

THE NO. 3 BUS

SEBASTIAN GERVAISE

Silver Key Award Winner
2020 DC Metro Scholastic Art &
Writing Awards Scholastic Awards
Competition -*Writopia Lab*

Sebastian Gervase
Fiction; Jonathan Volk
Great Books Summer Program
July 29, 2019

The No. 3 Bus

Emily Nicolas was plain, and the town of Mayfield knew it. From the top of her dull brown head of hair to the toes of her black flats, she was plain. She faded into the crowd, and if you were walking through the halls of Mayfield High and saw her, you would forget she was even there. She was a nobody, another faceless, nameless student you could find on a brochure. At 16, Emily was not tall but she wasn't short either. She found herself in the comfortable in-between, as was much the same with most everything about her. She was not quite beautiful. Her skin was fair, though with a pallor. It was as if she had all of the life almost completely drained out of her, with only a drop keeping her alive.

Emily was used to being ignored. Both of her parents worked in the city, about half an hour away to the west by bus, and they were gone before she woke up in the morning. She would walk herself to school and if it rained, she would catch the No. 3 bus that pulled up right to the front of the gymnasium. After coming home, she would proceed to eat alone, work, shower, and be in bed before her parents came home. She never once complained, and, in fact, much preferred to be alone. It gave her time to think, as it was giving her now, sitting alone on the cold, metal bus stop in the pouring rain, waiting for Hal and the No. 3 bus to take her home.

3:38 PM and the bus was now 8 minutes late, she noted, looking down at her watch.

A soft rustle to her right caused her to whip her head. A bearded man was sitting next to her, in a khaki green slicker. He had the hood pulled up, and, along with the awning of the bench, deep shadows almost completely shrouded his face from her view. Upon noticing this, Emily looked away, her hands tightening on the book she held in her hands.

THE NO. 3 BUS

SEBASTIAN GERVAISE

“Rainy out, isn’t it, Miss Nicolas,” the man said, in a voice that scratched like a grater on polished wood.

The sudden attention surprised her. Nobody talked to her except Hal, the driver of the No. 3, and a few people at school, but she was not quite out of her element. Accustomed to simple conversations like these, with people who talked for the sake of talking, to fill the emptiness between them and their companion, not to connect, she stiffly pushed out a simple “Yes, sir” in response.

She glanced down at her wrist to find her watch had stopped. It still read 3:38 PM. She tapped at the glass front briefly before losing interest. She would need to get it fixed; it was a gift from her grandmother anyways.

Something occurred suddenly to Emily after a minute or so of silence. Turning sharply to the man, she asked, “How do you know my name?”

He smiled. “I know many things, Miss Nicolas.” Emily felt a shiver travel down her spine. The cold of the autumn night began to reach its icy tendrils out to her, rustling through the dried leaves and the slackening curtains of rain. She pulled her sweater closer to her.

“What bus do you take, Miss Nicolas,” the man asked, her name rolling off his tongue as smoothly as the rain off the roof. Emily didn’t like it.

“Th-the No. 3, Sir,” she said. “And yourself?”

“The first one to come and the last one to go. They all go the same way, same as you. It doesn’t matter which one I take, so why not take all. Wouldn’t you agree, Miss Nicolas?” Emily did not respond, choosing instead to focus on the expanse of road stretching ahead of her. The man was clearly affected, though in what way Emily did not know.

THE NO. 3 BUS

SEBASTIAN GERVAISE

There was nothing but the rain on the road and on the roof of the bus stop. Emily watched the streams of water trickle down the posts, before rolling away into the storm drain. The silence stifled her, the space now being occupied by not just she, but now she and the man. It was an unfamiliar situation.

The No. 6 bus rolled by, spraying a fine mist of water up into the air. An idea sprang to her mind. The No. 6 didn't stop at Mayfield High but it did at the Kennedy Mall, only a 15-minute walk. The sun hung low in the sky, releasing its final rays that filtered through the hazy dusk that quickly fell. She would make it before dusk if she left now. She stood quickly, brushing her skirt off and reaching for her bag. Emily turned her head quickly, glancing at the man to make sure he wasn't looking. She took a deep breath and proceeded to walk.

Emily made it five steps before a powerful hand clasped her upper arm and yanked her violently back.

"Let go!" she shrieked, struggling against the grip.

"I'd hurry to catch that bus if I were you, Miss Nicolas," he stated, dragging her closer to him.

She looked at the empty road. "What bus? The bus is late! I don't understand. Please, let g-" She was nose to nose to the man and for the first time, she caught sight of his face. She stared straight into pools of black, arresting, deep; reeling her in. The longer she looked, the harder it was to look away. "Please let go," she whispered, unable to blink.

"I would hurry to catch that bus if I were you, Emily," he whispered in that awful, grating voice. His face split suddenly into a broad grin that didn't quite reach his eyes. Adrenaline pumping through her veins, Emily pulled with all her might until the hand loosened before slipping away. The clasp on the

THE NO. 3 BUS

SEBASTIAN GERVAISE

delicate iron-chain watch shattered from the effort and went tumbling to the ground, landing facing up, a spider web crack obscuring the hands. She stumbled into the road, clutching at her arm.

“Help! Somebody help! There’s a man-” she turned to face the man but saw no one. Her eyes darted left and right, trying to spot movement in the bushes around the school. After a moment, she cautiously crept back to her seat. There, she found a square box, made from polished black wood where the man had sat. Emily eyed it suspiciously.

Curiosity got the better of her. Grabbing the box, she held it up to her face. At first, it seemed to have no clear way to open it but, upon closer inspection, a tiny portion of the crack between the lid and the base was wider, allowing a fingernail to be slipped in. She chose her thumb to sacrifice, and after all, she could put more leverage into it. Steadying the box with her right hand she pressed hard into the opening until she felt something give. A click and a snap, and the lid popped open.

The box was lined with a deep red velour, smooth and supple. In the lid was a mirror inlaid with pearl, which winked and twinkled at her in the light. At the very center stood a small figurine, facing Emily. She looked closely, and was surprised to find, instead of the traditional swan or ballerina, it was a girl. There was nothing in particular to note about her, what with her long straight hair falling to her waist and lidded eyes. She looked like she could be anybody else. A soft tinkling began to flow from within the box, high and light. It was the kind of tune that would pound in your head long after it ended. The melody struck her as familiar and as she puzzled the thought, she examined the girl. “That’s odd,” she thought, staring intensely at the rotating figurine. “Why would anyone put a figurine so plain and forgettable inside this gorgeous music box?” She shifted slightly, angling it more into the dim light. The tune tinkled softly and soon she began to hum.

THE NO. 3 BUS

SEBASTIAN GERVAISE

Emily realized what it was in her third round of humming along. “Oh my god,” she whispered. “It’s the school anthem.”

It was indeed the anthem of Mayfield High, the one she sang every morning in History. She began to feel uneasy.

Something caught her eye, and for a moment, Emily could not place it. But then -- there -- she saw it again. A glint off of something metallic on the figurine. She peered closer trying to see what it was. It only took her a moment to see. Emily scrambled back into the bench, the box slipping from her hands as if she had burned herself and watched as the mirrored lid snapped away. The tune of the box cut off suddenly, leaving her in oppressive silence. She should have seen it from the start, from the amount she didn’t see. The girl, bland and nondescript could be anyone, anyone at all, but the iron chain watch dangling from the figurine’s wrist made it only one person. That person was Emily. The figurine was her, forgettable and plain. She saw, but she didn’t perceive, just like everyone did with her. She could be anybody, anybody at all.

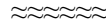
At that moment, reality hit her. Emily suddenly, more than anything, hated being alone, but now she was alone on an empty metal bench in front of an empty school. Nobody could see her or hear her pleas for help. Goosebumps raised on the surface of her skin. Despite this solitude, she didn’t feel alone. Something wasn’t right. She felt something, someone, somewhere. Eyes, watching her.

The tune started again, whispering through the air. “Vigere Aude” it taunted her, “Dare to Thrive.” Slowly, she stood up and crept over to the box. Bending down, she lifted the broken mirror and gazed into it. She saw her own lidded eyes and her own straight hair. She saw herself but she saw a nobody. She saw a ghost. She lowered the mirror, disturbed, only to look up and see the man in the green slicker. She tried to shut her eyes, but it was too late. She was already transfixed by the pools of black. A black that seemed

THE NO. 3 BUS

SEBASTIAN GERVAISE

endless as time, a black that expanded and contracted. A black that reached out to surround her in its cold embrace. She hardly felt the mirror splinter in her hands as her body seized. Her mouth fell open in a silent scream.

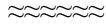


Hal Bedstock, the driver of the No. 3 bus, pulled up to the gymnasium of Mayfield High at exactly 3:38 PM, 8 minutes past the normal time of 3:30. The rain had caused back-ups up by Exit 7. He expected Emily Nicolas to be waiting for him as she always did when the weather got bad. He felt sorry for her. Nobody else seemed to notice her, only Hal. Hal prided himself on being the kindest bus driver in Mayfield, and though many parents had sought him out to thank him, he felt that he only needed the validation of Emily Nicolas, the plain and quiet girl whom nobody saw. She was the only student from Mayfield High to take the No. 3. He eased the doors open, a greeting on the tip of his tongue, but today, nobody was waiting.

“Odd,” he murmured, frowning to himself. He wondered where she could be; Emily never walked home in the rain. He decided to clamber down from his seat to make sure everything was alright. Stepping onto the platform, he immediately noticed Emily’s watch lying on his the pavement, the clasp broken and the glass face shattered. Picking it up, he noticed it read 3:38 PM. “Odd how things work like that sometimes,” Hal thought. A flash of green caught his eye and he noticed a dry khaki green slicker on the bench. Hal did not investigate; after all, he had other stops he was already late for. He sighed and climbed back into the driver’s seat. Hal took one last look at the bus stop. “Poor kid. Hope she got home alright,” he said to himself before speeding away into the oncoming night.

THE NO. 3 BUS

SEBASTIAN GERVASE



Emily Nicolas was plain, from the top of her head to the tips of her toes. She was a nobody, just another face in the crowd. Perhaps that's why when Emily Nicolas disappeared on the night of November 5th, 1958, nobody noticed.



About the Author: Sebastian Gervase, age 15, is a student in ninth grade at the Maret School in Washington, D.C. He loves all things within the creative realm: reading, writing, and the visual and performing arts. He has been in two professional shows in the DC area — *Oliver!* at Arena Stage and *Matilda: The Musical* at Olney Theatre Center — as well as many shows at his school and in theater training programs. He takes voice and piano lessons, sings in his school's *a cappella* group, and squeezes in several dance classes each week.

