

## Wee Wullie

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'John, hurry up will you? We'll miss that bus if you don't stop typing and get moving!'

'There's always the train, dear one, so much nicer.'

'No, the bus is nearer and it looks like rain.'

'OK, my dear one, just coming.'

I close down Lennie my Laptop and skip (!) upstairs to ready my body corpus for another trip to town. We are to continue our search of the now mythical rucksack that will be the main present for M's birthday. This is the rucksack that we spent hundreds of hours searching for in Tenerife. And, no, I never, ever, ever, exaggerate!

Toileted, tooth-brushed and changed into 'going out clothes', I skip back down, reaching for my anorak.

'No, John, for goodness sake, NOT in shorts. We're going to *John Lewis*, for goodness sake! Look at the time! I told you ages ago to stop typing.'

'OK, my dear one. Right with you. Two ticks. But remember, that 60A bus is always late.'

Five minutes later we stand at the bus stop beside Kessington Hall. It is cold, with rain dolloping vertically in huge icy drops. My preference is to go for the train but M is keen on buses because this saves an 8 minute walk to Hillfoot station and because it is 'free'.

Thank you again, Lord McConnell, he who told us we "must learn to do less better!"

(I *know* that there is a missing comma, and the emphasis is mine, but I love doing "*less better*", it seems to come so naturally. )

A bus hoves into view through the sleet. It is a single-decker, a number B10 that has travelled to us from Balfron, a mysterious village which lurks far away, in real countryside, in a distant land called Stirling. This means we must scoot some sixty paces to the other bus stop.

*When, oh when, oh when, will East Dumbarton Council get their Kessington Travel Hub concept sorted out so that both buses can be boarded from the same stop?*

This B10 like its stablemates is old, noisy, stinky and cold, with windows well steamed. The redeeming feature is the pleasant lady driver who smiles and is patient with dodderly old folks like me who have to fight three zips to get into my man bag to retrieve my Concession Travel Card.

A mile into our journey we reach the boundary with Glasgow, crossing into Maryhill, a very different place from leafy Bearsden.

A youngish couple clatter aboard our charabanc, chuntering loudly to each other. They wave to the driver their pink bus passes inside floppy plastic envelopes and head past us to

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plump down in the double seat directly behind us. We are engulfed in the acrid vapours from recently smoked cigarettes.

The young woman is attractive, with neat, short dark hair, and just a little too much make-up, giving her the face of a startled jester. I judge her to be in her early thirties. Wearing a lime green puffa jacket, a short dark skirt and high-heeled clumpy boots, she is slightly thick of thigh and wide of hip. Her escort is a several years younger, boyish, fresh-faced, good looking, designer stubble, wearing a dark grey bomber jacket. They make a handsome couple.

The bus heaves itself forward to stop almost at once at the traffic lights.

'Darren, dud ye heer about Wee Wullie?'

'Aye, fuckin crap, eh? It's no rite, that, so its no.'

'Aye, yer rite Darren. Ah mean its no fuckin oan, issit?'

'Naw, yer right, Sharon, its jist no fuckin oan. Aye, yer rite, so ye ur.'

'Aye, evurryw an nose Wee Wullie's a fuckin eejit. Butt a mean, if yer gonnae slash sumbuddy, dae it oot in the street, rite? Ah mean no uppatt his hoos in frontay his weans.'

'Aye, fuckin crap, eh? Its no rite, so its no.'

'Kummon, Darren, itsariddy oor fuckin stoap!'

With the slow, slow crawl of the traffic, I reckon our pair might easily have walked this short distance quicker than by boarding our bus. I frequently contend that fewer than 10% of travelers boarding and leaving in the Maryhill area actually pay cash. Many are clearly refugees. M is dismissive, believing they have paid for weekly travel permits.

'Well, my dear one, what do think of the sad news of Wee Wullie? Perhaps you will see now why I prefer the train? Surely Abellio Scotrail provides a better class of travelling companion? What do you say?'

'John, keep your voice down, for goodness sake.'

The bus wheezes on.

At Wyndford Barracks a chap gets on who might be in his late fifties. He is reasonably well dressed and freshly shaven of face and with a billiard ball head.

A gravelly voice calls out to him, 'Haw Boabay, how the fuck *ur* ye, ma wee man?'

This convivial greeting is from a man who boarded at the same stop as Darren and Sharon. He is attired in a dirty fluorescent yellow high-viz jacket with a logo which announces *Security Team*. On his head is a Tartan Bunnet topped by a bright red pompom.

Bobby banters back, 'Haw Tommy, its yersel, so it is. Ur ye wearin that fuckin bunnet fur a dare, eh?'

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Bobby sits adjacent to Tommy, directly across the passageway.

Tommy leans into Bobby, conspiratorially. 'Ahve no seen ye fur fuckin ages, Boabay. Huv ye geed up drinkin in the *Politician*, huv ye?'

'Naw Tommy, naw. It's jist thit, well, Ah'm kinda aff it the noo. Keepin ma heid doon, in at, ye no.'

'Fuck aye, Ahve goat ye. Fuckin nay fun huvinn tae duck ootside evurray five fuckin minutts fur a fag, eh?'

'Naw, naw, Tommy. Ahm aff the weed innaw. Its cosae the pills, rite?'

'Aw! Rite, rite. Ahve goat ye. Rite. Sorry. Ah huddnae heard, Boabay. Aye, Aye. Ahve goat ye. Fuckin bummer, eh? Haw, Boabay, did ye hear aboot Wee Wullie?'

'Aye, fur fuck's sake Tommy, whit the fuck issit kummin tae. Fuck me if he dinnae deserve it, but no uppatt his ane door, no rite in frontay his weans.'

'Aye, Boabay, whit the fuck next, eh? So, Boabay, whit *huv* ye been daein wi yersell since a seen ye?'

'Auch, jist hingin aboot the hoose, watchin the telly, jist wi a wee kerry-in.'

'So, Boabay, yer no aktually aff it aw thegither? Naw? So, whit dud ye huv last night?'

'Aw, fuck knows, Tommy, mibbay four pints an a wee hauf boattal a Voday, no that much.'

'Aw, Ahve goat ye, So, yeev signed the pledge, huv ye?'

'Christ, dunt yoo fuckin stert on me an aw. Its enuff wi Angela goan on it me evurry bludday minutt o evurry bludday day, so it is.'

'Aw, right, keep yer herr oan, wee man.'

'Ur yoos tryin tae take the micky, Tommy?'

'Naw, naw. Ah didnae mean it that wiy. Naw, naw. So, where ur ye aff tae the day, Boabay?'

'Cos if ye ur. . .'

Suddenly the B10 stands on its nose. Without indicating, a small grey car has decided to stop in the bus lane. Its hazard lights wink at us, tiredly.

Our lady driver calls out in anguish, 'Look, it's him again. That's the second time this week he's done that to me!'

From the passenger side of this car a large, elderly lady passenger climbs slowly out. She slams the door and then squeezes between the car and bus to dodge through a gap in the traffic to the opposite pavement.

Unsolicited, Tommy offers us his views, 'Fuckin mad bastarts, eh?' Then, louder, directed at our driver, 'Haw, well dun, hen, yer a fuckin geenyus, so ye ur.'

We are too near to the car to force a way out and past it.

I reach past M and wipe a viewing port in the window with a tissue from my pocket. The passenger disappears into *Amhed's Day by Day* convenience store.

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Traffic slithers slowly past us in the outer lane. The vehicles are closed up, front fender on the rear of the car ahead, as in an over-affectionate conga. One mistake and there will be a multi-car shunt.

Behind us a taxi blares, trying to move the bus ahead by force of a million decibels.

The car passenger emerges, clutching a fistful of lottery tickets and risks death as she dodges back to the small grey car. Before she has the door closed it accelerates hard away from us and turns left at the next corner, disappearing.

'So, Boabay wheyr wuzzitt yoos sayd yer goan?'

'Auch, jist sum fuckin daft pub ower oan the soo-side. Its this guy Andra Ah yoostay work waiy. Fuckin yeers ago it wiz, but since he fund oot aboot me, an that, hees aye on the blower tryin tae get me tae go ower. In Angela says ittull day me good tay get oot fay unner hur feet fur a wee spell. So, heer Am urr. In Ahm no even that shoor whery the fuck it is, so Am no. Butt Ah geed in an sayd "OK, Ah'll go hen, jist fur you." Aye, so heer am urr. Sum sortae sing-song place Andra says. Apposed tae be jumpin, an that, dae me good, Andra says. Aye, so heer am urr, Boabay, oot on the ran dan.'

'Singin? Betya thurs lottsa burds, eh?'

'Ah fuckin hope no, Tommy. Ah'm past aw that stuff, noo. Rite past it! Aye, an look whit it dud fur Wee Wullie, eh? Ha, ha, ha. Heel no be runnin aboot pullin oot his twajjer effter this, eh?'

'Aye. Did ye heer hoo dun it, Boabay. It wuz. . .'

M stabs my side with her pointy left elbow.

We have reached the stop for *John Lewis* and I am hustled from the bus, leaving my companions to their conversation.