

## **"Only Losers Take the Bus"**

**By Miles J. Bell**

In my 37 ¼ years it seems  
I've spent 6 months waiting at bus stops  
like this one  
outside the freezer shop  
on Bethlehem Street

I hunch over half-drunk  
from an afternoon in beer gardens with friends,  
lager and cocktails  
looking at the timetable  
and wondering why I've been waiting  
for a bus that comes every 20 minutes  
for 25 minutes now

when a voice intrudes:

"what're you looking for?"

I fight the temptation to say, "a world  
where everyone gets to die loved and  
unafraid", but you have to be careful  
what you say around here

I look up into the eyes of a heavy-set bald man  
wearing a duffel coat and an expression of benign  
evangelism  
and say "the 45"

"ah, the 45, I used to take it"

"ok"

"you going to Immingham?"

"yes, I live there"

"I used to, back when I was..."

I wonder how he was going to finish that  
sentence  
then he volunteers he is 53  
though I didn't ask  
he is sweating rivers  
and swaying from afternoon drinking  
so we're twinned on two counts  
and I'm sure he's my best unbeaten bus-brother  
now

but he seems ok  
apart from failing to grasp  
I hate awkward silences  
almost as much as  
small talk

then at his shoulder  
a woman appears  
and a smile settles between them  
she looks as if she's lived a little  
too much or  
too badly  
but harmlessly  
because you don't get that kind face by accident

she is carrying a bag:

"what did you get love?"

"pizza and 3 bottles of wine"

"lovely!"

and they get on the next bus  
which isn't mine  
but which  
for a moment  
I wish  
was.