

Commuting

—Joanna Cheng

The first day of uni after the Easter break. A beautiful morning. The sky mostly clear but just overcast enough not to be too hot, the wispy clouds floating happily through the sky, a slight breeze from the opposite direction to the Yarra River, and a perfect start to the day — your alarm clock has gone missing. The alarm, however, still sounds out of nowhere and failing to find the snooze button you simply sleep through it.

Eventually, you decide you might as well get out of bed, and after the standard top-of-the-pile dressing process, you shovel some carbohydrate in your mouth and sprint towards the station. After fifteen minutes waiting to purchase a monthly ticket, you finally miss your train, and naturally, the next one is late. You reel in terror as the thought of missing your first class hits you.

Squeezing through a throng of bodies, you manage to take the last seat on the carriage, handily beating a vicious-looking businessman. The moment you take your seat, however, you are approached by a ticket inspector. As you pull out your ticket, you wonder how such a large person managed to fit on such an overcrowded train. The inspector spends several long seconds glaring at it from multiple angles before announcing in a thick accent, “I am sorry sir, but this ticket is expired. Please could I please take down your personal details please.”

You snatch the ticket back from him, unable to believe your ears. Sure enough, the ticket has expired. You try to reason with the inspector that Metcards did not exist on April 4th 1905, the date the ticket believes itself to have been purchased, and therefore the ticket machine must be broken. The inspector thinks for a while, pulls out a thick Connex handbook which somehow fit inside his jacket without bulging, and informs you, just as the train pulls up to your stop, that this is not an acceptable excuse and that you may write a letter to Connex if you wish to complain.

Suddenly noticing that this is your stop, you bolt out the door, the ticket inspector firmly on your tail. Realising that the universe is working against you, you grudgingly give the inspector your real name and fake address from your out-of-date driver’s licence. The inspector rips the top page from his writing pad and hands it to you, informing you that this will act as a ticket for the rest of the day and get you home. You shove it into your pocket and run for the tram.

Managing to grab one of the remaining seats at the back of the tram, you find yourself staring out the window at an unfamiliar landscape, with buildings out of place and anthropomorphic cars driving around in packs. Maybe those mushrooms in the takeaway you ate last night weren’t as innocent as they looked...

To tear yourself away from the scene outside, you pull out your temporary ticket, only to discover that it is not a ticket at all — it is a set of directions to a meeting place. You wonder what the ticket inspector was planning to do with this.

1 Scotch ingredient; Moe's ____
1 University suburb; Chipmunk Ranger
2 Fast food outlet; Creepy ____
2 Female monastery; Walking through water
2 Manufactured cloth; Prolonged sleep
2 Metal-rich rock; Air chafe
3 Arm joint; Skiing mountain
3 Before gallop; Stonehenge location
3 Crate-lifting vehicle; Member for Melbourne
3 Ctrl ____ Del; Shakespearean city
3 Detroit state; Pig thigh
3 Ribena berry; Gastric reflux
4 Aboriginal call; Computer paddle game
4 Fish, shrimp, etc; Norwegian inlet
4 March public holiday; Suit maker
4 Neverfail ____; Bridal accessory
4 Nook and ____; Probability wave interpretation
4 Operating system; Front tooth
4 Secluded valley; Ribbed fabric
4 Washbowl; Dihydrogen oxide
5 Doublecross; Speedier
5 Atomic centre; Ship left
5 Picnic basket; Hillary Rodham ____
5 Parachute seed flower; Archaic soon
6 Shoppingtown; Motor interruption
7 ____ Blender RPG; Misty
7 Protecting; Evening meal
7 Trogdor the ____; Bowling centre
8 Flat water plant; Whirling answer
8 Toilet; Light quantum
12 Glowing markers; Seinlanguage author