

VIRGINIA: ALMOST-LAST BUS RIDE OF JUNIOR YEAR

Even after two years of riding the school bus, small bumps make me clench my jaw tight. I don't have a car because *cars cost money* & driving in tiny cars sounds like broken bones & torn skin, which means I am the only junior on the bus. So I am basically a freshman. The ride is too long with only my old iPod, headphones & the one downloaded Spotify playlist Zachary and I made two summers ago for company.

I lift my long green locs, which resemble seaweed or Medusa's snakes, over my shoulder & stare out the window. Every house is white & white & white with red brick & white. Every lawn is green & green & greenest.

The two other Black kids on the bus are younger & don't speak. Or they speak, but never to me. They never bothered to learn my name. Which might be a blessing, considering my name.

I guess a girl with a family who spilled out of a car & who has a scar down her face is too fragile to bully & what is the point of talking if they can't stack insults on my chest?

The thing about the white kids is they do what they want & the bus driver acts like he has cotton in his ears. The bus driver looks like his ancestors oversaw brown bodies picking cotton. The white kids slip new names at the other Black kids like nooses each bus ride.

Two Septembers ago, I started here, at this school in the suburbs.
Away from the smell of city fuel, where basketballs hitting
pavement are as numerous as the sound of crickets in the
country.

The suburbs don't sound like anything.

They are just bland—unseasoned. As tasteless as frozen toast.

In New York, I used to fracture my toes in pointe shoes six days
a week & cherish the bleeding. My gray-bearded grandfather
used to say, *You dance like magic because you offer so much blood.*

I used to feel tied to the music of the city, even walked to the beat.
But here, I don't dance anymore. I don't move.

I just sit & think
of drifting away . . .

away . . .

away . . .

BOY WITH LONG BLACK HAIR SHOWS UP IN HOMEROOM

His hair is tied in a knot,
but a few strands waterfall across his forehead.

The homeroom teacher:
... last minute to start school?

Waterfall hair:
Didn't want to come.

Homeroom teacher:
Maybe you can make a few friends before summer.

Golden eyes:
Don't really care.

He taps his pencil against the desk & more of his hair,
now looking like lava after it has cooled, slips into
his face.

He doesn't *look* Black or white or any of the boxes.

The pencil hits the table, then the center of his palm.
Blond & crimped flutters in front of him,
graceful. The butterfly (Ashley)
wants to know if he is a drummer.

He glances at her—mouth sealed shut.
I notice a cut to the left of his Cupid's bow,
thin & red & angry.
& he taps his pencil slower
 & my feet point in my shoes.
I wrap my ankles around the legs of the chair,
strangling my will to move, to sway, to dance—
to live too hard, too much.

I tug my spirit back into my skin.
I will myself into stone.

Butterfly (Ashley) says,
 What are you, anyway?
His hair covers his face again—
 curtain closed.
 Eyes closed.

He just taps his pencil faster.
Reminds me of tap shoes scuffing
wooden planks, or rain hitting
a tin roof.

No smile. No smirk. Just a beat I can't miss that hits a note
 deep in my gut, at the root of me.