There is Hope...
By
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Late on a sunny afternoon, the quietness of a residential street is shattered by an old noisy bus which carves an ominous shadow as it moves. Inside a teenager sits listlessly staring at his smartphone weary with the inevitable teenage lethargy, yet in commuting nirvana. An older man, who we can say is well past his prime years and bordering on senility, sits with his legs uncomfortably angled away from the teenager.

As they speed by the tired, fibro houses, endless as the dust of the desert and all different shades of mundane, the older man's thoughts turn to the nonchalance of the teenager—disinterested in his surroundings, listless in his reactions and, most pertinently, indifferent to the old man’s presence. This adds to the man's belief that to the world, he is nothing but a geriatric derelict.

Suddenly, the bus screeches around a sharp corner forcing the older man to succumb to the unavoidable law of inertia, clobbering into the side of the teenager. Nervous tension, momentarily, fills the air... However, the ruthless teenager shrugs off the collision and settles back, once again, to immerse himself in the same tedious routine of staring at his smartphone.

The older man's attention turns to other juveniles on the bus and their trivial conversations. Some argue, others recall, while still others deliberate— as in all public transport.

"I went over my phone plan by a whole twenty dollars," one says in an apathetic tone.

"Twenty dollars!"

The older man finds these seemingly abstract comments irritating and cannot fathom the facile minds of today's teenagers who all seem to obey a random code of socially awkward behaviour.

What would they say if he told them about the long dole lines of the 1930s, his makeshift dwelling with poor heating and sanitation when he couldn’t afford the house, his children going to bed hungry…

And, then, World War II…

What would they say if he told them about the curfews, the rationing, the conscription…

The bus slows, screeches to a halt and the door hisses as it opens. The teenager stands and, slothfully, wanders down the cramped aisle towards the exit. The older man follows. The teenager ambles off without so much of a backward glance or a polite ‘G’day’.

‘Teenagers!’ the old man thinks.

Maybe, they needed a war to teach them a thing or two…

The commuters dissipate into the twilight of the day, as the bus accelerates off in a puff of smoke. The older man follows at a much slower pace, along the uneven footpath that had long fallen into disrepair. The sky was slowly receding into a dark orange. There was stillness in the air reminding the old man of the ‘calm before the storm’ they had become so accustomed to in the war days...
BOOM!

The older man’s knees buckle beneath him; he instinctively places his arm out to break his fall.

CRACK!

Time stands still and then the shooting pain hits home, causing the old man to cry out. He, immediately, realises that he has tripped on the uneven footpath and, at his age, with disastrous repercussions...Seconds turn into minutes and minutes into hours.

"Help! Help! Anybody!"

The sky seems to have turned impossibly black. His words seem as useless as calling into a vacant wilderness...not a soul in sight, not a sign of life except for the buzzing of the blood seeking mosquitoes.

The worsening pain causes his breath to become more and more laboured.

Suddenly an unsure voice asks "Sir, Sir, Can you hear me?"

Severe pain prevents the older man from responding.

"Sir, help is coming," the voice reassures.

Through the haze of his agony and the darkness of the night the old man tries to catch a glimpse of his saviour-

The slothful teenager from the bus? Was it really him?

The wailing of the ambulance in the distance is comforting. In the meantime, the teenager pulls off his scruffy sweater and, awkwardly, props the old man’s head on it.

As the old man succumbs to the pain, a smile quivers on his dry lips.

There is hope…