

## The Bus Journey

She stepped out from the scrub as the bus turned the corner and began its slow descent of the mountain.

Peasant, thought the driver as the doors hissed open. Her head was covered with a scarf of indeterminate colour and she was wearing a faded grey coat, grey stockings, cracked dusty black shoes and clutching to her chest a large faded carpetbag. Her washed out blue eyes stared out from a face that told of a long and hard lived life. 'Where to today Grandmother?' He asked as she laid assorted coins onto the tin tray beside him. 'Town terminus, return, senior,' was the muttered reply. 'You should get a seniors card, then you can travel free,' he said, but she barely acknowledged him as she walked towards the back of the bus and took a window seat leaving in her wake a whisper of lavender. He was immediately transported to his childhood, sitting round the fire while the women of the household filled and stitched lavender sachets for sale to the tourists in the summer markets. Slowly the bus began to fill up, first with housewives aiming for the market and catching up with gossip as other regulars joined the bus, then with rowdy youngsters eager for the beach and mischief. An elderly man sat beside her, at first he tried to engage her in conversation but she turned and looked out the window, then he offered to put her bag on the rack above but she refused with a shake of her head and eventually he gave up. Meanwhile the teenagers had spread themselves around the bus and were tossing a beach ball around much to the annoyance of their fellow passengers.

The inevitable happened, the ball bounced badly and hit the old lady on the head dislodging her headscarf and exposing her mottled white scalp and a few wispy grey hairs. The housewives and the elderly man remonstrated with the youngsters who called out their apologies to the woman who merely adjusted her scarf and resumed looking out the window.

When the bus finally rolled into the depot the old woman was the only remaining passenger.

'This is it, the terminus, you have to get off Grandmother.'

She shook herself alert and stepped down off the bus.

'Don't forget the last bus up to your stop leaves here at 4.30 in the afternoon and I'll be driving it, so if you want I'll look out for you.'

There was a slight softening of her features as she replied 'Thank you, I'll be on it.', then she turned and disappeared into the town.

At 4.25 she was there at the terminus ready for the homeward journey.

'Had a good day in town?' The driver asked as she boarded the bus, but she merely nodded at him. He knew there was something different about her but couldn't quite work it out and then he no time to dwell on it as the bus filled with other passengers.

An hour and a half later the old woman got off the bus at the spot where she had boarded it earlier that day. Once again she was the last passenger on the bus. The driver watched in his mirror as she crossed the road and started to walk up a dirt track and quickly disappeared from sight

Four days later a short paragraph appeared in the local paper asking for help to identify the owner of an old, large carpetbag which had been found under the pews at The Church of the Immaculate Conception sometime during the past three days. Just over one year later a small ceremony was held in the cemetery of The Church of the Immaculate Conception when the well preserved body of a stillborn baby girl was committed to God's care. The pathologist reckoned the body was over sixty years old but had been carefully wrapped in old and more recent swaddling bands interspersed sweet lavender heads.

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