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GHS:2100

### Riding the Cambus

Story written as told by Rabab, University of Iowa student, to Jenna (student in GHS class).

“What is on your face?” “Why do you look like that?” “You kind of remind me of a racoon.”

These are comments I have had people ask me to my face. The questions mortify me, and I know everyone is thinking it when they look at my face.

I developed vitiligo at a young age. It started to show on my face when I was in elementary school. My parents are immigrants and do not work in the medical field. When my vitiligo started to develop, they were scared something severe was happening to their daughter. They had taken me to the doctor, and I was diagnosed with vitiligo. All my life I struggled living with this white discoloration on my face and I tried the ointments and medications, but they were not effective. The only thing that worked to conceal the white patches into my natural skin was full coverage makeup. All throughout my childhood and adolescence I believed I looked ugly because I did not look like the other girls in my community. My vitiligo is a large prominent white patch along my eyes, nose, and mouth. The insecurities about my appearance were usually validated by ignorant comments people would make to me. The worst experience I ever had was at the University of Iowa.

It was the first day of my freshman year. I had laid my outfit out the night before the first day of classes. I kept looking at myself in the mirror to affirm my decision to not wear any makeup. *You look good Rabab, no one is going to say anything. I am beautiful and strong.* I

hadn't gotten a comment about the white patch on my face in years and I didn't think today was going to be any different.

My roommate and I had a class together and we had to take the Cambus to class since the walk was too far. My roommate and I were talking about what we wanted for dinner, "I am craving Thai food. Can we please go to Thai Flavors tonight?" my roommate begged as I laughed and said "Of course! I have been craving some drunken noodles." My stomach was rumbling, and I couldn't wait for the end of the day.

The bus finally came, the Red Route, I won't ever forget which route it was. We got on the bus and sat together. Normally I get on the bus and when I look around for a seat most people are staring at me. I feel like an animal in a zoo enclosure, my every move being observed. I tend to ignore their eyes yet this specific time I felt the immense glare of someone I could not shake. This boy, maybe a sophomore, was just staring at me. I looked at him and all the sudden he blurted out "What is all over your face?". My heart dropped and all the life drained out of my body. Everyone had started paying attention to me and I could feel them all thinking the same question and wanting an answer out of me.

I froze and thought if I ignored him maybe he would move on, but I heard his voice again. He had repeated his question, "Hey, I asked you, what is all over your face?" My roommate finally broke the silence "Buddy, why don't you mind your own business and move on" she said in a firm, stable manner. The boy looked at my roommate as if she had said the most vulgar comment, and then got off on the next stop.

I will never forget this moment and it happened multiple times after this incident, just in less public spaces. Every time I met someone new, I felt the urge to explain why I look the way I

do. Even though I am confident in who I am today I always remember all the times anyone has ever compared me to a spotted animal or this boy on the Cambus. I like to educate people on what vitiligo is and how it has affected me in my life. I hope as a society we can learn to soon accept each other for our differences and not say or ask ignorant things.