

Nairobi Bus

They stood pressed into each other: cleavages squashed and bodies bent. Those who had got on first, watched the African sun climb the sky through dust smeared windows. Tight butterfly bows knotted into hair, punctuated the chaotic colour of dresses, shirts and ties - all the more vibrant against brown limbs. Surely, the bus was full now. But no. Wheels clanked and juddered to a stop, a groan whispered and was passed around as one last passenger angled and wormed his way in.

The last man raised his head, giraffe-like, above the smell of breakfast fires and mealy that clung to everyone. He searched the bus for her. Her eyes were already on him. She had loved this man's smile for a year - ever since she'd started work. She gripped her hands in prayer waiting for the flash of teeth. When it came, it was so brilliant she had to look hard at her shoes. Then she stroked the handbag that held letters he had given her: they were ironed flat and pressed into the central pocket.

The man ached to talk to her. Only occasionally could he tunnel a hand and push a note through. Once he had rolled it into a ball and thrown it. She had fluttered impala eyes at him, and he had thought he would melt. Despite that one occasion, she never returned his smiles and he was getting sadder by the day. He had come to believe that she could not possibly return his love. Tomorrow he would get another bus.

That night the girl laid out her letters and gently picked each one up to inhale the scent of him. If only she could read and know what he was trying to say to her.

295 words