

**Chapter 2:
Missing the Bus**



All Pianos Have Keys & Other Stories

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Chapter 2: Missing the Bus

“You’re going to miss the bus,” Fito said to me for the tenth time that night. We were sitting at the bar in my hometown this evening, just as we sat at the same bar almost every evening. It was one of those bars popularized by the “Cheers” TV show, “Where everybody knows your name.” Except it was more so. In Smalltown, South Texas, U.S.A., where life is slow-paced and change is always slow in coming, it is not unusual for the same crowd to spend endless days doing the same thing, saying the same things.

In Smalltown, there were few concerts, no sporting events, other than the high school football games on Fridays, and few business, professional or social obligations. In 1951, there were few TV sets in bars, although occasionally a bar would have a radio, and we would listen to the world heavyweight championship bout.

“You’re going to miss the bus,” Fito repeated. I looked at my watch and concluded that I had time for one final beer before walking the three blocks to the bus depot where I would join the group of draftees being shipped to the big city for induction in the armed forces and participation in the Korean war.

“You’re going to miss the bus,” said Fito for the final time. I paid my tab, picked up my satchel and departed with a “I’ll be seeing you.”

I did make the bus, and I reported in time to be sworn in and made a part of the American war effort in Korea. As promised, I was discharged from the U.S. Army in 1953, two years to the day that I had been inducted.

Since I was interested in going to graduate school when I was discharged from the Army, and there was no graduate program in my hometown, I did not return after the Korean war. I eventually completed the master and doctor of education programs. I became a high school vice principal, an elementary school principal, college professor and college administrator. In 1969, 16 years after my induction into the U.S. Army, I became a superintendent of schools. At about the same time, I received an invitation from my hometown superintendent to give the graduation speech at my old alma mater.

Going home after an absence of 16 years, I checked in at a comfortable hotel, and having a few hours to kill before presenting the high school graduation speech, I wandered in the downtown area, looking with nostalgia at the many places and sites that reminded me of my youth.

While roaming around and reminiscing, I happened to walk right by the bar where I had my last civilian beer before going into the service. The temptation to see the place was strong, and although I have never had any kind of a drink while working, I thought it wouldn't hurt just to see the old place.

I walked in and, lo and behold, there was a much older Fito sitting at the same place at the bar, having a beer, just like in the old days. I thought it would be a good idea to play a joke on him, so without saying a word, I sat down next to him.

Fito turned in his bar stool, looked at me, and then turned back to his beer. Without lifting his head, he casually said, "I told you that you were going to miss the bus."