

The Crimson Scarf

Out of eyes of blue came softness from the soul
Bringing a question from the passer-by
The crimson scarf was worn with grief-filled pride
Bringing a question from the passer-by
Sadness reflected from every pose
Tiredness showed with every breath
The passer-by could only question

Huddled against the back of the bus, she fiddled with the buttons on her grubby cardigan. Her feet constantly shuffled against the bag on the floor to keep the wilted flowers upright. Wispy portions of hair dangled around her face hiding weary eyes sunken by misery.

At each stop this traveller glanced urgently up and down the pavement almost as if expecting someone.

As her hands once again tugged at her clothes, broad bands of rings were visible. The mere quantity of white stones made one suspect they were not diamonds. The beads around her aged neck were accompanied by a beautiful crimson silk scarf.

Occasionally the scarf would be caressed by two life-worn hands and as this occurred one glimpsed a slow smile and softening in the eyes, showing the sentimentality of her soul.

Alice was making her daily trip to the cemetery to visit Jacob and Susan. Today the bus was crowded and as it turned sharply around a corner, Alice was jerked out of her thoughts. Her constant longing for Susan's presence tugged at her emotions. Susan should be here, her thoughts demanded. A quick flash of golden hair spotted at a bus stop would make her heart leap, but in an instant the grief would overwhelm her again, for it could not be her daughter. If only Susan was still here, Alice's heart would cry. Susan would have cheered her up. Susan would have had a smile and brought happiness to Alice. Her daughter would have caressed the crimson scarf and spoken of the father she had loved. Susan usually called it her scarf.

'One day it will be mine Mum,' she would say with amusement in her eyes.

It had been a melancholy day when Jacob offered the gift to Alice. There was no knowing if she would like it as Jacob had only been able to press money into a nurse's hand with instructions to 'buy something nice for my wife'.

Barely able to conjure up enough strength to talk, he pointed to the package at the foot of the hospital bed and asked Alice to keep it close when she thought of him. Then he held their hands and called them his favourite girls for the last time.

Alice fell in love with the gift immediately. It was not her usual colour choice, but the luxurious feel of the silk was unbelievably perfect. As she caressed the scarf that day, she knew it would always remind her of Jacob, for it was the colour of love.

Mother and daughter would visit Jacob's grave on Susan's day off each week. Alice always wore her lovely crimson scarf and they would sit on the grass and chat about him as if he were still there. They were able to express their sorrow easily while they recounted

stories about their life as a family with Jacob. Their hearts would be lifted and closeness would wash over them. As time went by the absence of Jacob became more bearable. They would laugh together and they would cry together. The trip home was always silent before returning to the grind of normality.

It was on one of these occasions Susan said how much she liked her mother's scarf. Alice promised the crimson scarf would be part of her legacy.

'It will be all yours, Susan dear,' she assured her daughter. Without words they acknowledged their strong attachment to a simple scarf.

On a fateful night of darkness Susan's life was taken from Alice. The phone call turned her life into a blur. They said the car was unrecognisable. They said they were sorry. They said she had to come to the mortuary. Her world crumbled. Her mind became numb. As she performed the perfunctory duty of identifying the body, Alice found she could not take her eyes from her daughter's hair. Hair that was damp and twisted far beyond the beauty that usually shone from Susan. The broken body brought damage to Alice's soul that could never be repaired. As she was taken home a fog engulfed her and every action became unreal.

So now Alice had to sit on the grass by herself; Susan occupied the space that was supposed to be hers. She was supposed to be lying next to Jacob - not Susan.

Her life could not be the same without them. She felt cheated and the grieving shell of a person that was Alice could not see a life beyond the daily habit of visiting the cemetery. For many months it had been her only reason for getting up in the morning. There was no delight in daily chores and the buying of flowers was all she could do for her husband and daughter.

The bus trip home, as the sun was sinking, was tiring and she longed for the comfort of her loved ones. Alice placed a cold hand at the space around her neck and heaviness of heart descended as memories flooded back.

Passer-bys in the cemetery noticed a shock of crimson fluttering in the breeze. The corner of a well-worn scarf had been placed securely under the heavy stone vase on the flower-strewn grave.

In the softness of a beautiful autumn morning, when the leaves are beginning to fall, Alice's soul soared beyond grief into the light