

Bus Ride

by Shelagh Power-Chopra

Pretty boy's dolling up again. I sit behind him on the bus, watching him the entire ride, sliding his yellow comb through his velvety bangs, his long legs propped up on the vinyl seat. Brett's in the middle—a chubby kid, loose aviators, kicking back on his duck taped seat. He plays Journey real loud, his silver boombox vibrating on the rubber floor. Bob drives the bus, steady slow like he's in a trance, Cal says he's stoned, smells it on him when he boards. Bob's a tiny old man—a squiggly line behind the wheel. He wears pristine white t-shirts, has no hair, a low light beard like an elf hanging onto his chin. He lives behind the cranberry bog, lives in a dark Ranch with a stupid dog. Every winter after it freezes up, we kids go skating there—Bob watches us from the window, wagging his finger, chastising us through the cold. A singer in a smoky room, the smell of wine and cheap perfume. I drank wine once with an tenth grader, a boy with loose curls and slippery gums. He stole it from his mother's car, it was dark and smoky, Sherrrrry! he said like a little boy ratting on his sister. We got pretty drunk and I woke up in his dark gold basement, his doughy head under my arm. Pete's running down the aisle with a plastic butter knife, smiling at the girls, Sarah, be my bloody valentine! My bloody valentine! He grabs her, turns her around in his elbow, holds the knife to her throat and he shrieks a wallop, dirty cry. Bob stop the brakes real short and screams at Pete, sit down, you idiot! Pete is pale, he lets Sarah go. Sarah blushes, reels back in her seat, she's a mermaid now, legs all fish. Pretty boy looks over at me and grins, got a smoke? he asks. He and the homecoming queen broke up last summer, and it was like he lost an arm. Sometimes I see him on the school track doing figure 8s in the sand with his dirt bike. His eyes get small from the sun glaring through the windows—like an old drunk squinting up at the world, draining all his cuteness for a quick minute. I give him a Marlboro red, it's bent and stale but he takes it anyway. Brett changes the music: ...An' I'll run in the rain 'til I'm breathless, When I'm

breathless I'll run 'til I drop, hey! It's Shane's favorite, Brett knows this but she's gone, left the island, moved ashore. Brett shouts out, I wanna go swimming, I wanna swim ashore, get the fuck outta here! and we all laugh—it's cold out there, the tourists gone, the dingies tied up and Bob slams the breaks again, flips open the door, go for it, you idiot! And Brett looks at us all wild eyed and scared, the song's going crazy now, Robert Plant moans inside whistles and calypso drums and Brett runs out, breaks the shore with his dirty boots and overalls and flops down, the water easing softly round his down coat. We watch him, watch the seagulls cry nearby, watch the ocean, the wide open sea where the whales once roamed and we all sigh at the expanse of it all, knowing we're stuck. We're stuck.

