

The Black Renault Clio and the Double-Decker Bus

Grace Sampson was by the bus stop in front of the church and stood facing the road. A timeless silence reigned as she drifted to and from her thoughts, fractured moments of realisation being the only thing keeping her from sleep. She was exhausted, although it was only a Tuesday, and was propped into an upright position by a sturdy lamp post, whose bulb flickered in and out of consciousness like her. The dusky October light was gathering, and the terrible brilliance of the blood red sun behind the roofs was fading against the anonymity of night as Grace clicked her phone to check the time. The bus was as late as usual but the high street was far from bustling; there was but a trace of civilisation as the final shopkeepers tucked their 'open' signs in from the flag-stoned pavement and sealed their doors firmly. At this point she felt very alone. A chilled gust of air curled around her legs like the arms of a cat and she jerked upright clinging tighter to the lever-arched folders in her hands and the mobile phone that rested on top, held in place by only a thumb. At that moment, the phone screen lit up and dinged with a text. Shock stole her breath. Grace had subconsciously closed her eyes in uncertainty so she opened them, slightly trembling, and glanced down to the phone. As the screen flashed up again she let out a sigh of relief with the assurance that the message was only from her dad, simply letting her know that he'd be home from work late. So she brushed the feeling of fear aside, just as the blue double-decker bus emerged from around the corner.

Grace staggered up the lip of the bus and placed a scattering of change with the expressionless bus driver. The veins on the back of his twisted hand stood out like tributaries of a river which made her squirm slightly, so she pulled the paper receipt from the machine abruptly, paced along the aisle and sat down towards the back of the bus. Grace had never felt so delighted to be sitting down, her legs throbbed with a hollow aching feeling from standing for so long and the uneven walk through the graveyard from her school to the town in high heels probably hadn't helped either. It was Grace's first year of sixth form and she still hadn't got used to wearing heels yet, she loved wearing her own clothes to school but it was no secret that she struggled a bit when it came to the shoes. She glanced down at the pair of tan suede boots she was wearing and was engulfed by a sea thought and recollection until she heard the hostile echo of a voice from the front of the bus. She jolted up, as the voice sounded undesirably familiar. The man was as unaccustomed as Grace had hoped, but there was something about him, the way his body moved and the way he spoke, that aroused an uneasy sense of emotion within her. The man was clearly not in his right mind, perhaps due to excessive drinking, and wove through the path between the seats before sitting down adjacent to her. Throughout Grace's entire voyage home she was unable to take her eyes of this man despite how tired she was. The man had certain qualities that resembled a person from Grace's not-so-distant past, and in particular, the irregular oval scar on the upper part of his neck smudged her eyes with memory as retrospection rippled across the surface of her mind.

The bus ground to a halt as it reached its final stop; Grace gathered her bag and folders and felt down to her pocket to confirm that her phone was there. Giving a dull nod to bus driver as she exited, the doors fastened behind her and she began to trudge home.

The walk was not long and no one else was at home so she had little urgency in her pace and the monotonous one-two; one-two sound of her footfalls was reassuring, as the deafening silence she'd experienced earlier that night had put her on edge. The crepuscular shadows interweaved with the hedgerows like gnarled fingers as an inky ocean gave a fatal embrace to the last promise of daylight, although at the end of the lane, not that far from her own home she saw car headlights. At first she was partially oblivious to her past experiences, as it was perfectly normal to see a car driving down the street at this time in the evening, but as the car prowled along, getting closer and closer she realised that this was a peculiar coincidence. Everything became a haze for Grace as flashbacks seized her mind. She picked up her gait as the car advanced, she knew she couldn't run due to her ridiculous footwear, but every ounce of sense in her body told her she had to make a move. The car got closer and then she knew. It was the same shrill stutter sound coming from the same black Renault Clio, no doubt about it. Her breathing became ragged while the car buzzed by, and as soon as she was certain it was gone she marched on to her front door, adrenalin surging through her body, coursing through her veins. Hastily, she rummaged in the geranium pot for the spare key, and after multiple fumbles and stammers she was inside, the door severely closed and bolted behind her.

She ripped off her shoes and ran up the staircase to her bedroom, which was the only one in the house that overlooked the street. She tore the curtains closed and flipped the light switch, then got down on her hands and knees and pulled out a notebook, the one with the faded leather cover and pale tangerine pages, from a small slot in between the wall and her desk. In a different state of mind Grace would have undoubtedly been more hesitant to venture into the depths of the diary, but she was wild with emotion and terror. Her body crumpled like a rag-doll down onto the carpeted floor while she prised the book open and began to read her own memoirs in silent agony. These scrawled confessions reflected on her experiences with a cold-blooded guy - the guy with the black Renault Clio.