

## Would You Buy Her a Rose?

Another #4 van stops, and I'm wondering whom it has brought me this time. It's a Saturday afternoon, and I'm trying to recall the list of names that are here at this time. And before I could even reach his name, Adam steps out of the van, hands the driver a 100,000 LBP bill, and walks on my sidewalk. He ignores every store on the way except for that one watch store where he checks whether that watch he's had eyes on since its release in 2024 is still on display, and it is; things move slowly in this country. I barely saw him in 2024; I'm guessing that was the last time he's had a real job, simply because I see much more of him now.

He stops at the café in Hamra Square, and he sits on the outdoor table, even though it's freezing today. But if you know Adam like I do, you'd know that he never goes out alone; not without Remi—she was the one that introduced me to him in 2021. And that chair? That's the chair where he always waits for her to be dropped off by her parents. Speaking of the angel, there she comes. She walks over to him and they greet each other warmly, and then they go inside the café where they sit on the same upstairs balcony table where they can see me and breathe in my city smoke mixed with their fresh cigarette air. It's their way of taking a breather, and it's the best catalyst for conversation, and as always, Remi has a lot to talk about. I linger in the steam floating above their coffee cups, listening in on their conversations that always end up at "I can't wait till we get married". I marinate on that phrase for a second, because I tend to hear it more often than all of my friends do. The word "wait" stands out to me, as people in love don't usually wait; they just dive right in. What are they waiting for?

There's a moment of silence before Adam asks her if she wants to study for the upcoming exam they have, and she says yes. They're reading some article about capitalism when Remi interrupts and says, "You know what I hate more than anything?"

"Tell me", Adam says, confused.

"Reading an article about oppression written by someone that has never struggled a day in their life; their sense of revolution comes from an intellectual understanding rather than affective momentum".

"I mean... everybody struggles in their own way, you know? And everybody thinks their problems are the biggest problems in the world."

"Sure. I'm not saying otherwise. I'm just saying: why would someone preach about something they know nothing about?"

Adam points to the header of the article where it says 'PhD'. "I'm pretty sure he knows what he's talking about".

She points at the line directly under where it says the name of a very distinguished university abroad, and Adam strikes her with a perplexed look.

"You're still proving my point", he says.

She laughs at him. "Seriously? You're saying that to me while sitting in a café in Hamra because we couldn't afford going anywhere else?"

I feel kind of insulted. They come here every Saturday; I thought they liked me. I'm not sure I want to listen to the rest of this conversation. I go back downstairs, and I start looking for someone else to eavesdrop on. Funnily enough, there's a philosophy professor sitting downstairs. He's playing with his wedding ring as he's speaking on the phone, planning a date of some sort. "Did you check if the place has a vegan menu?", a muffled voice says from the phone's speakers.

“Yes, darling. They do. Did you check with the babysitter?”

“Yup. She’ll be there.”

“Alright, honey, I’ll see you after work.”

He walks out of the restaurant, his coffee only two sips empty. A little kid selling flowers tells him, “Mister, will you a take a flower for your beautiful wife?”

“Go back to your parents, kid”, he says, as he opens the door to the taxi. “The university right down the road, please”.

I watch as the kid with ten flowers walks down my street, asking every pedestrian if they would buy a flower from him, from Hamra Square till the university where I can overhear the philosophy professor giving a lecture about ethics, and then walks back with the same number of flowers as his freezing fingers.

While staring at him, I see two people leaving the café from behind him, and I just wish I could tell him not to bother asking them if they want to buy a flower so I don’t have to see the frustration in his eyes again, but he won’t give up. It shocks me when the man leaving pulls out the last 100,000 LBP in his wallet—the one that was supposed to go the van—and he hands it to the kid.

The kid smiles, and so does Remi, and so does Adam.

I feel proud of myself. Maybe Hamra Street isn’t so bad after all.

I watch as Adam waits with Remi for her parents to come pick her up, and I realize what waiting means to them. The kid waits for Adam, Adam waits for the day he can afford to marry Remi, and Remi waits till next Saturday. But me? I’m just waiting for the Saturday when Lebanon to them is bigger than Hamra Street.

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