

Shared History

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Moments after I meet Vince he pushes me more off kilter. “What race do you think Dave is?” he asks me. I’ve know Dave for a day, and been in the city for three weeks, and I don’t know what to do with such a question. A blank look and a shrug of my shoulders is all I can offer for an answer.

“He’s half and half,” Vince says, slinging an arm around his friend’s shoulders. The phrase makes me think of coffee. “I’m pure black,” he says although I didn’t need him too. Again I say nothing.

Dave was the boy that found me and said he liked me. I said yes to being his girlfriend because nobody had ever asked me before. Now I want to back my way out of their dorm room and questions I never thought I would be asked. Instead we have a date at the end of the week—my first date.

Dave is surprised I’ve never been to the House of Blues and decides that’s where he is taking me. Vince and his date Jasmine will be joining us; I’m thankful we won’t be alone. It is mid-October and only just starting to get chilly at night as we wait for the bus. Dave and I loosely hold hands. His skin has just enough color that it doesn’t show the cold like mine. Dave has tried to reel me in earlier by the hand, for a kiss, for me to sit on his lap, I don’t know, but I’m still standing. He stopped when I shook my head slightly.

Leaning against the wall of the bus station I can pretend I’m not with the other three people waiting. They have an ease with each other that I don’t share with them. They grew-up within walking distance of each other and went to prom together. Their shared history makes me more of an outsider than a difference in skin and hair.

“About time,” Dave says when the bus arrives. I board last, fumbling with my fare card. I put it in backwards or upside down as usual. They are already moving towards the back with a city ease by the

time the machine has spit my card out. The separation makes me edgy. My hand longs to be back in Dave's as it is already a familiar place to be; big deal if we have nothing in common.

The aisle is crowded with knees and large feet and children's legs that stick straight out. "Scuse me," I mutter to the people that I jostle on my way. The motion of the bus makes me teeter. I haven't ridden the buses long enough to perfect the art of walking while one moves. Buses back home don't move like this.

My process is stopped by a hand that has firmly gripped my wrist. Age spots dot the flesh that is red from the cold just like mine. I'm a half step past an old man that I can picture decades ago young and charming with that smile he's offering me. I look in confusion at him. Do people usually grab you on buses? Dave is settling into a seat with an empty spot next to him where I belong.

"Are you sure you're going to be alright with them?" The man's words are spoken for only me to hear, yet they are as firm as his grip on my wrist.

My face crinkles in disbelief as his smile returns. I look towards Dave, Vince, and Jasmine—they haven't yet noticed my absence. Will I be alright? I hadn't questioned it before. I feel out of place because I didn't go to the same high school, because I almost tip over when the bus moves away from the curb, and the fumes of passing vehicles makes me think I'll never breathe fresh air again. "Yeah," I say pulling away from him.

The whole exchange took a mere moment, a slight pause in making my way to my seat. It didn't take long enough for my friends to notice it, or if they had they never asked me about it. I never told Dave. We broke up not too long after our first date. When I can still hear the old man's words months later I tell Vince about him. We are lying together on my bed. The darkness highlights the difference between our hands. Not far from us my roommate is asleep and snoring.