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Bus Ride

by Jesse Espenschied

One time I was riding the bus home and I got lost in thought. I don't remember what for, but as I slowly sunk into my thoughts, the bus made its rounds. People got on, people left, people made weird faces at me as I stared— it's interesting how people assume you're creeping, and not a million miles away, questioning the fabric of the universe, dueling with an alternate version of someone you know.

Perhaps this version of them is smarter, or well versed in the intricacies of gender politics, or metaphysics, or some other area you both require more information to form an opinion on and have zero desire to research. You think this alternate version of your best friend, co-worker, random-chick-at-Wal-Mart, will have all the answers so you don't have to bother.

They spend those few minutes picking at your argument, refuting it purely on the grounds of what-aboutisms and assumptions that you are wrong, and the world is right. Sometimes this conversation is longer than any you've had with their real-world counterpart. Sometimes time stretches mere moments into hours, dragging you in circles, spiraling you permanently downwards.

While this was happening, when the lights were on but nobody was home, when I gained, lost, regained my faith, saw and lost the simulation, I saw a mother dab the ice cream off her child's face. An old woman chattered with the driver because no one ever visited. A student dozed in the back and a professional argued on the phone. I saw an old man close his eyes and enjoy the wind against his face, reminiscing about his wife of sixty-three years. I watched, and I listened, and I remembered I had a test due yesterday.