The Last Seat on the Bus



On his first morning at a new school, Ben missed the early bus. The next one was full. He walked to the back with his backpack against his chest. There was one free seat, but a sketchbook was lying on it.

"Sorry," said the girl beside the window. She moved the book. Ben sat down and looked at his phone. The battery was empty. He knew the school was near a bridge, but there were three bridges in this town. He had moved there only two days before.

The girl was drawing a red bakery. When the bus passed a small cinema, she turned a page and drew that too. Ben looked away quickly. "You can look," she said. "I'm making a map. The one on my phone doesn't help me remember places."

"Do you know the stop for West Hill School?" Ben asked. The girl smiled. "I hope so. I'm going there too." Her name was Rose. She showed him a page with a bridge, a blue shop and a very small dog. "The dog isn't always there," she explained.

Ben laughed for the first time that morning. Then he noticed a school bag under her feet. It looked new, like his. "How long have you been at West Hill?" he asked. Rose closed her sketchbook. "I haven't started yet. Today is my first day."

Outside, the blue shop appeared. Rose stood up, but Ben pointed through the window. "Wait. Your bridge comes after the shop." A moment later, they saw the bridge and a group of students in school jackets. They pressed the button and got off together.

At the gate, Rose opened the sketchbook again. "The map works," she said. Ben took a pencil from his bag. "It needs one more thing." With her permission, he drew the tall school gate. His lines were not very straight. Rose added two small people beside it.

They still had to find their classrooms. They still did not know the teachers or where to eat lunch. But when someone asked if they were new, Ben answered, "Yes, we are." That afternoon, he reached the bus first. He found two empty seats and kept his backpack on the floor. When Rose arrived, he moved closer to the window. There was room for another person to belong.



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