

## The Hitchhiker

John was a hitchhiker. Or just a wanderer — he'd been hitchhiking around America for over a year, going from point A to point B, sometimes just at random, closing his eyes and pointing to a spot on the map.

And it all started after his former love broke his heart — left him for a more “promising” fiancé.

John fell into the arms of despair, started drinking, chasing oblivion in drugs, and quickly hit rock bottom.

His parents came to their senses just in time — grabbed him by the scruff and pulled him out of the mess. And he was truly grateful for that.

One morning, at breakfast, John said to his parents:

— I need to go for a walk. Think. Get myself together.

He put on his old leather jacket, threw a backpack over his shoulder, hugged his parents, promised he'd be a good boy — and hit the road. A long, long road.

How many sunrises and sunsets he had met like that, walking along highways — he didn't remember. And he thought, as his feet tapped the asphalt:

Am I really going to walk this whole path alone... and what will I even leave behind in this world?

He walked along the roadside, toward the setting sun, holding out his hand with a thumb up when he heard a car behind him. Judging by the roar of the engine, though, that car wasn't planning to slow down.

Not that John cared — he was used to sleeping in the fields under open sky.

He kept walking, not looking back, heading where the sunset had gone.

Night came on the road suddenly — and what John saw surprised him.

The road barely visible, and the sky burning with stars.

He kept walking, deep in thought, when he saw a light up ahead by the roadside.

Could it be? — John thought with hope, and picked up his pace.

It was an old Greyhound Scenicruiser bus.

The door was open, and the cabin lights were on.

And around — not a soul.

— Hey, anyone here?! — John shouted.

No answer. Just silence.

He walked around the bus and stared into the darkness, expecting someone to appear. But no one came. He was alone.

John was tired, and ignoring the weirdness, climbed into the bus and crashed on the back seats — and passed out.

When he woke up, it was still night outside.

He didn't have a watch, and he didn't feel like sleeping anymore.

He stepped out of the bus — and figured he was probably dreaming inside a dream:

rising over the horizon was a moon so enormous, his knees buckled at the sight, and he fell on his ass on the dusty roadside, mouth wide open.

— Hooooo... shit... — John whispered.

And just then, he saw the cat.

A regular fluffy black-and-white cat with orange eyes, sitting on a rock.

— How long you gonna stare at me like that? — said a voice inside John's head.

He said nothing, glancing back and forth between the moon and the cat.

— Lucky I passed by and saw this bus, — the voice continued.

— Otherwise, you'd be stuck here for a long time.

— “Here” is where? — John asked, locking eyes with the cat, feeling uneasy.  
— You don’t remember? — the cat said.  
— No... — John’s head started spinning.  
— The car. The one that didn’t slow down — remember? — the cat asked.  
— That drunk asshole hit you full speed. Didn’t even notice.  
Right now, your body’s lying on the roadside dying — while... while you’re asleep on that bus, — the cat giggled inside his head.

— So what... what am I supposed to do now? — John asked.  
— Start the bus, — the cat said out loud. — Get behind the wheel, key’s already in.  
John laughed nervously.  
— Want a ride?  
— Yeah, wanderer. We’re going the same way, — said the cat, and jumped into the bus.

John got up, swaying, not fully understanding what just happened or where he was.  
He looked one last time at the moon in awe, dusted himself off, and climbed into the bus.  
He awkwardly turned the key, started the engine — while the cat watched him with something like pity — and they drove off into the unknown...  
as a second moon began to rise behind them over the horizon.

To be continued...

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