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## Who Wants Flowers?

by Ivor John

Despite everything, I had to admit, it was a lovely day, given that it was mid november. The blue sky, mostly clear, with the odd dusting of white wispy clouds. No hint of rain. I climbed the steps on the bus, my knuckles white as I gripped the side rail, struggling to keep my balance as the bus pulled away. It wasn't sufficient to avoid falling down the stairs, which would have been a major embarrassment not to mention having the risk of an injury. No, not falling down the stairs was not in itself sufficient achievement.

One also had to appear unaffected by the uneven movements of the bus. By demonstrating perfect proprioception I should progress up the narrow twisting staircase, with faultless balance and poise as if walking up the stairs to my bedroom. Those really proficient in this in skill of insouciance, would even avoid gripping the rail. Any minor slips or stumbles deflected with an expression of nonchalance. I have no idea how it came to be important that I appeared faultless, but I know that I am not unique in this regard.

I was delighted to find the front seat, was free, meaning I could look out of the large window as the bus was driven along the tree lined residential streets of the outskirts, into the town centre. I could watch snippets of the quotidian activities of people below from my elevated lookout. Mise-en-scene of the vernacular which moving across my view as the bus went slowly into the town.

It suited me to be detached, to be watching, a back street ethnographer, deciding what the people I observed were thinking, what were their plans as they parked their cars, struggled with young children or bought their paltry shopping from the convenience store.

I never felt entirely comfortable in social situations. I didn't understand what I should say that people would be at all interested in. I had listened to their conversations. Studied them really. Most of what they said seemed pointless and often made no sense. I had been to shows, comedy shows in particular, where people would laugh aimlessly at jokes which were clearly not funny. People would always clap for the wrong reasons and I could never understand why. There appeared to me to be a profound shallowness, in their determination to have fun and enjoy themselves. I had often wished that I could be that way. Able enjoy such simplicity. Instead, I found I needed to understand and analyse nearly everything I said. Of course this made spontaneity unlikely.

I wasn't sure if I had always felt the way I do now. I can't really remember too much from when I was a child, although I am fairly sure that I was. Once. I do remember, then, thinking that people are always ruining things for you. I would have a plan, an idea of something I would like to do. I used to like to construct camps, by the edge of the fields, where I would spend hours during school holidays, watching people playing on the nearby swings. I had been given a small folding telescope on a birthday when I was about eleven I remember. Certainly my dad was still alive then, and had left us when I was twelve.

I loved the telescope and would imagine I was special forces or a spy as I looked from my hidden camp at the playing children. I never understood why, but my mother tried to stop me taking it with me. That I should watch the stars from my bedroom. I remember then, thinking that mothers are all slightly insane, the few that I knew anyway.

As the bus slowed at the Manor Road traffic lights, I looked at my watch. Seven fifty. I one more stop and I would have to get off of the bus and walk the few hundred yards along Manor Royal to the office. The bus was busy now, I would have to start preparing myself mentally for the descent of the stairs.