

THE BOY AND THE BUS

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There was no gentle way of saying that corporate life was driving Wafee insane. He needed to visit The Bus Stand; there was a lot he needed to get off his chest.

Wafee was among the first to walk out of his workplace as the clock struck five. The sky outside had darkened with a promise of the first rains of November. Wafee had no umbrella, but he knew a rant session at The Bus Stand was essential. So he set out to find it.

The Bus Stand always appeared in the same neighbourhood, but it jumped around from street to street. Wafee only had to walk at a steady pace for about five minutes before he reached the area—a quiet part of town, fully residential. There was no reason for a bus stand to be situated in a place like Nasirabad, which was what intrigued Wafee the first time he stumbled across it.

He had been walking around aimlessly. He used to do that, to get his thoughts straight. That was when he had noticed the stand, lit by grimy sodium lamps, looking completely out of place between two tall, looming apartment buildings. Curiosity had driven him to enter, and since then, he'd given up aimless walking as a means of sorting out his head.

The sky overhead rumbled, triggering Wafee into a slow jog as he searched. He passed immaculate houses on Road Two before making a right onto Road One. Then, he came to an abrupt stop, noticing The Bus Stand, a squat structure sitting opposite the local grocery shop. A few, fat drops of rain managed to land on his head before Wafee ducked under the protection of The Stand's sloping roof.

"Oh no," came a quiet groan from the very left corner of The Stand. Wafee ignored The Old Man's apparent annoyance and took a seat.

"My boss is an egotistical prick," Wafee began.

"Is there really no one else you can say this to?" The Old Man always made objections as Wafee started his rants, but he ignored them. After all, The Old Man couldn't go anywhere. And so Wafee launched into a tirade against his boss, before moving on to the self-hate that was brewing inside him because of his

dead-end job.

"When I was young, I looked at all these empty people around me, and I thought to myself, 'There's no way I'll end up like them. I'll follow my dreams, and I'll enjoy every single day at work because I'll be doing what I love.' Turns out, I've fallen out of love with accounting the way people fall out of love with their spouses after years of an unhappy marriage." He barely paid any attention to The Old Man's impatient grunt as he continued. "I suppose others would find this situation quite hilarious. I'd look at my life and have a nice big laugh about it myself, only I can't really see humour in anything anymore."

"I've got Divine Providence to thank for that," The Old Man piped up, "It's a big enough pain to listen to you talk, having to endure your laughter would be undoubtedly worse."

Wafee craned his neck to study The Old Man. On the first night, he had assumed this aged man was a passenger. His face was tanned and wrinkled, but he surprisingly had a head full of hair. He had been clothed in a deep blue shirt and deep blue trousers.

"I believe in monochrome," were the first words the man had uttered in a rich, gravelly voice.

Wafee had continued to stand in front of The Old Man. Probably with a look of utter confusion on his face, because The Old Man had said, "The Bus will be here in about five minutes," in a halfway explanatory tone.

"Which bus? Which coach service owns this stand? Blue-Green Line?"

"What do you mean, which bus? The Bus, there is only one bus that stops here."

"Which goes...where?"

The Old Man had looked incredulous.

"Surely you know where it goes! Why are you even here, boy?"

"Well," Wafee had taken a seat next to the guy, "I had a pretty rough day at my school, so I thought I'd take a walk..." Everything had poured out of him, all the thoughts that had been crammed inside his skull, and the rather small bit of feeling still left inside his ribcage.

When he had finished, The Old Man had said, "I really don't give a flying fart about

your adolescent nonsense." Wafee had been surprised to find that this didn't matter to him. He had felt lighter than he had over the previous couple years. Talking to this strange old man had worked out far better than any therapy session ever would.

"No one talks when they come here," The Old Man hissed, "They arrive, they board the bus, they leave. So you do the same and shut up, now."

"What bus? Where do they go, these people you're talking about?"

"Where do they go? Where do you think people like you go, boy? Where does your mind wish to escape to, late at night, when the world stops making sense? God, do they really bring 'em up this stupid these days?"

As sudden realisation had hit Wafee, an enormous bus had rumbled up in front of The Bus Stand. The tires had squealed and the paint was peeling. The windows had been too dark for Wafee to see inside.

He hadn't boarded The Bus that night. Much to The Old Man's dismay, he'd never boarded The Bus, but he kept visiting, and chatting to the disgruntled man. Over the years, the thoughts in his skull grew in number. The emotions in his ribcage all but disappeared.

A familiar clatter made Wafee snap out of his reverie. The Bus had arrived. The Old Man smiled at him in an almost fatherly sort of way. "It's here," he said.

"My life's a joke," Wafee blurted out. The Old Man's smile grew even more hopeful.

"So you'll board it today?"

It would be so easy. No more thinking, no more worrying. Just no more *anything*.

"Nah. Maybe some other day."

The bus trundled off past oblivious pedestrians. The Old Man slumped back in his seat, scowling. Wafee got off the bench, waved at The Old Man, and ducked out of The Bus Stand. He needed to buy some toothpaste on his way home.

Despite being a hopeless fangirl, Marisha Aziz lives under delusions of awesomeness. Contact her at marisha.aziz@gmail.com to give her another excuse to ignore her teetering pile of life problems.

