

TEN TO EIGHT

I stared out the bus window, fixated on our destination. It was just reaching quarter past seven, which is when we usually arrived. There wasn't much to see outside, just the long stretch of road yet to be driven, occasional trees here and there, and more pavement. To be fair though, this part of town probably has more to offer. I've just never seen it in daylight. Every morning- every *eerily early* morning- I take two buses in order to get to my 'prestigious' high school. I wake up at 6:15, catch my first bus at 7:00, *wait* for my second bus until 8:00, and arrive at school no later than 8:45. To think I've already been awake almost three hours before school even begins makes me cringe. Needless to say, I *dread* mornings.

I sighed as the bus pulled up to the curb and stopped abruptly, letting out a loud puff, which sounded like it was sighing itself. I grabbed my belongings at a sloth-like pace, moseying down the aisle. There were only a few kids who took this bus, and they never made it as far as school. It was just too convenient for them to have a mall located within walking distance of where we stopped first. I knew them all, which is what made not going with them so hard.

"Vanessa!" Kyle called as soon as I got off the bus.

The sun was just beginning to rise, so I could start to make out his faint caricature standing on the rough, gravelly sidewalk in front of the antique store. He was with two fellow mall rats, Adam and Katie.

He lifted his arms up as if to enforce the question he asked while doing so, "Are you coming with us or not?"

He was friendly in his expression, so I wasn't shy in my response.

"And do what?" I hollered playfully while coming towards them, "Play the mall arcade all day? You know I'm broke!"

It was true. The lack of enthusiasm and desire I had to go to school (not to mention *take two buses there*) I also had in my net worth. I did however, tactfully leave out the part about getting grounded by my father for chronically skipping school. My attendance dropped, and so did my grades. And in today's day and age there is no getting away with missing class. Thanks e-mail.

Kyle laughed and Mike stepped forward, "All I got are quarters, V! I can pay your way."

I was used to this routine by now, and shot him a thankful smile mixed with a rejecting shake of the head.

"You sure Venny?" Katie chimed in.

“I’m sure,” I told her reassuringly, “Now get out of here, and don’t worry about me,” I directed to all three of them.

They all smiled, and brushed pass me with full intensions.

“Have fun at *school!*” Mike taunted as he turned around.

I stuck my tongue out at him instinctively.

“Say hi to Mr. Warner for me,” Kyle added in a last minute thought, “Tell him my two month overdue biology report is *still* coming along nicely!”

I couldn’t help but let out a legitimate laugh at that, while also rolling my eyes in the same motion.

They walked off into the distance and I was left to myself. I stood in silence until deciding to make a chair out of the worn, yellow curb at my feet. Settling in, I checked the time. It was ten to eight, meaning I had at least ten more minutes until the next bus arrived.

“*Just great,*” I thought to myself, “*more waiting.*” It dawned on me then that my daily life was revolved around *waiting*. At that notion, I could have thrown up.

I dug my face in my hands and rubbed my temples. Looking up from the ground, I realized that I was yet again, staring at the road. I had spent the past forty-five minutes in a bus, staring at the road, and I’d be damned if I let myself do so a second longer! With that mini epiphany, I stood up angrily and planted myself in the same spot, facing the opposite direction. I slammed my bag down in the space beside me, regretting doing so when it released a cloud of dust that blinded me. Coughing, covering my face, and trying to wave it away almost distracted me from hearing a small noise coming from the direction I was now facing. In that instant, I released my hands from my face to reveal the antique store. By now, it was light enough to see clearly and all that looked back were dark, shadowy windows, an unflattering yellow and brown paint job that was now faded and chipped, and the distance between myself and the house, which was a good eight to ten yards. Everything was still... too still, so I stood up and checked the time again in hopes that the bus was around the corner.

“*It’s ten to,*” I read my cellphone accordingly, “*so that means... still ten minutes? What?*” *That can’t be right,*” I shook the device, apparently thinking that would help somehow. But of course, no luck. So, instead of using brawn, I began to enact what brains I had. Attempting to click into my phone and configure the time settings, it rendered useless. It had completely frozen.

“*Great!*” I thought, horrified, “*Dad’s gonna kill me!*”

Thankfully, for the time being, I remembered I kept a watch in one of the pockets of my bag. As I began digging through to find it, I grew tired of standing and didn’t like the idea of having to utilize the curb. The ground obviously didn’t want me, because it’s dirt had almost

given me an asthma attack, so my feet subconsciously moved themselves eight to ten yards towards the wood stairs that were conveniently placed against a house in the middle of nowhere.

Reaching the structure, I let my body collapse on the front porch, ignoring any possibilities of getting fined for trespassing, or just simply receiving slivers and splinters from the raggedly dangerous, never-been-sanded, texture of the front steps.

Feeling frazzled, I continued to search through my bag.

"It's gotta be in here!" I shouted, frustrated at myself. I don't know what it was, but it was sure getting to me- and quickly.

"A-ha!" I exclaimed out loud when I finally found what I was looking for. Pushing my bag aside yet again, I greedily turned the silver-faceted analogue watch right side up so I could read its face.

Taking a few moments to properly read both the minute and the hour hand (who uses analogue anymore?), I came to the conclusion that... the batteries were dead. It, as well as my supposedly more "reliable" connection to the outside world, had failed me. Fully realizing this, I mindlessly dropped what I now viewed as a useless piece of junk from what was just moments before, a tight, appreciative grasp.

"What now?" I asked myself, since there was no one else around... or was there?

Similar to what I heard before, only closer now, I jolted my head and the upper half of my body back around to catch the end of what sounded like... laughter. Startled and confused, I picked up myself and my belongings and held very still, attempting to hear more. Standing there for a good five minutes without hearing another peep got me worried, so I began my quiet retreat down the nicely finished, smooth white steps.

"Wait, what?" after clearing all of them, I turned around in disbelief to see something entirely new.

The baby blue window shutters were what caught my eye first. They contrasted brilliantly against the purest white you could ever imagine. Large, matching white pillars made the entrance of the house appear extravagant and grand, while gatherings of delicate purple and white flowers along with homey whicker furniture on both sides of the porch left nothing to be desired.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I shut my eyes and opened them again repeatedly in attempts to eliminate this strange mirage from my vision. Every attempt failed, and I was astounded each and every time.

Looking down, I realized what I was standing on had become beautiful as well. Instead of rough and dusty gravel proceeding into patches of dead yellowing weeds, my feet were wobbling on vividly bright, well watered and tended, luscious green grass. In an overpowering surge of weak adrenaline, my knees buckled and I found myself closer to what I couldn't believe, using

another sense to take in the possibility that all of this might be real. Feeling the squeaky wet texture of each blade, my fingers tightened around a clump of it and pulled it out. It was there. The patch of grass: healthy soil, roots and all, was sitting helplessly in my hand, as I sat helplessly in a place that was completely foreign to me.

“*What’s... happening?*” I was dumbfounded and shocked. My body seized up, keeping me from moving as little as an inch. So, I put my mind to work, piecing what parts of this puzzle I had gathered so far.

“*My phone’s dead.. My watch doesn’t work... Technology ... doesn’t work,*” I sat upright, my eyes fixed to the ground in focused concentration. “*Every thing’s... changed. The antique store.. isn’t one anymore. It’s... a house,*” I looked up suddenly, the restored building in my direct eye-line. Knowing my next move, I carefully stood up from the grass and fearfully turned around to see where my bus would have to travel now, in order to save me.

I shuddered as such a maneuver would be impossible, given that there was no road there. Being surrounded by an army of trees, I was trapped, and silently surrendered to whatever else this unfamiliar world had in store.

“Are you okay?” said a small, non-threatening voice, catching me off guard by coming from behind.

I must have jumped a mile, because I found myself much further from this plot-thickener than I had originally figured I was. Realizing that there was now quite a distance between us, I gave myself the okay to respond.

“Who are you?” I questioned him.

“I’m Jimmy,” he said back to me “matter-of-factly”, like I should already know this.

I took in his demeanor then, giving the seven or eight year old boy a once over.

After *really* looking at him, and noticing *everything*, I was shocked. His sandy blonde hair was a mess under a ragged light brown cap that he fixed on his head when he noticed me staring at it. His clothes were so... proper- abnormal really- for such a young boy. A clean, crisp, white long sleeved shirt with a collar was rolled up to his elbows underneath a beige, lightly patterned plaid vest, buttoned up all the way. He stood there, still holding eye contact with me, while wearing darker brown dress pants in a material I found unusual. To top it all off, he kicked the grass in old styled loafers.

I continued to stare at this boy without saying a word. After a few moments he began to nervously shift his weight from side to side, scratching his head and adjusting his cap in curious unease. Before I could move onto my next train of thought, he was off, running in the direction of the house.

I snapped myself back into reality and watched him head towards the side of the property, slipping through a neatly laid out gate that he opened with ease, which was most likely out of routine. He was gone, but I still stood there, focusing my energy on where he last was. Timidly walking forwards, I followed his steps, but traveled at a much slower pace.

As I got closer, I started to hear noises that were familiar to me now. Laughing, talking, more laughing... It was coming from where I was headed. Before I could get any further the sandy-haired boy was back, and he had brought a friend. At his side was a slightly taller, older boy, probably around the age of ten. He was dressed as the younger boy was, only with suspenders.

“*Suspenders?*” Now this was getting weird.

The two of them looked at me with the same expression I was most likely giving them: complete confusion. They walked towards me, then around me, examining me just as I was doing to the smaller boy moments before.

But why were they inspecting *me*? I was the normal one in the situation... wasn't I?

“What do you think, Carl?” asked Jimmy, from what I remembered.

“I don't know,” he looked me up and down while stroking his chin. “Maybe she's an alien.”

“Carl!” Jimmy exclaimed.

Carl began to laugh, which reminded me of what I should ask them.

“Is there anyone else home?”

They looked at me, then at each other, deciding if they should answer my question correctly.

“Sure,” Carl began, “everyone's out back.”

“Come on!” before Jimmy started running away again, he reached out and poked Carl on the shoulder.

“Jimmy! You little!” Carl chased after him fast but friendly, giving me the impression they've been friends for a long time.

I followed behind the two of them, running to keep up. When they reached the gate, Jimmy held it open for me, giving Carl his chance to tag him back.

“That's not fair!” Jimmy shouted. “I was being a gentleman!”

He said the word “gentleman” like he didn't *really* know how it was properly pronounced.

“That's your problem. There are no safety areas!”

Their formal speech surprised me, but as we walked through the gate and entered the backyard, I was given much more to worry about.

I couldn't believe my eyes. What I was seeing did not make sense to me, and as I turned my head back to look at the two boys who had led me into the heart of this strange place, they had moved on to be a part of it.

There were people everywhere. Some were dancing to unfamiliar, slightly distorted music coming from an odd looking radio, some were laughing and talking with each other while eating simple, homely grown farm food, and some were partaking in various games that I couldn't bring myself to put a name to.

I walked into it a little, almost being sideswiped by two girls chasing after a butterfly. Looking around, the truth of the situation hit me like a brick. I began to feel ill as I walked through the crowd and people stared at me like I was from another planet. I was not like them. I did not belong here. Making my way to the edge of the yard, I realized that there really wasn't one. The grass and divided sections of farm land stretched out until it reached more trees.

I was lost, and I was also trapped.

Ignoring the beauty of the untouched scenery in front of me, I turned around to face what was inevitable.

I had noticed the difference in the two boys I first met, but it was undeniably prominent now. No one was dressed like me for a reason. Instead of sporting the average "jeans and a t-shirt"- or anything even close to that- I was now amongst women and girls who wore full length dresses with lace and ribbon and men who all favored top hats. Everyone was outside resorting to radio and social interaction because there was no such thing as television and video games. My cell phone wasn't working because cell phones hadn't been invented yet. Nothing was modern because this was not a modern time.

At this notion, my eyes must have been bulging out of my head. My breathing grew heavy, and my heart began to pound at an uncontrollable rate.

"*What now?*" I asked myself, trying to keep calm.

The crowd hadn't halted their energy an ounce. Everyone looked to be having the time of their lives, while I stood to the side of the busy make-shift dance floor gob smacked and utterly dumbfounded.

I hadn't moved an inch when the next song came on and everyone who was dancing just moments ago was now booing. Apparently, ballads weren't very popular in the early 1900's- or at least, not to this crowd.

With that thought, another appeared. I looked around trying to gather an answer when I spotted a boy about my age changing the station on the radio to please everyone. Making my way over to where he was, I pushed through the disgruntled crowd and stood near the old device

just as he had succeeded in ‘fixing’ it. With the distraction of music and dancing once again, I mustered up enough courage to ask the question I was afraid of the most.

Before I said anything, he must have noticed my introverted behavior, because he flashed me a confused look immediately before consciously changing it to a reassuring smile.

“Hello Miss,” his voice was friendly and welcoming, almost making me feel relieved-but not quite.

“Hi,” I responded sheepishly, still being intimidated by the question that was to follow. “Uh, can I ask you something?”

He seemed caught off guard by my bluntness. His curiosity seeped through to his demeanor, allowing me to visually see it. “I guess that depends on what it is,” he leaned against the table the radio was on with a slight smirk, trying to play it cool.

I just stood there, staring at him in disbelief. Realizing there were douche bags in every time period, I couldn’t help myself from letting out an abrupt chuckle.

Looking confused and embarrassed, he immediately stood upright.

“Listen,” I stood my ground, having somehow regained lost confidence. “I have a very important question, and if you aren’t going to answer it seriously, I’ll ask someone who will.”

He seemed irritated, but still curious, which was enough to keep him from walking away. Composing himself differently, he took about a half step in my direction before leaning in to whisper “And what question would that be?”

I knew he was joking, mocking how secretive I was. Normally, I’d brush it off, no big deal. But right now, right here, under these circumstances my emotions were running high, and I was not able to take it.

Outwardly scowling, I stomped away from him. I made it as far as the gate when I noticed he was on my heels. Attempting to ignore him and escape, my hands angrily jolted the lock while my fingers mindlessly fiddled with the contraption. It couldn’t be *that* hard to open... I’d seen Jimmy do it twice already!

“I thought things were supposed to be *simpler!*” I shouted out of frustration and anxiety.

My hands were trembling now. I was beginning to feel symptoms of shock.

“*This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening,*” I repeated over and over again in my head, as if thinking it enough would make it come true.

Before I could scare myself any further, a firm hand reach around me and hit the trigger rigged switch *near* the lock.

Turning around, I wasn’t surprised by who did it.

He was looking down at me, using his best efforts to keep the laugh he had hidden behind a tight smile. “Jerry’s paranoid,” he said. “That’s why he put the lock there, to trick people.” He backed away then, eyeing the switch and me directly after. “I guess it works,” he added, allowing a small chuckle to escape.

At this point I was emotionally exhausted. I could have snapped back at him with some snarky comment, but I simply didn’t have enough left in me to do so. Instead, I surrendered, asking the question I didn’t feel even made a difference anymore.

“What year is it?”

The same confused expression he had gotten rid of just moments before returned.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean,” I stated impatiently for him again. “What *year* are we *currently* in?”

He took a long pause. Intensity in his eyes, they wondered, as if still trying to figure out what was going on. Finally, perhaps in realization that he couldn’t, he broke the dead air between us.

“It’s 1926,” he said, his eyes resting on mine.

My stare slowly seeped from him to the ground. In disbelief, I was frozen. Forgetting how to breathe, or that I have to in order to stay alive, my vision began to get dark and distorted. Anything what’s-his-face attempted to say to me went unheard and wasted, because my hearing also became impaired. My legs started to feel weak and useless, forcing me to grab onto the gate behind me for support. Like myself, everything around me seemed to be falling apart. I tried to focus on something stable, something that wasn’t spinning, but my dizzy head wouldn’t allow it. Closing my eyes, I gave into what I was fighting so hardly against; gravity.

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Everything was dark and quiet. I knew this wasn’t something to be afraid of, because I chose it. I was finally in control. Keeping my eyes shut tightly, a light gust of wind blew over me, stirring something up in the process. It felt like dust as it tickled my face and triggered an overpowering *deja vu*. My dry throat seized up, forcing me to sit upright, while my eyelids flew open in a sudden reflex. I found myself coughing and breathing in heavily, trying to force clean air into my lungs. At this point I was a little preoccupied, so I wasn’t completely aware of my surroundings. That is, until I identified the object that was directly in front of my face.

Recognizing the carefully crafted symmetry of many parallel pieces of wood, my memory caught up with me. Following closely behind, it seemed to be inevitably paired with an instant headache. I shut my eyes again in hopes of resurrecting just an ounce of the peace and

clarity I was somehow experiencing just moments before. But such a feeling seemed impossible now. My body subconsciously arranged itself into the fetal position, while I rocked myself back and forth, searching desperately for some trace of comfort. I was outwardly hiding now, blocking off what I had learned to call reality. At that thought I shuddered.

Remembering even more, and more specifically of what had *just* occurred, a wave of heat rushed over me. It left behind its crimson evidence that I wore blatantly across my face. I had just passed out. That boy had *seen* me pass out. Realizing that he could still be watching me endure this mentally unstable nervous breakdown, I broke out of the shell I had just formed and used the gate in front of me as, yet again, the helping hand I could only wish I had.

Dusting myself off, I found it peculiar that I even had to. Looking down and around me, I located the absence of greenery, and of life. The ground was dusty and dirty, and covered with gravel. It was the exact opposite of what I had become used to. Every step I took announced itself through eerie silence and as I reached the bend to where the backyard party had made itself so at home, I found nothing; and no one. Instead, the dead air continued more widespread than it would have before, due to the assisting lack of trees.

My mouth dropped as I stared out into the open area. Turning around, I gave the old house a few moments as well. It was abandoned. This entire place was abandoned.

With the reminder of crackling gravel under my feet, I was aware of my own approach towards the house. Getting closer, it looked tired and worn down. It's 'new' coat of paint looked sloppily splashed on its exterior, hiding a simple, elegant white with a sort of mustard yellow. It looked sickly.

Standing there and taking all of this re-stated information in, I seemed to find going back to normal more intrusive; the reversal even *more* disturbing than the initial change. This place used to be beautiful, filled with happy people and simple, carefree times. Nature was in its finest, thriving in a coexisting, mutual state. Things were *alive* here... Now, they have vanished, leaving behind them only a dark, dry, empty shadow of all that they used to be.

Out of all the emotions I had felt today, the one I was currently experiencing proved to be the strongest; and the worst. My vision became debilitated as sadness gathered there. I had no reason to hide what I was going through. No one was here. Alone, in a lonely place, I was still as a tear broke the barrier between my eye and my skin and successfully seeped down my right cheek. I watched it fall to the ground, almost feeling like it was plummeting in slow motion. When it reached its demise, I became instantly distracted by a faint, abrupt noise coming from the front yard.

I jerked my head up, all ears like an alert dog, and didn't linger there any longer. I set off towards the gate and opened it easily as I knew how to this time. Closing it mindlessly behind

me, I looked ahead to catch the end of my bus driving away. I don't know why, but I kept running. I knew there was no hope of catching it, but for some reason my legs wanted to push forward. I reached the end of the yard where the jagged bits of rock turn into smoothly laid out cement before I halted.

Watching the long, awkward yellow thing get smaller and smaller as it traveled further into the distance, I turned around to look at the house, or antique store, once again.

It was just as ugly and abandoned looking as I remembered. It almost had a way of slouching, if that makes any sense for a house. I guess it lost all of its support with the removal of those giant white pillars... Its homeliness had disappeared too. It looked to be the opposite of welcoming, having been raped of any signs that it is, or once was, ever lived in.

Suddenly, I discarded my trip down memory lane to attend to an issue that was much more important and pressing to me at the time. I dove my hand through the opening of my bag and brought out my cellphone. Quickly clicking into it, it responded appropriately. However checking the time, it hadn't changed. It *still* read eight to ten. Shock holding my body still, I stared at the screen in confusion. Everything else was as it was before, so why was time acting any different? Before I could react further, the tiny animated zero turned itself into a one. It was now 7:51 AM.

Surprising myself, I let out a light chuckle. The *one* day my bus was early and I wasn't waiting around, like usual, to catch it.

I sighed in realization of how extremely ironic this was, but also in relief. I was back and things were normal again, which were reasons to relax. But as well as that, I began to find a bit of humor in all that had happened today... or didn't happen.

Sitting down on the very curb I had resented earlier and remembering how it had turned non-existent for a quite a while, I now felt safe enough to start finding the situation *funny*. I mean, why skip school when you can go back in time?