

**REFLECTIONS, BUSES, DREAMS AND
WINDOWS**

by

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REFLECTIONS, BUSES, DREAMS AND WINDOWS

I spend too much of my life waiting for time to pass.

I spend the week waiting for the weekend to come. I spend the days waiting for the night, so that I can lose myself in dreams; I love to dream. I wake up in the middle of the night, and I find myself looking at the clock, and I can't fall asleep again so I lie there with my eyes closed, counting down the hours until dawn. And then I wake up on Monday morning, and it all begins again. Isn't everybody's life like that?

It's the routine, always the routine. It makes me feel safe, makes things feel manageable. Get out of bed, have a shower, eat breakfast. Put on my jewellery and makeup, wrap myself up against the cold, and catch two buses to work. Spend all day staring at a computer screen, broken up only by eating at appointed times and occasional cups of tea, and a lunchtime workout at the gym. Then two buses back home, maybe a little shopping, a little housework, yet another shower and dinner and something to watch on TV, and then back to bed, and then...it's not that I hate it. It's not that I feel trapped. It just amazes me that our lives are so regimented, so determined by what we're expected to do when. Everything's divided up into segments. Well it has to be, doesn't it? Otherwise, all would be chaos.

Sometimes I'll wake up in the middle of the night, and instead of lying there with my eyes squeezed shut or staring at the ceiling, I'll get up, turn the light, read a book. I always sleep better afterwards, knowing that it's something I can do just for the sake of it. Or I'll eat a meal at a different time, decide not to do the shopping that day, neglect the housework and take myself for a walk on the beach instead. I take a

peculiar pleasure in knowing that I can do whatever I want when I feel like doing it, and nobody need be disturbed by it.

But this doesn't come close to anything I wanted to say.

What is this, exactly? Autobiography, blog, fiction, my first entry in the journal I've always sworn that I would keep, but never have? Why is that? Is it that I resist looking at myself too closely – that might have been true, once upon a time – or simply that my life just isn't that interesting?

No. I don't accept either of those explanations. Remember that song, I think it was sung in the first world war: "We're here because we're here, because we're here, because we're here...?" Well, I write because I write because I write, because I write, because I write. I'm writing this because I feel the need to write it, perhaps in the hope that out of these random musings will come some kind of coherent whole. Never mind that life as a whole is never coherent. Not even when it's divided into segments.

Lately, I've had the opportunity to examine myself closely. No need to go into why or how, that's a much longer story, and not even very interesting. Or maybe I'm just too young and too close to it to tell it yet. Nonetheless, lately I've had the opportunity to examine myself more closely – or more closely than usual – and strangely enough, it hasn't been terrifying. Instead, I find that the more I see myself, the more clearly I see the rest of the world.

In the course of this self-exploration, I find myself catching a different bus some nights, a lot later than usual, when the world outside is darker than usual. Now, parts of this, I definitely don't enjoy. I like getting home when it's still at least partially light, thank you very much, I like to think that I can spend some time at

home relaxing, doing my own thing, having a life in other words, while the sun is still up. That late-night bus ride, though, is something I find I do enjoy.

I like looking out of the window. I like it when the bus climbs a height, and at a certain point it's at an angle that makes me feel like I'm looking back over my shoulder, and what I'm looking back down is the road I've just travelled, with all the lights, and the glimmering of them on the dark water. And there's a house that I can see if I squint as we race by it, a beautiful white house that's all windows and arches, and every one of them dark. A house like that shouldn't be empty. I always find myself wondering, is the house really deserted? Is it a shell of itself with ghosts wandering its hallways, passing through the arches? Is all the original furniture still there, sleeping quiet under its dust covers?

As the bus speeds on, I see other houses. Some of them are grand mansions, high and impersonal, others are simpler and more human. Some of them are still dark at the times I'm travelling, their occupants not home from work yet, or maybe they've just left for dinner. I travel at an awkward, transitory time, when most people are still coming or going, not settled yet. But sometimes I'm lucky, and I catch a glimpse of a house whose windows are lit, and I can see inside to the lives that are led there.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm no peeping Tom. I don't go around at night, creeping up to people's houses, peering in at their windows. I have absolutely no interest in that kind of voyeurism. I'm too protective of my own privacy. I don't want to know what people are doing in their houses; I want to imagine it. I want to see just enough in that fleeting glance as the bus sweeps me away to spark my imagination.

I see two friends chatting at the front gate before one of them has to go in for the night. I see a dining room table laid for a meal, the back of a young woman at the

stove or the kitchen sink, a grand chandelier hanging from the ceiling of a humble turn-of-the-century cottage, a man casually tugging his shirt off as he moves from one room to another. In one house, I see stained-glass windows and antique tinted lampshades. In another, I see glaring fluorescent lights and tattered lace curtains. Sometimes the glow of the windows makes me feel cold and lost in the dark, other times it welcomes me in, and I can almost see myself in that dining room, that kitchen, and it's my place, and I'm the one going about my life with no notion that there's somebody outside looking in.

Years ago, I wrote something else like this, with my heart in my mouth. It scared me, so I wrote it. Showing it to anybody else scared me even more, so I read it aloud in class. I'm not sure what that says about me, the fear or the refusal to give into it. Says I'm a human being with a stubborn streak, I guess. So I wrote this piece, with much more trepidation than I'm writing with now, may I add, and I was the one looking in at myself from the outside.

I can't remember everything that I wrote, but I do remember that at some point the line between the inside and the outside observer became blurred, even crossed. I remember writing a line something like: "She is the picture. I inspired the frame". That's not exactly it, I'm paraphrasing here, but you get the picture, so to speak. And I'm not quite sure, I haven't been on that bus for long enough yet, but I think that it's a good thing that the line got blurred, that I'm the insider and the outsider both, that I can look in from the cold and find myself in the warmth. Come to think of it, I doubt I'll ever figure that out, and that, too, is a good thing. I have a habit of asking myself impossible questions, and finding the answers is rarely the point.

Thinking about that piece of writing, though, leads me to thinking – don't ask me how – about some of the dreams I used to have, some of the nightmares. I said

before that I love to dream, and I stand by that. Sometimes I even find the nightmares interesting, once I stop being terrified. But there were some nightmares I had as a child that I just found horrific. Dreams about duplicity, literally dreams where I saw two of the one person, twin versions of a familiar face. Whenever I saw that doubling-up in a dream of mine, I knew that it was going to turn into a nightmare, one of those roller-coaster nightmares that you can't wake up from and you can't get out of. You half wake up with your heart pounding and your breath short, and then your eyelids close because they're just too heavy to keep open, and your limbs are paralysed. The dream keeps coming back until it's played itself out, and when you finally wake, you're curled up in a ball under the covers. I don't have those dreams any more. Maybe my own duplicity – or is it dichotomy? – doesn't frighten me so much anymore.

Last nightmare I had, I was in a dark house, a house where all the lights had been out for God knows how long. Cobwebs everywhere, and half-seen figures in the corners of my vision, and this chilling laugh and echoes of faraway voices...and I wasn't frightened. Oh, I felt a chill graze its way down my spine once or twice, but then I shrugged it off and said to myself, so this is a scary dream, and after a while, it just faded and went away. I have no idea what I dreamed after that, but I do know it wasn't a nightmare.

Once upon a time, I would have shut myself down, cut myself off. I would have squeezed the eyes of my dream as tightly closed as I could, and said no, I refuse to see this, I refuse to dream it. And I wouldn't see it, sometimes I wouldn't even hear it, but I would know that terrible things were happening all around me, and somehow that was worse. So now I face those demons head-on, at least in my dreams, and it was never a conscious decision, not even an unconscious one, it just

happened. The nightmares still come here and there, even more often just recently, but they don't seem to hurt me any more.

Oddly enough, I've never been afraid when I've seen myself in a dream. You'd think that would frighten me more than anything else. But then, when I dream of seeing myself, I see myself in a mirror, and I never look quite the same to myself as I do when I'm awake. Besides, there's nothing scary about seeing yourself in a mirror. Is there?

I also dream about the ocean. The same beaches, the same shorelines, over and over again, beaches and oceans that I have never seen in waking life; I used to dream about drowning in those oceans, being swept under by the waves, dragged out to sea by the current. Now, the water is simply there, and sometimes I'm in it, sometimes I'm being swept away by it, but there's no fear, no paralysis. It's simply happening. And the last dream about drowning I had, I was going under, I could feel the water in my mouth though I couldn't taste it, and I couldn't be afraid. The ocean was so blue, the sun so warm, and there was such a beautiful, solitary island in the distance.

I dream about houses, too, houses of all shapes and sizes, and they're houses full of people, usually family, and I'm trying to find someplace quiet. Strangely, I've been living by myself for a while now, and yet when I dream, there's always somebody with me.

What I dream about most nowadays, though, is buses. Sometimes trains too, but it's the buses that dominate. Getting on a bus in the middle of nowhere, at some empty stop on a long, grey highway and the sky is grey as well, and somehow I end up on the wrong bus, or being taken to the wrong destination. I'm sitting on this bus, looking out the window, and I see the bus I should be on go by me, I see the number

of the route I was supposed to take flashing on the display. But I'm not afraid. I know that someone I trust is following along behind, and they're going to come and get me and take me home, and if not, the worst that can happen is that I end up in a strange new place. Only, in the bus rides of my dreams, I've never reached my stop yet. I guess that's a journey I'm still on.

What is this all about? You ask as you read this. Are you still waiting for this to make sense? Didn't I tell you that there wasn't going to be one coherent whole? I thought I made that clear. You want to read a girl's first-ever journal entry, never mind that it's a glimpse into a private place that you'd never be allowed access to if she didn't permit it, and you expect it to be coherent?

Let me ask me ask you something. Is your mind clear? Do you understand completely what's going on? Do you completely understand yourself? Even when you categorise the world and the people in it, when you box them in, do you ever really comprehend them? Of course you don't. Otherwise, you wouldn't be so busy trying to understand them. Even I know that, and I know hardly anything at all.

Then again, sometimes I feel like I know too much. We all experience that too, I suppose. All my old nightmares about dichotomy; I was always the child too old for her years, now I'm the adult that will never grow up. And you know what? I like being that person. I can encompass all of these bits and pieces. Might take a while, yet; my bus hasn't reached its final destination, and maybe it won't until I take my last breath, and then there will be another bus to ride on. That's just fine by me. I like to ride. I'm a natural-born traveller. Just so long as I always have a home to come back to.

Here I am, spending too much time waiting for time to pass. Living by my routine, sleeping or not sleeping, divided by the hours. But not really waiting at all,

when you think about it. Because I'm always moving, always going somewhere, even if I don't know where. I'm not the kind of girl to take big steps; I'm too small, too shy for that. I'm the girl who learned to walk with one finger trailing along the wall, one hand on the furniture or gripping the banister of a stairwell for safety's sake, even when there was no danger of falling. I'm a cautious little girl, and I take cautious little steps.

Those steps, though, don't go backward. Why would I want to go in reverse? I don't want to relive the old. The old scares me worse than the new. So I'll get to your new world eventually, and I hope it isn't the perfect, together place that so many seem to want so badly. Let it all be a puzzle yet, because I have fun putting together the pieces. I want it to be a mystery for a little while longer, and as long as it stays that I way, I'll buy my ticket and get on that bus, and I'm not getting off until I feel like it.

I bought that ticket just the other night. Waited, huddled and shivering on a street corner, waiting for the bus to come. It was crowded, and too hot, at first. There was a woman arguing in Russian on the phone across the aisle from me, a young man with darkly handsome features staring blankly into space. An old couple sat side-by-side, silent with all the years of words they no longer had to speak. I studied them for a while, and then as the bus left the highway and started to climb, I started looking for those houses with all their lit windows. My mind was very clear, in the mood for observing. But that night, I didn't see into any of those houses. It was dark outside, and the light from inside the bus shone on the glass at an angle that defeated me, and all I could see was my own reflection.

