

END OF THE NIGHT

Terry watched as the bus rolled in from the main highway, this was going to be his very first trip away and was a little excited while at the same time a bit apprehensive. A gush of wind and a small plume of dust hit his face as the large bus stopped in front of the towns' bus terminal. With a sharp hydraulic hissing sound the bus doors swung open and the bus driver hopped out.

"Let me put your bags in the hole" said the driver pointing to the side cargo doors.

Terry handed over his two small bags and stepped up onto the bus. It was warm inside the coach most of the people were asleep. Well, it was quarter past eleven at night he thought to himself. Looking down the aisle, he could see it was quite full. Not wanting to stare for too long, in case somebody was looking. He spotted a spare seat about halfway down, that'll do he said.



As Terry began to stroll down the carpeted aisle and only a few seats from the front, to his right came a faint call.

"There's a spare seat here," pointing to the seat next to her, "I would like some company, we have a long way to go."

Terry stopped, "Thanks that would be great, my name is Terry."

"Oh, sorry, I'm Valerie." She said moving her jumper and blanket from the seat where Terry was about to sit. She looked at him trying not to awkwardly stare. He stood there in his blue jeans, dark blue woollen jumper, and her favourite colour. His hair was tidy, finger nails clean and trim, she admired what she saw, what a nice guy.

"I'm on the way to the end of the night, hah." With a small laugh, she continued, "That's my joke for the night, just trying to cope with the boredom, haven't been able to sleep."

"Where are you off to?" She questioned Terry.

He looked at her, such a friendly smile, "I'm off to Karumba to start a new book, I write for a living," he said.

'No', she thought, I'm not going to ask, just so obvious, he must get sick of it, I'll talk about myself.

"Bloody hell, that place is miles from nowhere. So, I'm off to the end of the night and you're going to the end of the road," she said.

Terry moved back into the aisle, gave himself some room to take his jumper off, much easier to do standing than sitting in the seat. Valerie lent over and grabbed his jumper and offered to fold it and put it in the ceiling rack. She was quietly taken by the pleasing odour of the cologne in the jumper as she folded it. Was as if she had known Terry from somewhere before.

Now all settled, Terry felt at ease sitting with this young lady. There was no awkwardness in this chance meeting, at least not like any other normal meeting with a woman. That awkwardness is so off putting that Terry has not bothered with encounters, well not like this. And she didn't ask him what he was writing about, he was going to lie and tell her he writes about the molecular structure of chlorophyll. Knowing his luck she could be a scientist who specialises in that stuff.

"Valerie, I don't think I can sleep either, would you mind telling me where the end of the night is." Terry said looking towards Valerie all wrapped up in her blanket. She didn't move, only her eyes switched direction, all Terry saw were the whites of her eyes flicker and then those eyes peering into his. She smiled, that smile, there is something about it Terry seems familiar with.

"My ramblings might send you to sleep. I'm a real chatter box you know. If I see you nodding off I'll keep going to the end, then it will be like a plane trip where you fall asleep just before the end of a movie, ha... and that sucks." She laughed out loud.

Valerie gave out a small cough to clear her throat and as she started Terry could sense a quiver in her speech. This was coming from deep within her soul, this was close to her heart. 'What have I done, she isn't going to cry is she', he thought. With another small clearing of her throat, she started her story.

"There was this guy I knew, Jack, well I had known him for a far while. He was going through a tough time, booze had taken over his life. Jack was once a stunning man, he would draw and write poems that were so beautiful. His words would take you away from the everyday hum drum. As you read his words you would drift away into his drawings. And now he is just a broken down bum that had lost his sparkle.

I decided to see if I could find that sparkle and bring him back to this, my world. I would meet him once a day to say hello and just smile, 'cause he wouldn't listen to my ramblings. I was forever thinking of ways we could do something together. Nothing ever popped up in this head of mine, absolutely nothing.

Then one morning as I was heading down to the café I saw a poster on the local billboard. It was asking for people to enrol in a small art class at the Town Hall meeting room on Wednesday evenings. Now today was Wednesday and the old light bulb hit me, I could ask Jack to come with me. He was so good at drawing and this might be a way of fighting off his demons.

Jack agreed to come, probably the only way to shut me up, but he did agree. This started something wonderful and over the next couple of months Jack's sparkle began to show. He would talk to me about his demons. I learnt to shut up and listen. Then when I look back at all his writings and drawings, he had been asking for help in so many words and no one had ever noticed. We would spend hours talking about each of his works and in the end he started to see the light.

He would keep saying that I saved him from the vile pits of hell, shit all I did was listened and chatted. We would lie together and talk about everything and anything all night. I had grown to love this man dearly. He always told me he would be with me till the end of the night."

With a sudden burst of tears, Valerie said, "and that's where I'm off to, 'cause I lost Jack last year."

They both hadn't notice the sun was about to rise and with that the bus began to slow down because they had reached the end of the road.

Terry asked Valerie, "would she stay with him here at Karumba for a while."

"I would like to share your story with others, I would love to put in down on paper."

"That's a big yes from me," she said, "considering I have nowhere to go, I'm the end of the night."