

*In a brief interlude, Anne found what she wanted—but she never knew his name.*

## BOSTON TO WORCESTER

JEAN ELIZABETH GOODRICH

IT had been uncomfortably hot in the smoky waiting room of the bus terminal, and the sharp air of the city street felt good against her face as she approached the long shiny black limousine in which she was to ride for several hours. Anne had hoped that she would go in this kind of a bus, which was really not a bus at all, but a glorified automobile which carried about a dozen passengers. She had always thought they looked extremely comfortable. Her heart beat a little faster at the thought of the trip before her—she loved the feeling of independence it gave her to start out on a journey like this alone and among strangers. She felt extremely capable of taking care of herself, and revelled in it. It always annoyed her when people, especially her boy friends, assumed that tender, protective air towards her, and smiled benevolently at her assertions of independence. Roger had been rather worried about her traveling alone so far, but he couldn't possibly get away to come down and get her. Silly of him, thought Anne, as though she couldn't get herself as far as Springfield,

where he was going to meet her.

The driver took her ticket from her and looked at it. "Worcester and Springfield," he said. "You won't have to change, miss, this goes all the way through." He took her small black suitcase and threw it on to the top of the car, and helped her in. She settled back luxuriously into the soft cushions. She was seated in the third row back, and it looked like a long way up to the driver's seat. There was room for two people on the seat. She wondered if they would put anyone in beside her. She was not to wonder long, however, for the door opened again, and a young man climbed in. She had glanced at him in the waiting room, thought him rather good-looking, although it was hard to tell with his hat on, and he seemed rather old—probably somebody's husband, she had judged. She did not pay any attention to him now as he sat down beside her.

The driver got in and started the engine, and they moved slowly forward in the late afternoon traffic of down town Boston. It was beginning to grow dark, and the lights which were coming on were cheery. Anne

loved this hour of the day in the city—it was somehow more friendly, and one no longer felt lonely. There was a strange sense of intimacy in riding like this with total strangers. It was funny, she thought, being thrown for a few hours with people whom you would probably never see again—a queer meeting of strangers who, though they did not even speak to each other, were bound together for the duration of the journey in a sense which was as indefinable as it was real.

Besides herself, there were four passengers, all of them men. She would have liked it a little better, Anne thought, if there had been a woman or two along, but after all it hardly mattered. She watched the five o'clock crowds hurrying along the street in the cold afternoon air. She was glad of the cozy warmth of her fur coat, and snuggled down into it. How nice it was to have an electric heater, too, she thought, feeling the hot air against her feet.

They were out of the downtown district now, although they still had to move slowly because of the traffic. Except for a young fellow sitting beside the driver and talking to him continuously in a loud, coarse voice, everything was quiet within the car. Each person was wrapped in his own thoughts, and they so permeated the air that it seemed to Anne as though she could almost reach up and pluck them down—a fantastic idea. She scoffed at herself, and decided she had better think of something more reasonable.

With a guilty start she remembered Roger. In the excitement of

setting off on this trip by herself, and of observing her fellow travelers, she had quite forgotten him. It had been like that a lot lately, she reflected—remembering suddenly that she hadn't thought of him for hours, and then being unable to find she could forget him thus easily. The knowledge that she would see him again in a few hours somehow failed to excite her. Yes, it was funny about Roger—somehow, he just didn't seem to matter. It wasn't as though she didn't think he was as fine as she ever had, or that she didn't admire him. She knew there were plenty of girls who would like to be in her shoes right now, going up to Amherst for the week-end with a handsome and charming young man. She felt puzzled and slightly annoyed at herself. And yet, she supposed it was an inevitable reaction, her not caring. She had thought about him so continuously all fall, and had imagined herself so irrevocably in love with him, and then when she saw him at last just for a couple of days at Christmas time, when she had been down visiting Margy, everything had seemed to go flat. It had been that way ever since, it just didn't matter any more. But the worst of it was that it still mattered so very, much to him, and she dreaded to hurt him. She knew she was the only person in the world that he had to care for—probably that was what had touched her from the first, had made her want to love him so badly that she had really imagined that she did. Perhaps if she had been able to see him more often—

Anne's reverie was brought to an



abrupt close as the car stopped suddenly for a red light. She once more became conscious of the people around her. No one had said a word, with the exception of the chatty young man in the front seat, who kept up a running fire of conversation. The rather distinguished looking man with the grey moustache and sleepy pussy-cat eyes sitting in front of her, whose profile she could make out in the gloom, was smiling to himself. Anne thought he looked like a music or an art critic on some newspaper, and wondered vaguely what gave her that idea, because he might just as well have been a broker or a lawyer. She had a feeling he was going to New York. He looked like the type who go to New York on a Friday evening. It would be much nicer if there were some one to talk to, and yet you just didn't start a conversation with strangers. She knew that sooner or later the young man by her side would probably say something to which she could reply, and the monotony of riding alone in perfect silence would be broken.

They were out of the city now, and on the Worcester turnpike. The driver speeded up, and the dark grey landscape flew past them. Oh, exciting, to be tearing along like this through the dusk! Although there was snow on either side of them, the road was quite bare and with their deep-throated horn continually blowing in short insistent signals, they flew past the other cars on the road.

Anne glanced sideways at her companion. He had slid down on the seat, and was apparently dozing. She

felt very wide awake, and, settling herself more comfortably, she watched the landscape whirling by. It was almost dark now, and she could see but little. It was dark in the bus, too, and she could just make out the outlines of the people's heads in front of her. She wondered if they were allowed to smoke. She felt that a cigarette was all that was needed to complete that feeling of luxury and ease which she was enjoying to the full. She opened her muff and felt her cigarette case, then decided she had better wait until some one else started.

It was all such fun. She almost hated to think of the end of the journey. Of course, Roger would be there—they would have a nice weekend, she knew. But she didn't want to think about him just now—she would have to for the rest of the time after she got there. She wanted something new to take up her interest. There had been such a long time that she had thought no one but Roger could ever matter, and now she felt there were dozens of attractive people of whom she could grow very fond. It was an exciting thought, and the feeling of freedom which she had experienced for the past few weeks seemed to well up in her, and she felt almost as though she would choke unless she could let it out. She straightened up and pulled her coat closer about her, although she wasn't cold.

They were passing through a town now, and the driver honked his horn continuously as he slid around between other cars. The young man beside her straightened up and shook



himself. He reached in his pocket, took out a cigarette and lighted it. Anne decided to do the same. "I was wondering if we were allowed to smoke," she said, taking a cigarette from her case. He lit a match and held it for her. As she lighted her cigarette, she glanced at him—a rather lean face; she thought he must be good looking, although she never could tell about men until they took their hats off. "Thank you," she said, leaning back once more into her corner.

"I'm smoking Kools now," he said pleasantly. "Lots of people don't care for them, so that's why I don't pass them around." He had a cultured accent. Anne liked it very much. She felt that it was the voice of a gentleman, one who knew his way around.

"I smoke them once in a while," she said. "They seem to be good when you have a cold."

"Yes," he replied, "that's how I happened to get started on them, and I've been smoking them ever since."

They rode on, smoking in silence, but somehow this silence was different. The other occupants of the car were quiet. The young man in the front seat had stopped talking at last, and the music critic on his way to New York (Anne had definitely placed him in this category in her own mind) was dozing peacefully, his head bouncing on his chest from the motion of the car.

Anne's companion had finished his cigarette and crushed it out on the floor. She opened the window and threw hers out. The cold fresh air that came in felt good—the air in-

side was a little stuffy, and the heater so close against her feet was becoming uncomfortably warm. She closed the window and unbuttoned her coat. The man at her side pulled his overcoat up around his neck and settled down again for a nap. He had moved over more towards her side of the seat—she thought he was probably cold, and wished she could give him her place beside the hot heater.

On and on they roared through the night. Anne sat watching the headlights shooting out over the road, not thinking, not even feeling. As the car rocked to one side when they went around a curve, her companion swayed dangerously. What in the world would she do, she wondered, if he should fall asleep on her shoulder? That would be rather an awkward situation. She could imagine herself saying: "Sir, if you must sleep, would you mind resting your head some place other than on my shoulder." But what would the other people think? They naturally couldn't help hearing. She began to be a little worried about what she would do. She decided that when they got to Worcester, she would offer to change places with him. That would eliminate the danger, she thought. She hoped it wasn't much farther. She wondered where he was going—it was fun to think about people, wonder who they were, and what they thought about. She speculated about the person beside her, dozing with his head so perilously close to her shoulder. Was he married? His voice had sounded younger than she had expected. She wondered why she had thought him



older—she really hadn't had even a good look at him.

When they did stop, she would offer to change places. She wished he would wake up—she felt like talking. She thought he would be nice to talk to, probably. They seemed to be coming to a town. She wondered if it could be Worcester, but it didn't seem as though it could be—the ride had seemed very short. Her companion stirred, yawned, and sat up, looking out of the window.

"Where are we?" Anne asked him.

"Worcester," he replied in that pleasant voice.

"Oh," she said, "I didn't think we would come to it so soon."

"Are you going to Hartford?" he asked.

"No, Springfield."

"I think you stay on this bus all the way then."

They were threading through rough streets, and seemingly going around in circles. Worcester was a funny city, she decided. The rest of the journey would be much pleasanter because now that the ice was broken, she felt it would be perfectly all right to talk to him.

"When we stop," she said, "wouldn't you like to change places? It must be cold on that side, and I'm really very warm from the heater."

"Are you really?" he said, smiling at her. She felt as though she had known him for a long time. He stretched himself. "I guess I went to sleep there for a while," he continued, "and I felt rather cold when I woke up."

They had come into the brightly

lighted main street, and presently they drew up in front of the bus terminal. This was going to be so much fun from now on, Anne thought, for they could talk and get acquainted. She knew somehow that he would be interesting.

"Wouldn't you like to change places now?" she suggested, as they waited there.

"Well"—he hesitated, smiling.

Just then the driver stuck his head in the door. "Bridgeport?" he said. "Change here for Hartford and Bridgeport." Anne's heart sank. The young man looked at her. "Well, I guess I leave now," he said. He smiled at her, and then turned and climbed out.

"Goodbye," she said, disappointed beyond all reason as she watched him enter the bus terminal.

They were waiting to take on more passengers. A moment later, Anne glanced up. With a start, she saw her erstwhile companion standing at the window. He had taken his hat off, and his hair was a mass of light brown curls. He looked years younger than she had imagined. He was staring intently at the bus, but she doubted if he could see her. How strange, she thought, that he should be so young. The driver got in and started the engine, and they moved slowly into the brightly lighted street. Anne turned around for a last look at the stranger. She was to remember for days, with that peculiar pang of regret, the face of the handsome young man as he stood staring after the retreating bus.

# ♦ PER-SIMMONS ♦

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