

When the bus arrived, it was packed. I don't normally travel at peak periods because I have all the time in the world and can choose to avoid the lumpen ignorant masses and travel at off peak times when they are safely at their workplaces, imprisoned in their daily mindless routines. Have you noticed that when you walk through lots of people, like down an aisle on a busy bus, you never see any faces in particular and just get past them, although you know that they are all looking at you?

I sat down near the back, next to a young lad listening to his music. After a few minutes, I saw the side of a face I thought I recognised. On the other side of the aisle, about four seats ahead I saw a familiar blonde feathered style of hair I thought I knew. I looked with greater attention but she kept her face bent away from me, and was looking out of the window. I felt that she had her face turned away on purpose because she never moved her head. I have a canny knack of burning my stare into the back of a person's head and I knew that she knew I was focussing in on her. She shuffled her feet a bit and then I knew it was Sarah. She always wore heels because she is short, and had little feet, just like the ones I could see now.

The bus kept stopping at almost every stop, to let people off, and soon there were only five or six people left on. She moved her head slightly and I saw her face. It was Sarah. She rang the bell and as she turned out of her seat she looked straight at me and without saying a word, I knew she wanted me to get off the bus with her. I did.

The bus roared away up the hill and Sarah sat down on the bench next to the bus stop. I looked briefly at the hospital looming behind us and then sat down as well, with her shopping bags in between us on the bench. She didn't say anything for a while and neither did I. I had noticed that her face was drawn and pale, and she had lost those attractive puppy fat cheeks that had made her girl-like the previous times I had seen her.

He died, she said.

I know. Her husband had cancer and although at first he had recovered and she had been less fearful, it had come back unexpectedly and taken him in a few weeks. Even the doctors had been a bit surprised at how quickly he had deteriorated. We had ended our relationship under a cloud, and although I wanted to make it up to her because it had been my fault, I had given her the distance I thought she wanted. I kept myself informed, though, about her husband's condition. She wondered how I always knew about what was going on.

I keep myself informed, I answered. I am sorry, but I can't really share your grief because I didn't know him.

You were right, she said, after another short silence. You were right. You never hear the shot that kills you.

I had that printed on a sheet of A4 paper and stuck on my wall at home. I had seen a Western in which four desperadoes were on the run. The posse was chasing them and when the desperadoes were trapped in a canyon, the one in charge of the posse

sent a cowboy to circle at a distance and shoot one bullet every five minutes. The scene cut to the desperadoes and after a shot, one of them asked 'what's that shot?' One of the older ones said; 'Don't mind it. They're just doing it to keep us from relaxing. You never hear the shot that kills you.' I had always been fascinated by that idea. It doesn't really matter if you do hear the shot that kills you or not because you will be dead and unable to tell anyone whether you did in fact hear the shot or not. Sarah didn't see my fascination, although, perhaps she did now.

I never heard the shot. She stated in a flat monotone. The shot ricocheted and after killing him, it went straight through me.

I was impressed by that vision, but kept my mind on the matter in hand.

So where's your car? I asked.

No money. She answered. He was the earner.

No insurance? I queried.

No. he told me he had life insurance but after he went, the policy wouldn't pay out; some clause about dangerous chemicals at work.

The sun was beginning to lose its battle with the on-coming evening and without it there was a chill in the air. She noticed and offered me a cup of coffee at her flat just up the road. I had never been there because our relationship had been a secret from her husband. Naturally, she had felt guilty about it when her husband got cancer and that amongst other things had led to the ending of our short relation-

ship. My antenna began to flash; there was no reason except her grief why we couldn't ignite it again now. I never know if it is an uncaring attitude, or normal male instincts; was it right to think these thoughts at this moment?

Her flat was quite homely, but strange. It was set out as if ready to receive someone. There were lots of male reminders; big screen TV, technical books on the shelves, and when I went to the bathroom, shaving foam and aftershave.

I haven't been able to get rid of the stuff, she said in answer to my questions.