had known ST was not the one for her right then. It was only a matter of time before he had to be told. So she waited until she could get away. She didn't like to stay behind and watch the mess.

*It seems very selfish of me, she thought to herself, and possibly unfair to ST.* But she liked to think she had helped him in her own way. He seemed to make friends a little more easily now. She shrugged away the guilt; ST was an adult and would just deal with it.

It felt so good not have invisible threads of expectations around her

wrist. *So this is what it feels like to be 'unencumbered'.* The word had always seemed dirty. But now she realized it simply meant she was free. *Free*, she said aloud as she enjoyed the taste of it. She looked out the window again. The rain drops were standing still on the window. It had stopped raining. She watched, as a drop started rolling down when the bus jerked to a stop. It joined another drop that was also making its way down slowly, and they combined forces as they picked up speed down the window. Beautiful. Life is full of simple pleasures, she told herself as she hauled her bag down. And she was having a fresh start.

