

Enough – creative writing



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

William Peterson rapped his knuckle against the hollow ply-board and gathered the familiar stench of damp cigarette stubs and oil into his lungs. The finger-stained door flapped open carelessly and the soft sound echoed round the concrete walls. A hand appeared, thrusting some worn keys towards William. It belonged to Janet. She was only fifty-ish, but the fifteen years spent doing nothing in the fumes had eroded her eyes deep into her face and had buried her personality even further down. William didn't even nod in acknowledgement; speaking to Janet would have been like conversing with a piece of machinery. The door closed.

William was late, as usual, but didn't hurry. He walked casually across the bus station, passed a small line of irritated passengers, and then clambered aboard the number 51 bus. Once in the driver's seat, William removed his coat slowly, much to the annoyance of the passengers, who were either looking purposefully at their watches or directing quick, sour glances in his direction. They started to board. First in the queue was a young mother carrying a chubby baby awkwardly on her narrow hips.

Her face was sallow, and she wore a frown that was accentuated by two smooth streaks of black lip-liner. An old lady sidestepped up next, balancing a puffed ball of grey hair precariously on her head. She spent several minutes counting out the exact fare in five pence pieces, before falling into the nearest seat in one robotically arthritic movement. Following her was William's friend Sam, a tall black man. He was wearing a brand new baseball cap that aged him considerably. After greeting William and paying for a return ticket, Sam turned and beamed at the chubby baby, and then climbed

the clammy steps to the top deck. Then three teenage girls giggled their way on to the bus, just finishing their conversation.

" Oh-my-God, did you hear what happened?!"

" I know, she's such a bitch."

Their self-absorbed world of mobiles and Bacardi Breezers swept its way to the back seats and settled. Only a few more people climbed aboard and the bus was not even a quarter full.

William checked his watch, and tried to start the engine. It wheezed for a few seconds and then stubbornly staggered into silence once again. This bus' reliability had ventured beyond temperamental. Cursing inwardly, William gingerly twisted the key for a second time... It started - thank God. The 51 pulled out of the concrete hovel into mellowing autumn sunshine. The bus groaned, stretching its filthy bodywork as it picked up speed. It was late afternoon.

The girls at the back laughed some more and rearranged their bulging shopping bags. William visibly relaxed and sank deeper into his seat. The soft pad had moulded itself perfectly to the shape of the buttocks that had occupied it for so many years. For a moment, William almost regretted that he had decided to retire in two month's time, but this absurd feeling quickly passed as he recalled how much he hated the job. The sweet-sour smell of cigarette smoke wafted down the steps.

" Nosmoking!" shouted William over his shoulder, though he felt utterly hypocritical as he did so; he smoked like a chimney himself. As he turned

back round, William looked with horror at the road ahead. Directly in front of him was a young girl, staring up at him, frozen with fear. William screeched on the 51's protesting brakes and prayed for the first time in his life...

Final Chapter

A crushing semi-silence had descended on the courtroom. The second-hand of a clock was jumping round somewhere above William's head. In front of him, he could see Carla Greene walking sedately. Still sporting the same hideous shade of lip-liner, she stepped up to the witness box. The dark curves round her mouth buckled and puckered as she started to speak, and William fixed his eyes on them, though he did not hear what she said. He was transported back to the day when Carla's lip-liner had formed a great oval, and when her mouth had issued piercing screams as she pointed at a small, lifeless mound in the road. He had been haunted by that image ever since, and saw her face almost every time he closed his eyes. William's chest tightened and he took a deep, choked breath that brought him back from the verge of breaking down into tears. The sound of it made several people look over at him.

William dipped his head down to avoid their stares. He knew the girl's parents would be looking, and he couldn't face them. The pain of this guilt was worse than anything he had felt before. He dared not look up. Instead, he pretended to be engrossed in picking a callous on his thumb. After a while, Carla's voice stopped, and the sound of the clock ticking could be heard again. William ventured a glimpse up, and was relieved to see Rose's parents were looking at the judge. He studied their faces: the mother,

despite her show of strength today, could not hide the devastating grief she obviously still felt. Though quite young, her skin appeared dull in the harsh light, her eyes were puffy and her brow was lightly wrinkled. The father, who was receiving counselling along with his wife, looked vacant and bewildered.

Though William had told himself countless times it had been an accident, blame had engulfed him during the past few months. A part of him still couldn't accept that a moment's lapse in concentration could destroy a young life, and ruin the lives of a whole family. William had wanted the court case to be over, so that he could put this all behind him, but now, actually sitting in the court room, confronted with so many sad faces, he felt that he would never be able to do that. Somehow a sentence of community service – the norm for a charge of driving 'without due care and attention', wasn't enough to heal the wounds left by the accident.

The court was adjourned for the day, and some window blinds were opened as they all stood, letting thick shafts of sunlight into the room. The general mood lifted slightly and a low hum of conversation developed. William saw Cynthia up in the gallery and also noticed Thomas peering over the high railing, his cool blue eyes darting around inquisitively. After a few moments, Cynthia turned and smiled at him. At least, William thought, he had people around who cared for him. William walked out of the courtroom, staring at the green carpet tiles beneath his feet as he did so. Once in the corridor, Mr O'Brien walked over and spoke to him briefly. The conversation passed completely over William's head.

" I think you're going to get away with a relatively short sentence of community service, Mr Peterson. The evidence the girl gave was hardly incriminating."

" Mmmm..."

" So, I'll see you tomorrow then."

" Uh, yes."

William could see through into the foyer where Cynthia and Thom were waiting, and he willingly broke off the stilted conversation to hurry off and meet them.

" Hi dad!" Cynthia said, kissing him on the cheek, " How've you been?"

" Oh, I'm fine... I see you didn't manage to find anyone to look after Thom, then."

" No, but he was fine up in the gallery - didn't hear a squeak out of him!"

" No, but a court is no place for a child."

Cynthia fell silent at her father's criticism, but readily took his arm as they walked outside. The Crown Court was a Sixty's building, and through the door they were greeted with a typical concrete courtyard, complete with matching shallow flowerpots in which some thoughtful person had planted beautiful purple pansies. Their colour pinpricked the otherwise monotone surroundings. William and Cynthia stopped so that Thom, who was playing on the steps, could catch up. It was then that William saw Rose Eliot's

parents exiting through the doors behind them. They were walking slowly as Mrs Eliot was obviously heavily pregnant, a fact which had escaped William until then. He watched as they came down the steps past Thom, and saw them look at him.

Suddenly, William found himself walking over towards them. He didn't really know why. He just realised that he desperately needed to speak to them, to tell them how sorry he was, to tell them he would never forgive himself... Mr and Mrs Eliot looked quite shocked at first, but as William drew closer, they just looked expectant, as if they had wanted to speak to him as well. When he had reached them, William said the only thing he felt that he could, the only thing he wanted to say, and the only thing, it seemed, they wanted to hear.

" I'm so, so sorry."

That was all. That was enough. That said more than a whole court case could say, or a huge bunch of flowers sent to a funeral could say. It was enough.