

task #1 complete.

she has Polish toast + jam to keep her grounded & makes it to the bus on time, 'suited & booted' as they say. (although standing at the bus stop she realises she has forgotten to put on deodorant.) *[no, happy reader, we are not making this up to sound like a commercial for a specific brand. it really happened this way.]*

writing on the bus, she giggles slightly, taking some comfort in the amusement value of the almost planned nature of this catastrophe.

writing about herself in the third person eases the nervousness slightly, makes her feel less awkward, more professional.

waiting for her second bus, she notices her hair is still a bit wet, despite the quick flash with the hair-dryer-she-hardly-ever-uses. she worries this will count against her; personal appearance and first impressions are quintessential. her bus is due to get in well before the appointed time. she could use the hand dryer in the toilets. but, with no brush, no gel, this could be a worse disaster.

she gets on the second bus & picks up a free paper, which is what people do on their way to work. the travesties of yesterday confront her: Baghdad + Karbala, Quetta & Manila. & suddenly, she is again embarrassed to be American, to have been travelling yesterday, this most holiest/bloodiest of days, holding an American passport. *[she never flaunts it + in fact often holds the passport in airport queues so that other passengers cannot see her American-ness. but that is another story...]*

while she writes, two Muslim young women chirpily get on the bus & sit down almost opposite her. one picks up the free paper on the seat & their mood visibly changes. one girl seems very upset & they move to the back of the bus, she assumes to be away from prying eyes.

she is from the United States but she is not sure she is American. besides, as her Canadian cousins like to point out, America is a continent not a country. but today, with george bush's reference to 'fine allies winning the war on terrorism', without any reference to the new scores of dead + grieving, nevermind the hundreds of thousands terrorised by global capitalism - today "America" turns her stomach. from the governmental policies on high to the head-in-the-sand consumer-on-the-street.

she finishes her writing and looks up to see she has arrived. with just enough time to buy deodorant + nip into the loo to apply it. she checks her hair in the mirror & it doesn't look great, but it doesn't look wet.



she is ready to spend half her day's wages on a blouse for tomorrow & she finds a couple of options, but the shop is shutting. she heads to the station but can't find the stand, so she opts for a different bus combo. the queue is too long & it fills just shy of her position, which fucks up her plan to catch the last little bus home. the windows of the first bus are so dirty she begins to feel claustrophobic & the next rattles so hard at each stop to make her chest hurt. she has travelled almost 3 hours to & from. so often the staunch defender of public transport, heart & head are reduced to jelly at the end of the day.

day two: structural adaptations

1. wear silly underpants
2. Polish toast with Californian art marmalade (stoking up her reserve of Los Angelina gusto + also reminding her of the bits to be proud about. come to think of it, the Polish toast is from an art event as well.
3. use mascara
4. arrange to meet someone after work
5. take the little bus + train (which means only walking to the end of her drive instead of 5 minutes around the corner. a much calmer way to start the morning - examining the moss sprouting between the bricks, listening to the birds; instead of rushing down the road to stand in a plastic bus shelter watching the ant-like stream of cars. the train is an altogether more pleasant experience. for starters, its a smoother ride; a better variety of places to sit/stand waiting, including facilities to purchase reading materials +/- or a drinkable cup of coffee, should one desire. there is, of course, a logarithmically increased possibility of delay, given the current state of the British rail system. but certain lines are fairly reliable. this morning, the display boards are out of order, but the man behind the ticket counter tells her 'platform 3. 8:29' she watches the tower blocks & other tall buildings struggle to emerge from the breaking fog. *[our weary traveller feels more like a passenger than a wage slave, sitting writing on the train platform.]* the mere possibility that people are here, at the train station, for purposes other than work or school - setting out for a visit to family, or heading to the airport on holiday - lightens the tone of the place. even though many people are obviously heading to work, maybe it is a special or unusual day, going to a conference or an important meeting.)
6. make sun shine just enough to justify wearing sunglasses entire journey **to work**



she starts her phone calls at the bus stop. suppliers are up this early, but most humans are either sensibly in bed or, like her, en route to work. the rest will have to wait until lunch break.

it feels much colder today, but then again she wears a shorter skirt + no jacket under her coat. this business of working is already becoming a nuisance. she has been invited to a private reception in London next thursday night, which means she will have to leave a little early & miss friday.

the woman she is covering for is meant to return on the monday, but everyone has been rather vague about how long she will be needed. she is already getting lured in & might like to stay on, but the following week she wants to go to Glasgow + is required on the friday in London. besides, the project she has been managing is due to launch in less than 3 weeks.

everything is mostly in order, but there are loose ends that need tidying. which meant that yesterday she spent much of her lunch break sat on bench making calls. (her phone bill is going to be astronomical.) & yesterday, after work, she bought 2 blouses (bringing her total office wardrobe up to 8 pieces of clothing, though they are not entirely mix + match. she has come out today without a jacket because it is grey & she is wearing a brown skirt.)

especially when considered against travel expenses + excess mobile phone charges, it is likely that yesterday's purchases will exceed the day's earnings, after tax has been removed.

shivering, she approaches the train station & heads for the café. she sits at a warm table for a few minutes to write + defrost her hands, before making her way across the bridge to the platform. too cold to stand outside, she nips into the waiting room to stand by the radiator & leans on the counter to write. she finally takes the lid off her coffee & is grateful that her server had added milk, though it is not enough to her liking. she forgot to check. it is bitter but the kind of bitter that isn't eased with sugar. she dons sunglasses & gets on the train.

pulling down her tray table, she discovers a strange wee present: a sign, a gift. candy lovehearts instructing her to "stay cool", "heart desire". she cannot but take it seriously in the midst of such normal madness, so she does what she does and harvests. collects these small candies, not to eat but to savour.

she opted to leave out gloves in favour of a fat book. barely cracking the pages, her pencil has been on fire. a thick-leaded mechanical pencil, given to her by another artist-friend. stiill, carrying reading material comforts her on a deep & indescribable level. as if she is ready for anything.

checks her hair in a bus stop window. looks ok, but then again its rather grimy. zips her coat as far as it will go & heads off to the office.

with an acrid taste in her mouth, new ID card in hand, she enters the building & turns her phone to silent. removing her coat, she heads to the toilet to check her appearance & decide whether to use the clip at her hip or cord around her neck. seems a big deal this morning, but she feels like neither and bags the tag in favour of lipstick.

no one seems to be in yet, so she jots a few notes while she waits for the computer to boot up and is reminded of her friend's casual comment that any organisation is lucky to get a few good hours each day from their employees. she starts to fill in her timesheet; must remember to fax it across to the agency at the end of the day.



she eats yoghurt in the shower. spent a little too long at the email this morning and she needs the hot jet on her aching shoulder for as long as possible. she apologises to the fish in the Colorado (a habit she has from her California days) but tries not to dwell on the ecological impact of her water usage. she knows that recycling can cause more pollution than it is worth and that a lifetime of overtures towards conservation are wiped out in a millisecond at Heathrow airport. notwithstanding, she dries her hair just enough for it not to look wet & picks up the shiny little red starts for her ears. they are not orthodox office wear, but she needs them today; hardly anyone will see them with her hair covering her ears. besides, no one really looks at her anyway. she has decided this is the test of good office wear - looks smart but you won't really remember. stylish but unremarkable. her husband hands over her lunch, joking with her that behind every good woman is a good man. then he goes back to bed.

she carries her new heels in a nondescript plastic bag, wearing another more comfortable pair as back up. she has considered bringing her backpack, but it would spoil the look - it being orange + purple, decorated with cartoon characters + sequins. it just would not do. she is black + white + grey today, but she has an art meeting later so she spices it up with a lime green scarf festooned with pink + olive flowers. it feels a little rebellious.

she paints another coat on her nails at the bus stop, pound coin between her teeth. then checks her watch every 45 seconds. the bus is late. the train is late. the enormous queue at the station moves quickly enough and she discovers she could've bought an all day all transport ticket on the bus, saving the £1 fare into town.

she knows the boss is not in this morning, but she has an important diagram to do. & the minutes. she is afraid of these minutes. but hopefully, with a couple of hours to herself + a recently rearranged office, it will be easier to concentrate. she reminds herself to pick up something from the flower vendor at the station, for the ladies upstairs. 'you didn't need to do that,' she hears them saying. but neither did they have to help her out so much.

[she wants to write about that, the most horrible of days, but she can't bring herself to it yet. be patient, gentle reader, she is new.]



having **again** spent too long at email, her long luxurious soak turns into a ten-minute dunk **with** hair pulled back. she has been waking long before the alarm, [*but that may be another story*]. her husband has offered to make her lunch again (under the guise that getting up with her will provide him with the early start he desires). she has to rouse him twice but he finally complies. (yesterday's sandwich was particularly tasty.) also, **she** needs to return the mini spy camera since it won't work with her computer, so he kindly **finds** the receipt & then goes back to bed.

standing at **the** bus stop, she examines the rose bushes, brutally pruned & just now starting to **burst** back into life. she feels in these few short days, she has noticed a change - the buds **opening** into tiny waxy leaves.

yesterday was not bad. she is definitely less anxious this morning. she is doing her best. she is pretty sure the temp before her bailed or they asked for someone different. she must get a small hand lotion for her bag today. she thought she would get some yesterday, but lunch was preoccupied with the post office + phone calls.

trains are being diverted today because of a failure (a specific failure today, but - it has to be said - caused by that greater system failure called neglect.) various justifiably annoyed people harass train representatives, with **the usual** combination of disgust + panic: needing to shift platforms, shift arrangements, shift the blame.

she leaves the warm waiting room to see the same man standing in almost the same position on the platform, talking to the same women on the same bench. at first she feels a déjà vu, but then remembers this is not mysticism; just **routine**. she thinks, if this job were permanent, she might eventually talk with them, making acquaintance. there is a spare seat at their table on the train. she wonders what they do, where they work, where they come from. he is in a suit but has head shaved + 2 visible piercings, a leather overcoat. does he go to rock clubs or fetish parties at the weekend?



the clock occasionally does not go off and, since her husband tends to sleep through it, she's not sure if it has been working properly. she sets a back up alarm on her mobile phone, but gets up a good 2 hours before it is set to go off. her computer is on the blink, so she cannot entertain herself with email.

she decides to eat cereal in the bath in order to extend both the soak time & also to eat a bit more for breakfast. shoving a bit of toast down her neck so early in the morning has meant she is starving by late morning.

she stays in the bath almost too long and rushes to dress, grab a yoghurt + some cashews. she could not be bothered to fully rouse her husband, so she will have to do without one of his lovely sandwiches. she does insist that he at least open his eyes to check her outfit before she leaves. he mutters 'sexy' & drifts away, but this is not the answer she was looking for today. the light blue skirt is a little risky - still a suit, but she worries her stockings might be too sheer. the skirt is not that short but above the knee - plus she hasn't shaved her legs in months. she goes with the sparkly clip in her hair but decides against the blood red stone at the neck in favour of a tiny flower-like pendant she got in Rajasthan.

she has yet to have long enough at lunchtime to get hand lotion, but the situation is getting desperate. between the cold outside (she cannot write well in gloves) + the strange, dry air in the office + all the handling of paper - her hands are a mess.

she hopes today will be calmer. she hopes she can take a nice long lunch today. writing on the train platform, she keeps seeing flecks in the air that look a lot like snowflakes. the customer information screens are still out of order.

she thinks about the first day - filling her little water bottle at the cooler, hearing the glug glug glug. standing up to see a man glaring at her. unsure if the slight disdain is because she's making too much noise or using more than her fair share.

she fell asleep on the couch again last night. exhausted from the schedule, she is also still recovering from a heavy weekend + probably also from events at work on Friday that precipitated such abandon.



and with that, she is released. well, almost, since she has been offered a 6-month post, covering someone's adoption leave. she spends much of the train journey doing sums, trying to figure if she should accept. and, if so, what she should negotiate for.

head swimming with figures, she is still drawn back to the benchmark of her daily rate as a freelance. there is an astronomical difference and she tries to put from her mind the drastic pay cut this implies. not that she worked every day. or that she got paid for everything she did. but still, had she wanted, she could have booked up 3 out of 5 days with relative ease. she never really made the effort. or, not for some time. work came to her. she could pick & choose. so why?

why, indeed, would she barter all that spare time, flexibility + tax breaks for a much longer working day, being line managed + less money?

having said that, the wage bracket she is being offered is commendable (within the context of the salaried world) and especially after just 7 days of "proving herself".

she took advise off someone else in the office & could tell they thought it a grand opportunity, a slight envy thinly veiled. the department clearly wanted to retain her; they remind her of the growth potential, especially given current circumstances.

the assumption is, of course, that she is looking for full time employment in the first place. the assumption is, of course, that any temp would be pleased to be offered a real job.

