

SHARING A SEAT

The woman on the bus spoke in a loud and constant ramble to the man next to her. Her sentences had no full stops and she never paused for a breath. No one sitting nearby could fail to hear her. The man in the seat beside her never said one word. The woman said that her grandmother had taught her how to Tell The Weather and she reckoned it would be dry tomorrow even though the man on her radio had promised rain. She announced, “I do not care if it rains because I am going to be at home all day tomorrow anyway but my grandmother’s method tells me that it will not rain.” She said, “I know how to Tell The Weather, but I will not be telling you how I do it because I do not know you. Why would I tell you anyway? I am just sharing a seat on a crowded bus with you. It is not like I know you.”

BUS PASS

We took the X51 from Galway to Limerick. It was the fast bus. It traveled on the new motorway, so the journey was smooth. There was an old man sitting in the front seat up beside the driver. He fell into a deep sleep as soon as the engine started and he slept for the full hour and a half. He woke up as we pulled into Limerick station and he was the first person off the bus. The man wore a short-sleeved tee-shirt and he carried no bag. It did not look like he was going far. The weather was too cold for just a tee-shirt.

We went into the station café for tea and toast while we waited for our connection. The old man came in soon afterwards. He ordered a piece of apple pie. The counter girl poured thick cream over it. He took his pie to a table and he ate it fast. He ate one bite right after another without stopping. He finished the pie and left his plate on the table. The man went up to the counter and ordered a big slice of chocolate layer cake. The counter girl held up the jug of cream and he nodded. She poured a lot of cream onto his cake. There were plenty of empty tables. He could have gone back to the same table where he sat when he

ate his pie. Instead he came over to our table and he asked if he could join us. I knew the man wanted to chat. He sat down and he began to eat his cake with the same speed and attention that he had given to his pie eating. He sat down with us even though there were a lot of other empty tables. He looked up from his plate when it was empty. He asked if we lived in Limerick. I said No. I asked if he lived in Limerick. He said No. He said he lived in Galway. He had just come over on the bus for a slice of cake but the pie looked good so he had a piece of pie first and now he was having the cake which is what he came for. The man told us that he was retired and that he used to be a farmer. I asked if he missed the farming and he said No. He said he did not miss the farming, but he did miss the wife. She had been a school teacher but she died two years ago on December the 12th. He said the hardest thing in life was losing your partner. Losing your life partner and living in retirement had a way of making life empty.

The old man said that he enjoys the freedom of his Bus Pass. Every person in the country receives this card at the age of sixty-six. The card gives them freedom to travel on buses and on trains without

paying. They can take someone with them if they want. They can take a spouse or a carer or just someone they meet at the bus stop. Two people can travel for free. He enjoys the freedom of his card but he would like it better if the wife could travel along with him. Today he had ridden for an hour and a half to get to Limerick. He ate pie and cake and now he was speaking with us. Soon he would be on the next bus returning to Galway. That would be another hour and a half. He said he could ride the buses all day long. Riding the buses was a way for him to pass the time.

We said goodbye and went out to wait for our connecting bus. I watched the old man come out of the station a few minutes later. He climbed back up and into the X51. He was the first person on the bus. He sat himself in the front seat. We were still waiting for our own bus to arrive when the X51 pulled out and headed back to Galway.

VALLEY BUS

I caught the early bus to Cork. It was dark when I left the house. It was dark and it was cold. By the time I boarded, daylight was breaking. It was no longer dark but it was not yet light. As we motored along the valley road, dawn was illuminating the land. The pink glow of the sun hit the mountains first. Hills and trees and buildings were washed in the warm color that got brighter and brighter even while everything else was not fully lit. I sat on the left side of the bus in order to look out and across at the mountains, enjoying the silent emptiness of the countryside.

As we approached the village, the first house came into view. On the side of the house, someone had painted foot-high capital letters with bright red paint. What was written was: JIMMIE FEENEY RAPED ME. My pleasure in the pastoral and beautiful winter morning was shaken. This village is a small village. There are only 300 people living in it. The population of a village is determined by the number of people living within the speed limit signs.

There are more people in the surrounding countryside, but not a lot more.

I do not know anyone in this village. I do not know who Jimmie Feeney is. Everyone who lives in the village will of course know who Jimmie Feeney is. Everyone will know everything. If they did not know it before, they know it now.



STUCK IN INCHICORE

We were leaving Dublin. A man seated in the middle of the bus was shouting into his phone. No one could read or sleep or think while he was shouting. No one could fail to listen.

“The bitch yeah you heard about it? Yeah she had her head out the window. She loved doing that she did but we went through a skinny bit of the alley backing down and her head hit a pole. Yeah yeah dead right away. Snapped her neck. Not a whimper. Hey who is this anyway? Paddy? Paddy Dorman? Who the hell gave you my number? Who do you think you are ringing me? Paddy Gorman or Paddy Dorman? Oh you’re that Paddy. Oh Sorry Paddy I thought you were the other Paddy. You know him yourself. He’s a right nuisance that one. We’re stuck in Inchicore Paddy. I’m on the bus and we’re stuck in Inchicore. We’re going down to Tipp to see The Wife’s Mother. The Wife she’s down there already with The Mother. I’m with The Son. On the bus yeah. She’s not well The Mother. Yeah I’ve got the grapes for The Gift. Yeah Paddy we’re on the bus but we’re only in Inchicore. We’re going nowhere

Paddy. We paid to go to Tipp but we haven't got far. I'm inside on the bus now. Yeah we got on at Busarás. That's where it starts but at this rate we won't get to Tipp till Tuesday. You know yourself Paddy. Once you're on the bus it's like a trap. You can't get off. You've got to go where you paid to go. It was 28 euro for the both of us Paddy. That's what we paid and we're only in Inchicore so in that kind of a way it's an expensive trip but if we ever get to Tipperary we'll feel sure we've had our value for the money we will. We'll feel glad Paddy to be somewhere else."



HORSE

The woman was the last passenger to board. She was not old but she was not young. She was completely winded as she mounted the steps. She was gasping to catch her breath while she hunted out her money to pay the driver. She had been running down the road in order not to miss the bus. She had been running down the road wearing exactly the wrong kind of shoes for running. An elderly man was sitting in the very front seat. The old man said, “I heard you clattering up behind me. I thought you were a horse.”

TWICE

We had a short stop and then the bus left Cashel. After a few minutes, a boy in the back stood up and called to the driver. He shouted, “Hey! You! You left me Mam in Feehan’s Bar!”

Cashel had been the first stop since the bus left Dublin. It had been a two hour trip, so several people rushed across the street to use the toilets in Feehan’s Bar. The mother had been one of them. The driver himself had smoked a cigarette on the pavement and then he hopped back into the bus. Thinking that everyone was back on board, he closed the door and drove off. When the boy shouted to him, the driver stopped the bus and discussed the situation with the boy, who was about 10. The driver then turned the bus around and drove back into Cashel. The mother was waiting at the bus stop. She did not look upset nor worried. She was just waiting. The door opened to let her on and then the bus turned around again.

Turning a bus around is a slow and cumbersome maneuver. Our bus did it twice. By the time the bus reached its next stop, it was forty-five minutes late.