

The bus squealed to a stop at 10:55 AM, 15 minutes later than scheduled. An ad for the local community colleges with 2 broadly smiling faces was plastered on one side, blocking the faces inside the bus. Riders standing outside looked on impatiently as the driver waited a few moments to open the doors to unload and let on new passengers. This was unusual for the morning route to Downtown Irving, and no wonder, Vera saw, as the doors slid open to reveal a new driver.

The kindly older gentleman who typically sat at the wheel was gone. In his place sat a slouched, bearded, droopy-eyed man who looked to be in his thirties. This driver was on his phone, barely peeking up to check tickets. Unlike the usual driver, he looked as if he'd rather be doing anything else.

“Good morning!” Vera said with a smile as she flashed her pass to the driver.

His eyes met hers and scanned over her body instead. His mouth was unsmiling. “Good morning, how you doing?” He leaned toward her, whispering, “You could be riding for free, ma.”

Stunned, Vera looked at the man as he licked his lips. She looked at the passengers behind her growing more impatient as she stood there. How could this man talk to her like this, especially after causing her to run late to her weekly therapy appointment? Her skin crawled. A fire burned her throat, threatening to roll off her tongue and through her lips.

“Could you let her by and check my ticket, sir?” An older man behind Vera asked in a loud voice, interrupting Vera’s thoughts. He waved his pass in the air, face dripping with frustration. She smiled and shook her head.

“I’m sorry y’all, forgive me,” she turned and said to the waiting passengers before she rushed down the aisle to the back of the bus.

The driver let the remaining passengers by without incident. He kept his eyes on Vera only until a couple of other women passed by them. Vera ran through several scenarios of what she’d say before getting off at her stop before calming down. *He wasn’t worth all this energy*, she told herself, *maybe he’s just being nice, right?* She let it go. A few stops later, the driver pulled up to a Kroger.

Vera watched as the young woman, bundled in a coat, hat, boots and leggings, boarded. She didn’t think much until she noticed the bus still not moving. She looked up again. The driver pulled the woman back by her arm and muttered something to her. The woman faced him as his arm slid to her waist. She draped an arm over his shoulder and kissed him on the lips before taking a seat.

Vera’s eyes widened as she shook her head. A few stops later, there was another lady following the same routine. *He’s pretty popular around here to be new*, Vera thought. She couldn’t shake the feeling of something being off. At the end of the route, pulling into the Downtown station, Vera hurried to the front of the bus. It was practically empty now, the two women from earlier were long gone.

“You a fine-ass white lady,” the driver whistled behind Vera as she waited to exit behind a few other riders. “Let me get your number.”

She looked around and threw her hands up. “Did y’all hear that? I know y’all heard him.”

“Shut up!” Someone yelled.

Vera scoffed before turning back to the driver saying, “I have a husband!”

“You trippin, ma’am. I’m just being nice, nothing else,” he shrugged and stroked his beard. Vera glanced at his name tag — James.

Two weeks had passed without Vera and Mr. James exchanging more than a few words. There was still the occasional remark, but toned down from that first day. He had turned his attention to his many lady “friends” along his routes. By the third week, his attention was back on Vera, and it wasn’t what she expected.

“Hey!” Vera shouted as the bus doors closed. She banged on the doors, but he drove off, leaving her to wait in the cold. There was no point chasing him, he’d already sped down the street.

Vera knew why he was doing this. She knew he’d find out eventually that it was her. A week after he catcalled her, she made a report to the DART police of sexual harassment.

“I know it was you, cow!” He’d said before closing the doors on her. “This is my bus, and I run it! I got goons ‘round here, so you better be careful.”

He was supposed to be transferred to another route, and it took this long for word to get to him. Vera was disappointed, but not surprised. There he was the next week, still late and flirting at new women waiting for the 10:45 route to Downtown Irving. All the while, his glare was fixed upon Vera as the doors closed. No matter how badly she wanted to get on that bus and teach Mr. James a lesson, she knew she couldn't. The consequences he should have faced fell onto her, which resulted in a ban from his bus route.