

## Payton Highlights – Eccentric on the Bus

At the next stop, the entire bus got up and scrambled for the exit, trying to escape this raving lunatic. As if on cue, he scooped up his bags, increased the volume of his shrieks, and tottered off the bus, tumbling onto the sidewalk. All the CTA passengers reentered the vehicle and gazed dumbfounded at the man from the confines of the bus windows. He was splayed out, facedown on the ground his bags abandoned in the street, his screams muffled by the concrete and a large umbrella grasped securely in one arm.

“There’s a rat on the bus!”

A group of women in the front stand up and scream, and soon everyone is on their feet, hopping about and searching the floor for the rodent. The light from the windows is completely blocked, and it becomes eerily dark in the bus. I am up on my feet too, but I stand in the aisle in a trance-like state, wondering what was the cause for this man’s odd behavior. Amidst all the chaos, I feel a small piece of paper slip into my hand, followed by a roundish object. I look up in surprise, but no one around me is watching for a reaction. Perplexed, I open the note. It reads: DON’T LET THEM TAKE IT. FIND ME.

Frederic passed his bus stop by without a second glance. It was at Frederic’s stop that a certain gentleman boarded the bus, dressed as though he were heading to some formal event such as an opera or Oratorio, certainly not the garb one would expect on a sunny 70-degree day. This man, in passing every person on the bus, gave the formalities of greeting that are customary of the host at a party. It was as if he had spawned from a time shift marked 400 years in the past. Yet, possibly the strangest event of the evening was that not a single person on the bus reacted with any degree of astonishment at the arrival or formality of their new riding partner. When the formal stranger had made absolutely sure he greeted every bus-going patron, he sat next to Frederic, lifting his fitted slacks as to better situate himself. Upon doing so, he immediately struck a conversation, “Hello, and good evening dear boy!” he said.

Its contents spilled out. Flood of water that sent the women skittering. It swept up the crinkled bags of chips, drowned flimsy newspaper, soaked the passengers’ dingy socks. After the rush finally ended, the huddled mass sat shivering in a pool of her chilled waters. Then came the shouts. Not of the people – the sound floated from her stuffed backpack until it clung unto the seats and rails, unrelenting. They were deafened by her father’s howls, her mother’s voice that clawed their eardrums. Out came from the backpack her every trouble, her every trial. Her crooked teeth. Broken wings of her ignored dreams. Then leapt out memories of prettier things. Her sweet pink quilt, only slightly tattered. Her brother’s glorious smile, illuminating the dark. They stood

mystified. It was her soul that filled the shaky bus and made their eyes glow. Someone reached out just to touch, but it was gone.

She heads straight for me, I have been cornered. She immediately begins talking to me, asking questions like, how old are you? Where's your school? And what's your name?

Now, this isn't a talk show, so I give short, clipped sounding responses of one or two words. She doesn't lay off for a while though, and when she does, she gets this satisfied look on her face, like she's found out what she wanted to find out.

Today as I was on the bus returning home from school I believe that I may have encountered one of the most insane me I've ever seen in my entire life. You see, trying to avoid social contact and interaction with any of the other civilians I decided to take my seat in the rear of the bus. However, not too much longer after an amazingly frail man made his appearance and gave the illusion that all of his bolts were screwed tightly. Well, I must say that is would be considered one of the few times I have been incorrect.

He looked at me when he said this, and there was some type of electricity that bound our gazes for a split second. It paralyzed my mouth and brain, ail could do was nod in agreement to what he said. He was putting his bag on the floor, and took out a small, red book with a gold cross on the spine. He started reading a page he had saved from a previous reading. Very suddenly, this man stood up and started preaching. I jumped a little in my seat, it surprised me so.