



The Richard Compton Creative Writing Competition 2015

Forget everything and run - Bethany O'Sullivan

Wake up.
Cereal.
School books.
Bus.
'Hey, what's up?'
'Not much. I'm tired.'
'Yeah me too.'
Class.
Lunch.
'How was class?'
'Boring, you?'
'Dull.'
Class.
Bus.
Home.
Internet.
Sleep.
Repeat.

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Sleep.
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Wake up.
Cereal.
School books.
Bus.
Screech.

There was a moment where it just looked as though the world was moving past the bus as it floated, stationary, in space. The early morning fog billowed across the glass and the tall, faded stripes of the trees slid through the cold air.

Then the bus shook. It thudded down off the side of the road and the world outside blurred into a grey mass of shadows and highlights.

She was thrown off her seat into the aisle, her arm whacking hard against a seat back, her leg flaring up in pain. The other people on the bus were just vague shapes and screams thrashing about and crashing into her, elbows and knees and heads hitting more bruises into her skin.

The world turned upside down.

She was weightless. Only for a split second, but in that second she felt her hair fan out around her face. She watched pens and pencils from dislodged bags hover in front of her eyes until they all hurtled down again to the ceiling with an immense crash that rang in her ears.

Her arm was on fire as she smashed into an overhead light, the glass shards shattering into her skin, but still the bus kept rolling. She lost track of which way was up and which was down as the bars of moonlight that flashed through the broken windows blurred together.

When everything finally rocked to an unsteady halt, bodies thudding into place, she couldn't even feel any relief that it was over, through the searing pain that coursed across her skin and through her muscles. If it weren't for the thick darkness that blanketed everything, broken only by weak moonbeams, she would have assumed she was on fire. The pain was intense.

Her fingers scrabbled weakly on the dusty floor as she tried to pull herself upright, but her over-stimulated nerves barely registered the sharp debris that scratched her skin. Heaving herself up, she squinted to look around.

Dark lumps were splayed out over the remains of the chairs and across the aisle. The silver light of the moon highlighted each one with weak haloes, lending sickening details to the hands and faces that poked out through their thick winter wrappings.

Through her hazy eyes she could see a few people stirring, desperately straining for purchase on the rubble covered ground around them with weak hands and feet. She

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tried to call out to them, but her voice wouldn't catch on her sore throat and she only succeeded in a scratchy breath. She tried to cough but her chest was too weak.

With a limp hand she pushed against the layers of fabric that were wrapped confusingly around her, trying to find the pocket of her coat and her phone. When she encountered a pocketful of broken plastic she gave up.

Through gaping hole where the window glass had been she could see trees ranging the edge of a grassy field damp with dew. The cool ground looked like heaven to her burning skin, and only a few metres away.

Hauling herself up onto the chair was the hardest part. Her muscles strained and complained as she flopped onto the torn seat padding. Everything was sprinkled with tiny shards of glass from the windows. She curled her fingers, over the window frame where the glass had been, to drag herself up over the edge.

After falling out of the window and onto the hard ground, however, she considered that maybe it hadn't been the best plan after all.

Once again her face was pressed to the ground as her body screamed. All the air had been forced out of her lungs and it was difficult to pull any more in down her dry throat. Her right arm was trapped awkwardly beneath her and her left foot was twisted painfully.

But this time the ground was cool beneath her skin, the soft blades of grass caressing the scars. She shuffled forwards until she was splayed out, limbs untwisted, and pressing her hands and face into the cool dewy ground as it sucked some of the heat away.

She heard a crash behind her. Another survivor struggling through the debris.

She twisted her head around to look at the bus, catching a look at only part of the front-most window from her position. Three people were silhouetted in the opening, shuffling around.

She tried to shout again, but her voice still stopped short in her throat, and so she pulled herself around until she could see them all properly.

There were four of them. None of them were injured from what she could see and behind them, lighting them up better than the faint moon could, she could see the piercingly bright headlights of another vehicle in the darkness.

One picked up a boy from the floor. He was limp in the man's arms, with a mass of blood shining on his face. The man studied his face, inspecting the injury and-

He smashed the boy's head against the wall, leaving a thick, dark smear, and dropped his limp body back out of sight. Had she been able to make a sound she would have screamed and she could barely breathe. She tried to bury herself out of sight, deeper into the short grass.

'Was that the boy?' One of them asked, in a gravelly voice, but he didn't speak quietly. Clearly there wasn't going to be anyone around to hear them. Another shook his head.

'Nah, the kid's at the back. I recognise that stupid hat he's got.' A third one replied.

'Is he dead?'

'I'll go check.' The tallest walked to the back of the bus. He didn't seem to be stepping very carefully along the aisle and she remembered the amount of people lying on the floor in the way. He paused near the back, looking down, inspecting something out of sight.

'He's still breathing.' He eventually added, then kicked out, with a loud, wet crunch. 'We're good.' He nodded back to the rest of them.

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She wanted to throw up. She wanted to run away. She wanted to scream for help.

She lay there, silent.

'You sure he's gone? We don't want a repeat of last time.'

'Have you ever seen that much brain outside a living person? We are definitely safe.'

'Ok, take care of the rest and let's get going.' Two filed out and began to trek up the hill to the headlights. The other two remained in the bus.

She watched in horror as they walked towards each other from either end of the bus. They moved slowly because every few steps they kicked out with a series of loud thuds. Three people they picked up and slammed against the wall. She heard a couple cries of pain. They were stopped quickly.

When they met in the middle they nodded to each other and scanned the bus, then headed back to the door. One stopped for an extra kick.

She sunk her forehead into the grass, pressing it into the wet mud, trying to push herself even further out of sight as they walked away. The footsteps grew quieter.

Then they stopped.

There was a pause where she didn't dare to breathe. All she could see was grass and mud and sparkling glass shards thrown out by the crash. She could hear the wind brushing through the bare tree branches and felt it caress her hair. She could hear faint thuds and bumps from the car at the top of the hill.

She could hear the men's footsteps coming closer.

They didn't stop at the bus.

'I think there's one left here!' One voice called out. She couldn't breathe.

She felt the grass shift in front of her face and looked ahead as well as she could without moving her face.

There was a pair of glistening boots. Liquids that painted the tops gleamed in the moonlight, the colour washed out by the dark into an unidentifiable wet smear. The trousers that rested on the leather shoes were also splattered darkly and unevenly.

She didn't want to look up. Didn't want to see his face, but she felt drawn to. She followed the trousers up to a pair of folded arms and up further.

At the top she could see a man's face picked out in silver by the moon.

He grinned.

'Night, night, sweetie.'