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Sojourn

Kate Seferian

I love Scott.

I had been staring at this announcement on the seatback in front of me for the past 96 minutes. The “o” was slightly bigger than it should have been in relationship to its fellow letters, and to my OCD-infested mind it was torture.

Jenna was also “here” in 1996, apparently.

Attempting to chill my mind over the whole “o” fiasco, I turned my gaze to the couple sitting across the narrow aisle from me. The woman, or to be completely accurate, *Girl Thrust Into Womanhood Prematurely*, appeared to be discomfited at the idea of remaining on the bus for another 6 hours. Her pregnant belly was an enormous bubble squeezed into a cramped space, and I feared it would burst and splatter placenta in all directions.

I had never liked pregnant women.

However, the mental image of a bus filled with afterbirth intrigued me, and I couldn't help but stare. The man poked his blushing bride and she shifted her body to face me and all of my rudeness. And I proceeded to open my mouth. Lo! what disasters may occur!

“Are you ready to be a mother?”

From where came this effrontery?

“I mean, how old are you? Can you raise a child?”

Fully expecting my decapitated head to be rolling around on the floor (hopefully before the baby explosion....any minute now....) I managed to force my lips closed and choked back any remaining comments. Alas, my larynx performed its own version of the Heimlich.

“Is he the father? I hope you two can make it through this together.”

Too stunned to react, the girl slowly retreated back and turned her doe eyes away.

Ten minutes later I was still trying to wrestle that darn foot out of my

mouth when the girl managed to squirm and shimmy her way up into a teetering standing position. Panting from exertion, she gathered all of her remaining strength and slapped the alleged father of her cherub.

“Rosemary, what....?” he spluttered.

She then summed up some last cells of adrenaline, and while raising her other hand turned in my direction. I instantly recoiled, knowing all too well that I deserved a good tear-worthy slap, but I guess (thankfully) that ambidexterity was something she lacked because I ended up receiving what almost felt like a love tap. Her attempt at violence bordered on amusing, but I kept silent and watched Rosemary shove her way up the aisle and collapse into a seat.

The two old women sitting in front of me swiveled around and stuck out their chicken necks. They proceeded to peck at my manners.

“What a faux pas, dearie,” chided one.

“Where’s your heart?” the other chimed.

Cluck, cluck, cluck.

Searching for something to shoo them away, my hand groped around in my army bag and grabbed a bottle of blue nail polish. I dabbed the shimmering blue liquid onto my nails and splayed my fingers, admiring my handiwork. The old chickens scowled.

“Here, sniff this. It will make you feel better,” I advised, pushing the bottle under their noses. Disgusted, they turned around and continued to complain in hushed clucks.

Our father-to-be chose this moment to make an awkward dash up to his beloved. Once again she began to swell up (not from maternal bliss, I assure you) and tried to escape his pleading orbs and suppliant position on bent knees. Rosemary heaved herself up and across the aisle, her billowing stomach (burst! burst!) leading the way. Her behemoth figure knocked her beau backwards, but he remained impervious to her not-so-subtle, and quite abusive, come to think of it, gestures. Hell hath no fury like a woman’s scorn.

Suddenly the bus stopped, tossing everyone forward and Romeo on top of his rotund Juliet.

The doors squawked open.
Thunder cracked.

One of the old chickens fainted.

Rosemary slapped her man.

And gothic girl (a reincarnation of Edgar Allen Poe? Maybe.) clambered into view, possessions discombobulated and juggled wildly to maintain a balance. Robert Frost would have been proud. A fetal juggernaut blocked the otherwise clear path down the center of the bus, though, and this greatly impeded Poe's progress. After a few moments of struggle and impressive squeezing, the girl managed to stow her belongings in the proper place. Bechained and bestudded, she sauntered down the aisle, combat boots thudding. Quite happy sitting alone, I averted my eyes and turned up the volume on my headphones in an attempt to force my mind into the nirvana engendered by the British beats of The Clash. If only Joe Strummer hadn't died.

"Did you know Joe Strummer died of heart complications on Christmas Eve?"

Mistakenly believing that I was the social type, Poe plopped down next to me. She eyed the CD case like a child focused on a sparkling object.

"It was Christmas Eve Eve," I mumbled, shrinking back into the corner of my seat, a make-shift hermit shell.

"Well, we all have to die sometime," she prattled on.

The trumpets have sounded. Let the destruction begin.

"We are already walking slabs of death," I responded.

"Come again?"

"Our skin, honey bunch. Cells push up from the stratum basale and as they approach the superficial layer, the epidermis, they flatten and die. You know, keratinocytes and such."

An appropriate (but untrue) answer concerning her quizzical expression would have been an affirmative regarding any intake of crack on my part.

“OK, that’s kind of morbid,” she choked out, obviously disturbed at the idea of being covered with millions of corpses, so to speak. The two old chickens in front of us cast pretty overt glances in my direction and murmured to each other. (Sweet nothings, perhaps?) Pick a little, talk a little. Cheep, cheep, cheep.

My raven friend had put up with enough and flapped a few seats back. Reluctant to admit defeat, and not to be outdone by my blue nail polish, she whipped out some black lipstick and slathered a coat over her lips. (Pruning some ruffled feathers, I suppose?)

The bus picked that same exact moment to come to a halt, once again forcing all of the passengers forward and slamming us into the seat-backs. My cheek squished against the fuzzy ridges of corduroy, and out of the corner of my eye I caught a satisfying glimpse of black lipstick smearing a cheek. She looked like an inebriated football player. Hah.

Pregnant girl darted out the doors and waddled with surprising quickness to the bathroom inside the Quik-Mart. I watched the others file off on quests for Milky Ways and Nutter-Butters and then settled back and closed my eyes. I pondered.

The picture. (My real mother.)

She was supposedly my real mother, my biological mom. Real. What does that mean, anyway? She didn't raise me, hug me, punish me, laugh with me, sing to me.

Biological.

I guess that word made all the difference. Because now she wants me to be her real, biological daughter. The dilemma didn't end there. I could barely live with myself; I didn't even know myself. How could I deal with Bio-Mom if I was suffering my own identity crisis? I didn't have a clue. Where will I end up? How will I know when I get there? Travel heals all. This was my journey, my life.

The bus chugged to a start. "Wait!" I yelled to the bus driver. Do I get off? Do I call home? Where is home? I looked at the faces watching me.

"Those girls. And the father. They aren't here," I said.

Outside, gothic girl, Rosemary, and her partner came running to the bus. Poe was equipped with a handful of Wet-Naps. (Lipstick's a killer to get out.)

Well, I had done my good deed for the day, and as a reward I snuggled into nap position. The bus pulled away from the Quik-Mart and droned on down the highway.

Here we go.