Mark heehaws into the bus terminal lobby and nobody looks up. A tubby guy is pondering a soda machine in the back. He kneels over a toolbox that’s laid out on the floor, holding all his wrenches. He’s humming some kind of tune all slow and soulful like. He doesn’t turn around, just sways his hips back and forth.

Mark sits down on a bench in the center of the room. He looks around at the bus terminal’s emptiness. Lines of twisted metal benches. Ping. Some old woman in a flowery dress hobbles in on a walker with a built-in metal basket that has something in it.

Mark checks his watch.

The old lady oozes between aisles like molasses, until she comes to Mark’s. She lets a sigh and creaks down next to him. Mark is surrounded by empty seats.

“Mind if I sit here, young man?” she says.

“You already are,” says Mark.

“Thank you.”

She sighs and pulls her walker closer to the bench, inch by inch. She sighs and stretches her twitching fists out in front of her, like an excited child in slow motion. She gets some cylindrical thing out of the metal basket and sits it in her lap, with a sigh.

“Well, William. Forty-one years and here we are.” She pats the cylinder. “Been a long road. Oh, sometimes I can’t believe we made it as long as we did. All those times we’d argue. All those times we’d split up and get back together, like we couldn’t live apart. Ha!” She yips.

A big screen off the ceiling scrolls through the bus times and serial numbers. He holds his watch in front of his face and looks back and forth.

“I think my watch is off,” he says.

“What’cha waiting for, young man?”

“Thirty sixty-seven,” says Mark.
“Hmm.” She strokes her chin fuzz. “You’re about half an hour late. You missed that one. Hey, now that I notice, can I ask you a question?”
Mark drops his head back, ponging into the solid metal head rail along the top of the bench. He groans.
“Why are you dressed like that?” she says.
Mark massages his orange hair and looks down at himself. “I’m a clown.”
She gets a look of intense concentration for several moments, then grunts.
The tubby guy slams the soda machine closed and starts launching his wrenches into the metal toolbox, one at a time.
Mark grimaces and his nose falls off and rolls under the bench.
Tubby slams his toolbox shut. The million keys on his belt fanfare as he strolls over, still humming to the aisles, and slams down onto the bench across from Mark and the lady. He lays out like a washboard and starts bobbing his foot, his hands under his head.
The soda machine rumbles and hocks a soda. It spins out onto the tile floor and collides with a metal bench leg, dead. Tubby nods at the ceiling.
Mark squirts something from an eye-dropper around the rim of his nose. Plants it.
“I still remember the poems you used to write, Will,” says Lady. “You were so talented.”
Mark shifts in his seat.
Tubby sticks his head up and hums, “Where you from, man?”
Mark stares at him.
He just hangs his head there. “Oh, my bad.” He stops humming.
“I was trying to summate some infinitesimal derivatives.”
Tubby pulls out a legal pad and writes up at it. “Huh. What for?”
“My graduation.”
Lady says, “You’re going to love the redwoods, William.” She pats the cylinder in her lap. It’s a lampshade.
“Ain’t you missed your classes?” Tubby says.
The soda machine rocks and spits another soda across the floor.
Tubby nods.
“No. It’s an online college.”
“Huh.”
Mark glances up at the screen and fiddles with the knobs on his
watch. After a while he says, “Be right back,” tries to scratch his nose, and stands up. He walks out the sliding door, which makes a garbled bong sound. His shoes heehaw as he goes.

The wind flaps his frilly shirt. Mark bundles up in his own arms and sulks across a slushy street with all kinds of arrows and signs and lines painted on it. He heehaws into an old, wooden gazebo, huddles in one corner, and lights a smoke. He does the dance with his shoulders around his ears.

A car honks in the distance. The snowy wind gasps. Mark checks his watch. Beyond an open chain-link fence, a graveyard of drunken buses stare at him. Clanging and pinging sounds echo between the terminal and an apartment complex next to it.

A shifty-eyed man in a trench coat tramples into the gazebo. He glances up at the sun hiding behind the gray. “Can I bum one?”

Mark digs out a smoke and hands it to him.

“Please and thank you. Hey, you ever heard the story of Diogenes?” Trenchie says between drags. “So, Alexander the Great, right, he shows up at Corinth after he conquers Athens. He’s doing his whole victory march through the streets kind of thing. People are bowing. Anyway, there’s this homeless guy, Diogenes, laying on the side of the road. Just lays there. The whole march stops.

“A guard walks up to Diogenes and asks him what he thinks he’s doing. Tells him to bow—that was a big deal at the time, see. They’d flay peasants for less. So, the guard tells him he should be afraid. He should bow before his king. Diogenes just asks if Alex is a good king or a bad king. Well, he’s a good king, of course. So Diogenes asks, ‘Why should I be afraid of a good king?’”

Trenchie puffs spastically. “Well, Alexander overheard this, and walks over and offers Diogenes whatever he wants—a house, money, women, men—whatever. Diogenes just says, ‘You can take two steps to the right. You’re blocking my sun.’ And Alexander the Great bowed to this homeless guy, Diogenes. Man.”

“You’re…welcome,” says Mark.

A sick engine coughs to life but gives up. Mark looks over at the bus graveyard. He takes a last puff that blows away before he can see it. Trenchie starts to wave as Mark scampers through the open gate like the ground is lava.

A woman with a spiky haircut and huge breasts is standing on a platform and leaning under the white hood of an old bus. She bangs
around throwing bits of metal over her shoulder into the snow and grumbling at the engine.

“You want some help?” asks Mark.
“Hand me that.” She sticks out her arm, pointing at a pile of snow. Mark just stands there trying to scratch his nose.
“The wrench!”
There is no wrench. “Uh, sure. Hold on,” Mark says.

Mark heehaws back into the terminal. Lady’s there and Tubby’s humming on the bench with his legal pad. There’s a graveyard of dented sodas in the floor. Mark asks Tubby to borrow his toolbox. Tubby flings up a silent thumbs-up.

“Which one do you need?” Mark hoists the heavy metal box onto the platform at Busty’s feet.

“Mmm… a two-eighty. Preferably adjustable.” Busty emerges from under the hood and leans down to the box between Mark’s gloved hands. She locks eyes with him and stares for a second. Then shrugs and says, “Don’t know why I’m surprised.” Her face is speckled with black soot and grease. She makes the grease look pretty.

“You always dress like that?” as she gets back to it.
“No,” says Mark.

The buses are like benches. Rows and rows. Some rusted out. Melted paint. Some without doors. Some without hardtops and a double-decker without seats.

“Don’t look like it, but they all run,” Busty says.
Mark looks at her. “You fixed all of ‘em?”
“Yep.” She throws a stripped bolt into the snow.

Later, Mark heehaws back into the terminal and sets down, himself then Tubby’s toolbox. He gives him another thumbs-up.

Lady says, “I never said it, but when your eyes got worse near the end, I was angry.”

“Lady, you need to tell me who you’re talking to,” says Tubby. “Oh, and you missed your bus again, man,” from under his legal pad.

Mark is a sinking, harpooned whale. He thrashes into the bench, smearing an arc of white makeup, a brochure crumpled in his fist.

“Too many candles,” Lady sighs, “no surprise, really. Why always candles, I’ll never know. Good Lord, it wasn’t the eighteen hundreds!”

Mark is one with the bench. The soda machine rumbles and spits another soda across the room that crashes into the others like bowling pins.
“Got that.” Tubby swivels upright, tossing the legal pad into the back of Mark’s head.

“…Why?”

“Solved,” Tubby declares.

Mark turns his smeared face around and looks at the pad. It’s a detailed series of calculations titled Probability of soda from (y) stopping at point (x).

“You’re not going to fix it?”

“I ain’t work here.”

“So you broke it.”

“Hell no, I ain’t break it. The hell would I go around breaking Coke machines for? Man, I’m making lemonade.”

“This is good,” says Mark.

Tubby puffs up.

Lady says, “Do you have any family coming to see you graduate, young man?”

Mark smears his face back inside the bench. “No. I mean, there was just my aunt, but…she—”

The two of them stare at Mark like gravestones.

“No friends?” she asks.

“I don’t know what to say.” He sighs.

There’s a blong and Trenchie tramples in, slapping off snow. He stops mid-step and stares at the wreckage of unopened sodas in the floor. Looks back and forth at the rumpled clown on the bench. He grins.

He looms menacingly over the three of them. “You guys wanna buy some deathsticks?”

“You ain’t wanna sell us any deathsticks,” Tubby says over his shoulder.

Trenchie erupts. “Haha! This guy got it.” He leaps over the back of the bench and parks next to Obi Wan. “Got mugged, huh,” he says to Mark. “Shoulda’ asked, dude. I know a couple o’ moves.”

Mark turns and sits up with half his face dangling. It’s completely dark through the windows. “You been out there this whole time?”

Trenchie says, “Nah. I was talking to this chick out there, dude, she had huge…”

Lady glares at him.

“…arms.”

There’s a boing and a clown saunters in.
Mark's face lights up. He says to the clown, “My luck. Is there any chance graduation'll get delayed?”

The clown looks offended. “What graduation?” He shoves past and disappears into a bathroom.

Mark shakes his head. He decides to just sit down.

“What a dick,” says Trenchie.

Mark gets in his pocket and slips out an old Polaroid with cross-fold lines through it.

“Ma'am,” Mark says to Lady, “tell me about William.”

She smiles. She lays her hand on the lampshade and lifts it up. There's a small urn underneath. She sighs and hands it to Mark. He takes it with both hands.

“Wonderful man. Wonderful. We're on our way to the Redwood Forest. William went there as a boy and always talked about it. It brought him such peace. So, I intend to spread him there.”

Tubby begins to hum an old folk song to which Trenchie snaps the beat.

Mark looks at the urn. This dull, red thing with flowery engravings. That's all it is. After a minute, Lady asks if he's okay.

Mark just says, “I think she is.”

“May I? Your aunt?”

Mark nods.

Lady holds the picture close, and smiles. “She's laughing.”

“Yeah.” And Mark sees her.

“She looks happy. You know, dear,” Lady tells him, “she'll always be your aunt. We can never lose their love.”

There's a kerschlock. Trenchie's drinking a soda from the floor.

“What?”

There's a blung and Busty stomps in covered in white snow and engine grease. She wipes her blackened face on a dirty cloth.

“Got old Bessie running,” she says. “Just about to start my shift. Anybody going to New Mexico?”

Everyone gets quiet. Mark holds up his hand. Lady smiles at him. Tubby raises an eyebrow. Busty's wiping off her fingers. Trenchie sips.

“Ya'll thinking what I'm thinking?” Tubby asks.

Lady nods. “William won't mind.”

“I da never mastered in physics if nobody come to my graduation,” says Tubby. “How 'bout you, slim?”

“Sweet! Road trip,” Trenchie says, “I'm taking these.” And stuffs
armfuls of cans into his trench coat.
“We better fix your face,” Tubby says.
Mark begins to smile.