

Fitus Pool

“What if you should decide that you don't want me there in your life and that you don't want me there by your side?”

Mr. Pool just heard the lyrics from the bus driver's radio. He was always sleepy every morning. As soon as Mr. Pool took a seat, he fell asleep right away. Even the loud music would not wake him up. The bus driver was a musicaholic, and he forced his passengers to share his interest. Most of the time Mr. Pool would not pay attention to the music, but this morning the music struck him.

“Brian, what is this song?” asked Mr. Pool.

“Oh Fitus, you finally ask me such a question. How much I hope someone will notice my music. It's one of my favorite songs. Its name is ‘What if.’ Guess what? The vocal got on my bus yesterday. You should see how cool he is.”

Brian liked to chat with his passengers, especially Mr. Pool. Although Mr. Pool often closed his eyes, Brian knew Mr. Pool sometimes pretended to be asleep to avoid conversations. Every time he saw Mr. Pool, even on holidays, Mr. Pool always wore a perfectly straight business suit and behaved properly. Besides, Mr. Pool always sat behind Brian. Even though the seat was occupied, he would stand and wait. But, Brian felt that despite his set behaviors Mr. Pool's mind was stirring, and that something would burst someday.

Out of his habit, Brian greeted the girl getting on the bus. “Good morning, Veronica. You look great today.”

“Thanks, Brian. Hope it'll be a great day, too.” Veronica said. “You got more passengers today. There's only one empty seat.” Veronica walked to the only vacancy next to Mr. Pool. She sat down and took out her MP3 player. From her bag a flyer slipped out with the MP3 player, dropping on the floor near Mr. Pool's feet. He stooped to pick it up for her. On the flyer he noticed that there was a concert tonight at Roseland, near his apartment. ‘I haven't went to a concert for a long time. Those kids look like me when I was a teen, so happy and so passionate. How nice to be young!’

When he lifted up his head and turned to the girl, Mr. Pool was stunned by her beauty. He hadn't looked at her while she sat down. Besides, he found an astonishing thing. Mr. Pool stared at her, wondering with mouth wide open. ‘How come she looks like Natalie? Natalie doesn't have twin sisters. Who is she?’

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Veronica felt strange about this man. “Is there something on my face?”

Mr. Pool was still immersing in his thoughts and didn't answer. He looked funny when he was thinking so that Veronica couldn't help snickering. Her laugh drew Mr. Pool's attention back and made him embarrassed.

“Sorry for staring at you. Oh, your paper.” He gave it to her, flustered.

The girl was in a pink chiffon dress with small floral prints and a hat with stylish badges. Her hair was long and smooth and jet-black. Sometimes, Mr. Pool smelled a fragrance, not too strong but light and refreshing. She seemed in a good mood. Humming softly, she tapped out the rhythm on her laps. When the bus turned at the corner, Veronica tilted close to him. Mr. Pool felt their distance closer and felt his heart beating faster.

“Do you want to go to my concert?” asked Veronica, but before Mr. Pool answered, Veronica cried out, “A park! It’s a nice day to stroll in the park and lie down on the meadow, isn’t it?” She acted like she took the route for the first time.

“Yes, it’s a pity that we should work today,” Mr. Pool said. ‘That is just a *park*. Maybe she never goes to one.’

“It’s you that should work, not me. Anyway, Veronica Grey.” She stretched out her right hand.

“Fitus Pool.” Mr. Pool stretched his hand, too, but Veronica turned away and said, “Sorry, I don’t shake hands with people.”

She was totally different from Natalie. He must be bleary-eyed. Natalie wouldn’t say rude words and wouldn’t be childish. She was humming louder and louder. However, he didn’t hate her. ‘She’s a natural singer.’

Then the bus passed by a theater, a mall, a post office, several bookstores and shops. Those marble buildings had stood where they were for eighty years. On and off government would repair them because they were historical buildings with the Baroque style. Veronica seemed to like the buildings very much. She pointed here and there, looked with amazement and burst out “Gee” or “Wow” while Mr. Pool showed no interest on his routine bus route. After the bus crossed the bridge, they entered the new district of the city.

“Fitus, have you visited that new restaurant? You should try it. Their lobster is heavenly delicious,” Brian said when the bus passed a restaurant. It was between an Italian restaurant and an Indian restaurant. Food on 45 Street was delicious, and the price was favorable. Mr. Pool sometimes had lunch with his clients here.

“I’ll try it next week.” Mr. Pool said and then was silent.

Usually the only sound on the bus was Brian’s music. Other passengers either slept or read their books. None of them made a noise. Sometimes there might be murmurs. But Veronica broke the silence this morning. She sang, she laughed and she talked loudly. Veronica took off her earphones, and she was singing with Brian’s music. ‘Maybe I should frown at her. But I can’t bear to do that at Natalie’s face.’

“Can I ask you a question?” Her voice suddenly popped out.

“Sure.” Mr. Pool was excited and wondered the question she might ask. ‘Why, is she curious about me? She’s weird, but somehow attractive. Oh, God. What’s wrong with me? I’m interested in *another* woman.’

She found him wearing a ring on his ring finger. “Hey, you’re married. But you keep your eye on me all the time. That’s not good, Mr. Pool.”

“Please don’t misunderstand. You look like my wife. I just want to figure out the coincidence.”

“Maybe that’s your sub-consciousness, illusion, or something else.”

As the bus was about to cross 52 Street, Brian slammed on the brake. Some female passengers screamed, which woke up sleeping passengers with shock. Brian pulled up the bus and apologized, “Sorry, a dog dashed out. It is safe. Anybody hurt?” “We’re OK,” one of the passengers answered. The bus was on the road again.

Mr. Pool also woke up. He forgot when he fell asleep, and he found that the seat next to him was empty. He was puzzled because he didn’t remember when Veronica left.

“Brian, did you see Ms. Grey?”

“No, who is she? Your secret lover? Tell me and I promise not to tell it to your wife.”

“Well, forget it. Maybe nothing happened. Maybe it was a dream.”

Mr. Pool felt upset. The dream was so real. He thought the girl might make the commute to work a little bit different. It might be his underlying desire to have changes. However, the time of change was not now, not today.

Then Mr. Pool got off the bus and headed for his office. Water spouted from the fountain in the square as usual. People walked quickly and passed him as usual. There were men and women lining up to get on Brian’s bus every day. The traffic was heavy every day. The lofty skyscrapers blocked half of the sky, Mr. Pool’s sky. Taking a deep breath, Mr. Pool walked to one of the business buildings and returned to his normal life.