



ILLUSTRATION: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

HELPING OTHERS

ANIMA TABRIZI KHAN MAJLIS

The bus stopped and the doors opened. Since I was the only one at the terminal, I waited for the people on the bus to get off before I could jump on myself. The people on board filed out one after another, half emptying the bus. The door closed behind me as I screened the empty bus for a seat. There were many. But I chose the one closest to me. Grasping on to the handle bars for support, I trod lightly. I pushed my body forward, somehow managing to reach the empty seat.

A man wearing a dark overcoat with no hat remained seated beside me. He stared out the window intensely and was completely oblivious of my presence. He was the only person whom my radar detected – a possible crosser.

"Hello."

"Hello," replied a voice devoid of spirit.

"You seem really depressed," I said.

"Am I? I guess I am," the stranger replied.

I sat in silence as my initial attempts were met with indifference. The bus moved on towards its next destination. There really isn't much that can be done in such situations.

"My wife just faxed me divorce pa-

pers. She is getting the custody of the children. The house is on a mortgage. I was already in debt and I got fired today. There really isn't much left to be done..." the stranger went on.

Yes! Yes! Yes! There we have it!

Easy now. Keep your concentration on the reigns.

"I am sure you can change the course of your life. After all, we have the free will to change our destinies. You shouldn't give up."

"There isn't anything that I can do to fix my life right now!" the stranger screamed.

Silence.

"What is your destination?"

"I'm sorry!" said the man.

"Where would you like the bus to stop for you?" I asked

"I am going to get off at the last stoppage. What about you?"

"Same as you," I followed.

Actually, I was supposed to get off before the last destination. But work is work.

"My wife lives just before the last stoppage. So, I was wondering if I should stop there," the stranger said.

"There is never any harm in trying. Maybe she will come around."

"I wasn't thinking about reconciliation with my wife. I just wanted to get off there," the stranger said.

There was a cliff nearby and my radar was beeping so loud that people on board were shooting looks my way.

He must be thinking about putting himself in harm's way! There is no other reason for my radar to go off like this! How do I solve this?

Think, think, think.

"Get that thing to turn off," one of the passengers said.

"Did an alarm go off?" another passenger inquired.

"What is that beeping noise?" asked a commuter.

"Do you have a bomb on you?" echoed another one of them.

The bus skidded. The screeching of the tyres made a noise so painstakingly loud, it pierced through the ears of the passengers. They sunk their fingers in to their seats, anticipating an impact.

The bus stopped. Three seconds later all eyes were on me. Curious and enraged – all eyes were on me.

"Is it going to explode?" yet another passenger asked.

"No, no, no. I am really sorry for the inconvenience. It's just that my phone's alarm went off."

I took out my device. I flipped it open. Even amidst broad daylight, my face was painted yellow from the reflection on my device. The word "death"

glared back at me.

I instantly turned it off and looked to my right. The man appeared to be startled. His surroundings were probably alien to him. Nonetheless, he came to his senses. My phone beeped at the lowest volume until it slowly died down.

He has changed his mind.

Enough for today. I have my limits too.

Just to be sure, I stayed quiet until the end of the trip and decided to follow the man. He got off at the last stoppage, walked to a house and rang the doorbell.

By their gesture, I could tell the woman at the door was his wife. She screamed and told her husband to leave. With each passing second, she became angrier until she could no longer withstand his unwanted appearance. She threw something at him. It must have been the TV remote.

This time, he shouted too. The children came running at the door and the woman had no option but to let him in. I watched from the bushes as the front door closed. My radar showed the word "no" in green font.

Phew. That was a close one. Usually, it's difficult to change a crosser's mind so easily. My radar did that job for me. I was lucky. I didn't think this could happen again in a very long time. It was definitely a first.