



Source: Michael Georgy, 'Free me from these cuffs, says Saddam', Reuters, AFP in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 29/11/05.

Tags: [child/parent](#), [seasons](#), [travel](#)

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9.02 a.m.

They stood under the bus shelter, taking turns to stare through the Perspex walls at the wet road.

'Do you know whether this timetable is current?' Daniel asked, running a gloved finger down the board, looking for Saturday. His gloves were soft, young leather, fur-lined, making his hands appear delicate. 'I don't know sorry, I've just got here,' Clare replied. Hers were odd mittens, pink on the left hand and blue on the right.

'Well, according to the timetable there should be a bus here in three minutes,' Daniel said, and reached into his top pocket, pulling out a comb. He turned his head to make use of the reflective bus shelter wall and dealt swiftly with a few stray curls before returning the comb to his pocket. Then he checked his watch. Clare saw the Mickey Mouse face and looked quickly away before he could see that she saw it.

9.08 a.m.

She waited a few minutes and then turned to him, 'Excuse me, do you have the time?'

He checked Mickey Mouse again. It had a bright yellow plastic band.

'9...9.08'

'Thanks.'

9.10 a.m.

'I always wanted one of those,' Clare said, looking straight ahead.

'Pardon?' He followed her gaze across to the house opposite them.

'Disneyland,' she said, pointing at his wrist.

'Oh...my watch. Ah, yeah. Well, I...never really grew up,' he laughed nervously, quickly slipping his hands into his pockets and rocking back and forth. The watch had been a present from his mother when he was eight years old and he had worn it on his left wrist ever since, changing the battery every few years.

'Sometimes I feel as though I never grew up either,' Clare said, 'especially standing here. I used to stand and wait at this very bus stop, you know. This was my school bus route. I've just moved back to the area after twelve years and not much has changed. It's bizarre.'

'Right. Really? And, ah, were the buses always running late back then too?'

'Mm. But we mucked about: hopscotch, elastics...we probably didn't notice. And of course, schoolgirls always fall in love at the bus stop. There was always some boy to look at...' Clare laughed and Daniel saw clouds of steam pouring from her mouth. He nodded tightly and looked down at his black boots, examining them for signs of wear.

9.14 a.m.

'Did you grow up in this area?' 'No. I um...no I didn't grow up here. I just moved here two weeks ago actually. From Adelaide.'

'Really? Welcome to North Melbourne, I'm Clare,' she said, reaching her blue hand out. He stared down at it for a moment before pulling his own right hand reluctantly back out of his pocket.

'Daniel,' he said, shaking her mitten.

'Lost and found,' she said, holding up her ill-matched paws in the air and then shoving them out of sight and turning her head to look for the bus again.

Daniel nodded and pressed his lips together.

On warm Sunday afternoons Danny would sit wedged in a cardboard box watching his father striding behind the electric mower. 'As soon as you get too big for that box, it's going to be you up here doing this mate, so watch carefully.' And after mowing the lawn his father would take out his boxing gloves and hammer the speedball in their shed. Danny was expected to grow into those gloves, too. But Danny preferred to watch clouds instead of his father's sweating red brow. He crouched lower and lower into his box with each passing year, making himself as small as he could.

Clare hugged herself to keep warm and said 'I promise you Mr Daniel, Melbourne gets hot in summer.'

'Yes. Summer.' Daniel said quietly, then looked down at his watch again.

9.20 a.m.

They saw the shadow of an arriving bus looming above the oncoming traffic like a mirage.

They both stepped towards the curb at once. The bus squealed as it slowed but didn't stop. Behind a foggy windscreen the driver leaned forward waving them off, indicating that it was full. Dark clothes pressed to the windows and doors. Daniel waved uselessly back at the driver. Clare laughed.

'Damn,' he said through his teeth as he calculated the cost of a taxi in peak hour.

'The next one won't be far behind,' Clare said, walking back under the shelter. Daniel caught the scent of lavender in her hair as she turned. He watched her pull off one mitten and start sketching out crystalline shapes on the frozen bus shelter walls.

9.23 a.m.

'Did you ever get called Danny as a boy?' she asked suddenly.

'Yes,' he said, letting out an audible sigh.

When the box got too small Danny's mother offered him a way out. Would he like to help her cut and clean the vegetables, she had asked, leaning down to him. Later, she showed him the best place to trim hydrangeas, leaving the stems long enough for their tall glass vase. And each time his father broke the vase, Danny would save up and buy another one.

'Do you know much about the feminine/masculine sides of the body?' Clare held out her mittens again. 'It was purely by chance. But after I got these I found out that the left side of the body is the feminine side. The right side is the masculine side. So it must have been instinctive. Pink on the left, blue on the right.'

When his mother died, Danny stopped buying new vases. Instead of trimming the garden his father made him cut his hair. Military—short back and sides. He gave him a comb and checked his pockets to see that he took it everywhere he went. He showed him how to comb down his curls, shaping with his left hand, combing with his right.

9.32 a.m. 'Here it is,' Clare announced, 'we only had to wait 30 minutes, but it was worth it. Nice talking to you.' She stepped onto the bus.

Daniel followed her on board and sat down. As the bus pulled out from the curb, he removed the comb from his pocket, opened the window, and as bitter air flushed past his cheeks, he threw it out into the street.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lucy Broome.*