


Silent Yet Deadly Buses

Most Saturdays are generally uneventful, a chore even (apart from watching *Strictly Come Dancing*). But not this Saturday. No, this Saturday, Wai Gong nearly got his head knocked off by a single-decker bus; the number four to be precise. It was one of those eco buses that you can't hear coming. The headline would have been DEATH BY SILENT-YET-DEADLY BUS. Luckily for both of us, I saved his life because that's the kind of granddaughter I am. It's been me and Wai Gong since last year when my grandma passed away. And I wasn't about to lose him too.


I was making my way home from the market; my arms were aching from carrying the shopping bags. Red lines streaked my palms where the heavy bag straps dug in – I blamed the two kilos of red potatoes and the bag of jasmine rice. I was walking as fast as I could because the quicker I got home, the sooner I could sit down. My flat feet were aching badly.



As I turned into Woodlands Road, I heard the familiar sound of the Mr Whippy ice-cream van on the opposite side of the road, waiting for kids to appear. The battery must have been dying as ‘If You’re Happy and You Know It’ was horribly out of tune. The autumnal sun was shining brightly, which meant I had to squint to see the lump hunched over the edge of the pavement. As I got closer, the clouds moved over the sun. Then I saw a familiar figure.

Wai Gong was on his knees jabbing a piece of wire through the cracks in the roadside drain like he was trying to hook a duck at a fairground. His uncombed black hair hung over his face like frayed curtains; he was wearing the red scarf I had knitted him. He’d worn it all summer and now the cooler weather had arrived, he was rarely without it. Grandma Kam had started it off a couple of years ago and I finished it a few months ago. It was just one of the things that I had taken upon myself to sort out. I liked to keep busy, it stopped me from getting too down in the dumps. I really missed my gran; she had been a mother, a good friend, and a grandma rolled into one. Now it was just me and my wai gong, trying to take it one day at a time.

It had become a habit, doing the things that she used to do, such as the food shopping, the cooking, and even sorting out paying the household bills. Wai Gong had been so sad after she died. He refused to get out of bed, and some days he wouldn’t eat at all. There were days when I just wanted to hide under my duvet too, but I couldn’t just let him get thinner and thinner. So, I made him some chicken and sweetcorn soup, just like Grandma Kam did




it. I told him to get dressed in my ‘teachery’ voice and I took him for walks around Kelvingrove Park. It worked. He was still occasionally out of sorts, but he was a little more like his old self again. Lots of people offered us help, but Wai Gong said we didn’t need it. That we had each other.

The eco bus passed me in stealth mode, silently edging towards the human shape in the distance that was my grandad.

‘Get up, Wai Gong! The bus!’ I shouted at him. But the ice-cream van’s loud ditty drowned me out. ‘Wai Gong! It’s gonna hit you!’


My heart was thumping in my chest. I tried to rush over to him as fast as I could, but the bags were so heavy, they slowed me down. The bus was getting closer and closer.



I yelled: ‘Wai Gong! MOVE OUT OF THE WAY!’ I knew I needed to do something. He looked up and started waving at me. I sped up but felt like my feet were sloshing through mud. The bus was less than a few metres away from him. He turned his head towards me, smiled. Then he yelled:

‘Hello, Lizzie!’

The bus was about to give his head the biggest metal kiss. That’s when my legs pumped into action. I dropped the shopping bags. I ran as fast as my legs would go. I grabbed the end of his red scarf and pulled it with all my might. He fell back onto the pavement, his eyes bulging as he clasped his hands around his neck. The bus sped past BEEEEPPPPPPPING loudly. The driver held up her fist and was shouting something rude. I know this because a mother at the front of the bus covered up her child’s ears.



As it chuntered off into the distance, I read the sign on the back advertising a supermarket – ‘Every Little Helps’ – and squatted down in shock next to Wai Gong. He was trying to catch his breath. I loosened the scarf around his neck.

‘You . . . you . . . strangled me!’ He rolled over onto his hands and knees, panting. ‘Why did you do that?’ He moved the hair out of his eyes.

My heart was beating in my chest so hard I thought it was going to explode. All I could hear was the ice-cream van’s happy drunken song fading away as it drove in the opposite direction.

‘That bus almost killed you!’ I said, wondering if this is what superheroes felt after they had saved someone’s life. Probably not. ‘I was trying to save . . . you . . .’ I panted.

‘A quick death by bus would be preferable to a slow death by strangulation. What in the name of Guan Yin were you doing?’ Wai Gong said, taking off the scarf and rubbing his neck. I sat on the pavement and watched as two large potatoes were squashed by a Toyota hybrid and a cyclist swerved into a lamppost to avoid riding over a very large marrow (which only cost me a pound), that I was going to make soup with.

Wai Gong rose to his feet. He brushed down his black joggers and peered at his scuffed brown shoes. I walked over to where I’d dropped the bags. The egg box had flipped open. Half a dozen yolks were shimmering through cracked beige shells.

‘Not the eggs!’ I lamented. I’d hoped to bake cupcakes tomorrow for my birthday.

‘Come on, it’ll be all right. I’ll help you get all the food out of the road,’ said Wai Gong. He pointed to the mess. I was too tired to argue. The road was clear of traffic. We gathered most of it up and repacked it into the bags. Wai Gong walked into the road and picked up something flat as a pancake.

‘This chicken is dead,’ he said, surprised. He held up the sad squashed pale poultry, then smiled. ‘Twice-dead chicken, a rare delicacy!’ He laughed. ‘Do you think we can eat it?’

I couldn’t help it – I began to chuckle at the thought of run-over chicken with some squashed potatoes on the side. Although the tyre marks didn’t look that appetising.

‘If it wasn’t dead before, it certainly is now,’ I said. ‘And no, we can’t eat it, it’s basically pre-packed roadkill.’ I never could stay angry at Wai Gong for long. He put the chicken into the nearby litter bin. I felt bad that I’d wasted money buying it only to have it pulverised by a car. I hated wasting money full stop and I hated wasting food even more. We had to be careful. If we spent too much, then that might mean sitting in a cold house for a few days.

‘Wai Gong, why were you even in the road anyway?’ I asked.

‘I thought I’d dropped my house keys down there,’ he said. He nodded his head in the direction of the grate at the edge of the road. The silver wire stood upright up like a skinny finger pointing to the grey sky.

‘Oh,’ I said. I hoped he’d just misplaced them at home, because getting a new set of keys would eat into our weekly

budget. After the rent came out there wasn't much left. 'Okay. Come on, let's go home and I'll make us a nice hot drink,' I said.


Wai Gong smiled. I noticed he had dark circles under his eyes. I don't think he was sleeping as much as he used to.

Wai Gong took one of the shopping bags, which was now half the weight after our little incident. We walked to our tenement front door. There were some large weeds growing outside next to the step, that I hadn't had time to pull out. Neither had Mrs McGuigan who lived on the ground floor. The window boxes were full of soil with no plants growing in them. Only brown leaves that were starting to curl at the edges that had been blown in by the wind.

I took my housekeys out from my coat pocket and opened the communal door. Then we went up the stairs to our flat's door. Once inside we put on our rubber slippers and hung up our coats on the wooden coat pegs that Grandma Kam had nailed to the wall. They were slightly wonky, but I liked it that way. She'd put two coat pegs higher up for her and Wai Gong, and one near my waist that she'd put up when I was about six so I could hang up my own coat. Now I used her peg.

More bills had been delivered by the postie. Bills seem to always come in beige envelopes. I shoved them into the pile of pizza flyers and other unopened mail which had gathered behind the front door. I hated opening those, often choosing to avoid them until we got the ones with angry red writing on the outside that urged FINAL DEMAND.

Wai Gong carried the bags into the kitchen and put on



his music. This week it was ‘My Heart Will Go On’ from that *Titanic* film that Tyler’s dads loved to watch. Tyler was one of my best pals and his dads were called Antoine and George. Antoine was from Chicago, which I thought was cool, and he worked at Glasgow University. His area was meteorites. Tyler was proud that his dad was one of the few black scholars who studied space rocks. I think that was why he LOVED *Star Trek* so much.

I was glad to be home despite the warbling coming from the kitchen. I put my keys back in my coat pocket and accidentally knocked Wai Gong’s coat onto the floor. When I picked it up, I heard a familiar jangle. I reached inside the pocket and there was his set of keys. I grinned. He’d almost got his head knocked off for nothing: his keys were there all along.

