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Skyscrapers

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Skyscrapers

Matthew H. Kennington

Lock your doors. Make sure you have your money, cards, anything you want to keep. And your keys. If not, no sweat; finding someone to jimmy the lock is like finding a shoeshine in Mexico. Makes you wonder why you bother. Cross yourself. Or, if you're religious, say a prayer.

Right away, there's a man in a baby blue shirt with a collar. Have you got your two dollars, he wants to know. Two dollars? For parking in this lot, he says. Ignore him. He's a hustler.

Hey! he yells to your back. You owe me two dollars. Which is how they all feel, that you owe them something. Keep walking. Don't engage him. You're here to see Dallas.

Walk briskly. Walk with purpose. Not like you're lost, but not like you're running either. Keep your money in your front pocket, your hand on your money. See the sights, but let your eyes glance off: busses, people, walls of shimmering glass. At the corner, six, seven people standing—not touching. They are waiting for a sign. The Sign of the Red Palm. Sign of the Walking Man. Don't step out first. Once the flow gets going, step into it. Let the man up front get the honk and give the finger. Cross.

There is a photo shop advertising Kodak film, and a bum under the eave. He will say something. Time it carefully. Look up, up at the blue building across the street just as you come parallel. Two, three, four steps, then down again to see where you're stepping.

Another block, right through the heart of Dallas, right through the depot. Up there, that third story window, they found a girl last night with one arm under the couch. It's OK. It's the middle of the day, and it's crowded. Three boys in shorts are sitting with their necks cocked back against the brick wall, their music full-bore. Blistering heat . . . sshk, sshk, huh! They're wearing shades . . . sshk, sshk, sshkaa. The woman on the curb turns and gives them a look; the boy waves

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one finger without smiling. She turns, and he aims the stereo right at her back. They're sprawled halfway across the sidewalk. Don't step over them. Wait for an opening and go around.

On the next block, white-and-yellow busses crowd the curb. Right up front they state their business: Beltline, Business District, Ross. White on

black. From four directions they come, from the four corners, advertising David Letterman, the Mavericks, and milk. Then two busses rumble in, but it's not two busses; it's one bus that they've stuck together with accordion plastic. Monstrous. Like someone chopped the head off one bus and taped it to the rear of another. No one seems to mind much.

They think she missed a certain payment, the girl whose arm they found under the couch and the rest of her in the hallway. It made the papers. Over the civil sound of motors, there is a shout. A man in a blue suit is standing on a bus. Not a city bus, but a smaller one, an old school bus painted black. White letters sprayed on the side: JESUS saves sinners!

Hundreds of souls are hiding under their purses, papers, or *The Dallas Morning News*, trying to make shade. A few lean up to check the bus schedules. Most have turned away from the man on the bus, but they keep him in their periphery, just in case he goes postal. He's in a suit and coat, and he's sweating. He shakes his Bible. Every one of you, he says, is going straight to hell.

People snicker. Your mother, someone says.

Keep moving.

Wasn't one thing, the man is yelling, wasn't one thing they did in Sodom and Gomorrah y'all don't do right here.

Your mother, someone says.

Look away. Look at your watch. Keep moving, right by the madman. You! he says. Don't look up. He probably doesn't mean you.

The people thin, and you're there. Lean into the big glass door. It turns. It's like stepping into a pool, it's so fresh and cool. Cross the marble floor to the desk. The girl will take your money as soon as she gets off the phone.

Somewhere, another phone rings.

My pleasure, she says, and hangs up. She takes your two dollars. If her lips are painted, you can't tell; she did it that well. She smiles and nods at the elevator. Eighty-fifth floor, she says. You'll have to change twice.

You see what she means. The buttons only go from one to thirty-two. You step out and there's another elevator. Going up? a man says. Of course, you say, and press the button for sixty-four.

The third elevator lets you off on the observation floor. It's empty except for the man who came up with you. A foyer with navy couches and water trickling over fake rocks. Or maybe they're real. A few goldfish. Soft music.

Cross to the window. Step up just as the man gets there. He looks down. Holy mother, he says.

Look down. All you can see are busses. There are people, you know, milling about down there, but they've disappeared. The black bus is gone.

Take a breath. Hold it and push with your diaphragm until your ears pop. That's better. You hear the music better, though you still don't recognize the tune. It doesn't matter. You've made it. Look around. There's the Cotton Bowl and the state fair. There's Six Flags. What can't you see from up here?

Down below, the preacher has probably been arrested by now. The hustler has his bottle, but he got it with someone else's two dollars. Thank God you aren't down there. Lean out. Put your forehead against the cool glass, the thousand-foot wall of glass that goes up and up, almost to heaven.

 *Matt Kennington is a senior from Hoytsville, Utah. He served a mission to Cambodian refugees in Dallas. He will graduate in human biology because his wife won't let him change majors again.*