

A short story by Caitlin Flatman

I remember a day when I still went to school, it was like any other day, and although looking back the story is quite mundane, to a young me it was the most nerve-racking experience ever. At that age I found a lot of things nerve-racking, I was just a generally anxious person, but that day stood out because I felt worse than I had ever felt. Of course most year 7's would feel horrible in that position, I guess that's kind of how that age is, you're in a new school, you don't want to mess up or break a single rule, so the day I couldn't get to school was the worst day of my life.

I got up, like I did everyday at the sound of my alarm, and got ready for my day. I got dressed, ate breakfast, brushed my teeth, did my hair, washed my face and packed my bag. When I was done I still had 5 minutes before I had to leave for my bus, and when the clock finally hit 7:45 I knew it was time to leave. I walked down to the bus stop and sat on the little bus and waited. I kept waiting, saw cars go past, my parents leave for work, but still no bus. It wasn't unusual for my bus to be late, I mean we lived in the middle of nowhere, but it would always arrive and get me to school on time. But the longer I waited the stronger the sick feeling in my stomach got. I would always feel that whenever I was nervous, like my stomach was suddenly deep, dark, empty pit. But no matter how badly my stomach ached, the bus never came. By 8:15 I knew it wasn't coming, it had never not come before. Nerves overwhelmed me, I couldn't think straight, I felt like someone had just thrown me in the pit that had formed in my stomach. Eventually I came to the conclusion that my mum would know what to do. I called her, it must have rung for about a minute before she answered, and the moment of fear she wouldn't pick up only added to how I was feeling. I don't remember the words she said but I do remember that she was positive that she couldn't come and get me and that I wasn't allowed to just go home. She suggested I walk, all the way to school, a two hour walk all the way to school. At first I thought she was joking but she wasn't. She told me she'd ring the school, and tell them I would miss the first couple of periods, but they should expect soon, and then she was gone.

So I started walking. I was alone and all I could do was walk, I could roughly envision the route I'd take but I wasn't focusing properly on that. All that I could think about was how the people at school would react. They knew I'd be late, but what were they going to do to me? My young mind couldn't even comprehend the idea that they might understand what had happened. This meant that the first half hour of my journey isn't very clear in my memory. But I came too again when I reached a fence. The fence bordered a field, and the only way I could get to school was to cross it. I climbed over the fence and put my still shining shoes down on the muddy grass. The ground squelched, even under my tiny person, but I had to keep going. It had been raining last night so the mud was even more muddy than usual, but I trekked on making sure only the very soles of my shoes touched the floor. I was about halfway across the field when I heard the rip. Due to the silence I had previously been in, this sound was deafening, and when I looked around to see what it was that when I saw the mess on the floor. The contents of my bag were scattered all over the place, from the big tear in my bag. My books were already drenched in a coat of thick mud, random sheets of homework that were swept up in the wind were stuck in bushes or settling on the opposite side of the field I had to get to. I started running around like a headless chicken, trying to gather up everything I could. I must have looked like a madman to anybody who saw me, if anyone did, with tears so close to falling down my face and fear etched across it. Once I had collected up anything I could, I set back on my journey to school, but the books and papers in my hands gave me another thing to worry about getting in trouble for, while they carelessly got mud up and down the front of my uniform.

The walk continued similarly to how it was at the beginning, with my mind focused on the potential trouble I could get into for this whole escapade. I tripped several times due to the weight I was holding in my arms, it was all I could do normally to not topple over from how heavy my backpack was, now I was having to carry that weight in my arms it was fair to say I wasn't having the most fun I'd ever had. Each time I fell the mud already caked on my jumper and books would thicken, as my books went flying from my hands as I tried to catch myself before falling straight onto my face, and every single time I would lose more and more paper to the wind.

When I finally arrived at school, nerves filled me from head to toe and the school receptionists must have seen it in my face because they instantly took pity on me, and then those nerves were replaced with confusion. Where was the strict telling off, why wasn't anyone yelling? But everything was fine, they gave me a spare uniform and backpack and sent me off to class. It continued to confuse me for weeks after, but looking back I realise how silly little 12 year old me was. From that day on for the rest of my school years, I always remembered to bring my bike down to the bus stop and chain it up there if the bus came and ride it to school if the bus didn't.