

The Bus

Observation.

That was my key to survival on the road.

It was the strangest thing. I felt so distanced from my friends, who I'd spent all summer with, yet I knew deep down inside that I know more about them than they ever would've thought.

I never did quite understand how six people could stand each other despite being so different. The key thing that the five people I am loyal to have in common is that they met me first. I always thought of myself as the glue that held this group together; now I suddenly felt different.

We had many more hours to go in this bus before we'd be home.

And I was ready to find my way back...

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Am I crazy?

Maybe it's just the lack of sleep that's making me doubt my place here. It's the only logical explanation really. I glanced at all the familiar faces, nodding to myself in what I hoped was a subtle way.

I felt inclined to blame the bus.

Being on the road changes people. The ordinarily lively faces of my favourite people in the world now beared frowns or furrowed eyebrows – the atmosphere was cold and quiet. But hey, I'm saying this whilst I'm in the damn bus too, so I'm probably affected just as much. Me, Sir Optimism...currently freaking out.

I fidgeted nervously, hating being seatbelted down for so long. I was the only one in the group sitting alone, and it was really weirding me out. We'd left Roy Oberst behind before heading back home, and it was the most bizarre feeling. I remember what it was like finding out that he was moving; everyone was sitting in his living room shouting their opinions of the worst movie ever when suddenly he just blurted it out. There was a stunned silence, followed by choruses of 'are you serious?', and then tears. One of the first things said after everyone calmed down slightly was, and I quote: "Dude, do you realise you're making us an odd numbered group?"

I wasn't the one who said it, but I was feeling the brunt of it now. Not great.

The person most affected by Roy moving away was Kiki. They were really close because of their shared interest in photography. Roy was always the one who

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would happily go to an art gallery with Kiki, while the rest of us fumbled around with excuses. Todd's were always the most hilarious, albeit not very effective. "I can't go. I'm...I...I have to help my sister with her homework. And then I have to wash the dishes. And scrub the floors. I'm not quoting Cinderella, Kiki! Ok, I lied. But really, I'm serious, I can't go! I'm not...Wonderwoman! "

Right now Kiki was scrolling through the pictures on her camera, a sad look on her face. I vowed to myself that I would go to a gallery with her next time she asked, even though last time I went with her, I got kicked out for, um, tripping over. With food. I'm a disgrace, I know.

This had to be the most normal thing I'd seen her do on this entire trip. I'd noticed that while in the bus, she got bored quickly, and frequently resorted to staring at her hands. She'd move them around and look at the shadows they'd cast. More often than not she'd also start sketching what she'd seen. Completely strange, but fascinating at the same time. I really couldn't understand how she managed to make these drawings look amazing, but they did always end up that way. I watched as Sophia leaned over to look at the camera screen, commenting on how nice the lighting was. I wasn't sure whether or not she *really* knew what she was talking about, or if she just wanted to give Kiki a compliment. Sophia was like that – unwaveringly nice, always wanting to make someone else feel good about themselves. Sometimes this could be annoying, but most of the time she was successful, in all honesty. Kiki's inquisitive eyes turned to Sophia quickly, and it was obvious she was trying not to laugh. Kiki thanked Sophia and

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continued to scroll through the pictures. Sophia grinned to herself before going back to what she always did to occupy herself on the road – examining her hair for split ends. She'd seriously been doing this for the five hours we'd been driving so far, *straight*.

Noticing a pattern here? My friends are insane! I mean...I was positive that that was why I loved them in the first place, but still. They're completely nuts!

Todd watched Sophia examine her hair in disgust. He too couldn't believe how long she'd been doing that. I guess Sophia probably thought the same of his bus habit though – I know I did.

Todd was really into music; he prided himself especially on knowing the hippest new acts around, underground wunderkinds with small, dedicated fanbases. He hated to admit it, but despite the fact that his old group of friends were automatically considered by the majority of people as the cool hip ones, he liked us a whole lot more. And what were we, really? A group of misfits who somehow fit together really well.

Todd dressed like an annoying emo kid and had the hair to match, but in reality had a very open mind and varied taste. He enjoyed the wide-eyed looks of admiration/confusion he'd get as he spoke about German electropop and Canadian violinists. As soon as we were in the bus he shut himself off from the world by putting on his massive headphones, putting the volume up at such a

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level that I could clearly hear every word that was being sung/shouted/screamed. I really hoped that he would still have his hearing by the time he was 20.

I stifled a laugh as my gaze shifted to Victoria. She had a great way of entertaining herself, one that had little to no chance of annoying anybody – she slept. Victoria had a brilliant ability to be out like a light at will. Anywhere, anytime. Including once during a school trip to the museum while we were having lunch, which was pretty amusing. It was the weirdest thing. I'd always wondered whether she'd trained herself to be able to do that. I'm that kind of person though. Always thinking. It was a bad thing, really. I'm not really capable of letting thoughts go. Obviously, considering this whole 'wahhh, I'm not part of the group!' thing I still have going on. This was really bothering me. I was a glass half full kind of guy. So I thought. Would I be like this if Roy was still here...?

Suddenly the radio station was changed, the beginning of a loud guitar riff making me jump slightly. Typical dad right there.

Yeah, my dad was driving the bus. It was really cool of him to be doing that; he'd been transporting us all summer. I felt bad for him, sitting up at the front by himself, but I knew he preferred it that way. He had this *thing* with speaking when I was with my friends. He was intensely cautious to not be seen as the uncool dad who butted into everything. He figured that the best way to prevent humiliation for me was to speak only when necessary. I'd tried several thousand times to convince him it was ok, and that my friends actually thought of him as

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legendary, but he didn't believe me. So now in the bus, the only thing keeping him company was the radio; and in true dad fashion, the station was changed approximately two times every three minutes. Every single time it was changed I was startled, and had to take a moment to recover my train of thought.

Should seem obvious by now that I have a phobia of change.

One change causes a domino effect of other changes. I don't know about other people, but it's pretty much always been like that for me.

Then it all became clear. I was feeling distanced from my friends because inside, I was positive that because Roy moved away, they'll each start to do their own part in making sure that we all drift apart. I was sure that everything would go topsy-turvy and by tomorrow, I wouldn't know any of these people anymore.

I'm still choosing to blame the bus...

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Observation.

That was my key to survival on the road.

It seems less harmful than listening to crazily loud music. Less obsessive than checking your hair for split ends for hours. Less odd than drawing peace sign shadows. Less antisocial than sleeping. Less irritating than constantly switching the radio station. But in my case, it wasn't.

I was later told by my friends that they didn't think they could survive if I moved as well.

It was the best compliment I could've ever received.

Welcome back Sir Optimism!