

Short Story

Call Your Grandma

by

Kate Kelsen

Word Count: 800

Call Your Grandma

All Rights Reserved © Kate Kelsen 2016

The bang was loud. Bloodcurdling. In a split second, every person on Dawson Parade froze, and then came running from all directions. The girl was wedged underneath the bus. Someone phoned for help. The emergency services freed her, and time stood still as they worked to save her life in the pouring rain. The bus driver sat on the curb, holding his forehead in his hands. Distraught onlookers comforted one another, unified as witnesses to this terrible accident.

They had been pulled into a situation they'd been completely unprepared to encounter. Memories were etched in their minds over the loss of a stranger's life, somebody they had cared less about only moments earlier.

The medics draped a white sheet down over the girl's motionless body. A dark cloud descended upon Dawson Parade, and it wasn't full of rain. This was the place we came for coffee, for boutique shopping, for Saturday markets. Dawson Parade would never be the same again for any of us there that morning.

As the fateful gathering began to disperse, I began to process what had unfolded. Life had slipped from this world into the next before my very eyes. It was surreal to observe a body that was walking one minute and dead the next. An invisible force had been sapped from the flesh right in front of me.

That morning had been fairly ordinary up to that point, but in the wake of such disaster, I appreciated its simplicity. The temperature was uninvitingly low, and I had wanted to stay in bed all day, but I was expected at work. Wrapped up tightly in my blanket cocoon, I was reluctant to get out of bed. Eventually I did force myself up, dawdling through breakfast and removing myself from my pyjamas.

As I rustled some breakfast together I remembered my mother had called the day before, gently reminding me to phone my grandparents. Grandma was very lonely now that Grandad was lost in the Alzheimer's abyss. He was living in ten-minute fragments of memory, and couldn't leave the house because he became too unnerved. I dismissed the thought for the time being, deciding to call them on my lunch break. I knew I would forget that too. I seemed to have become preoccupied with my own adult life.

I knew the time was fast approaching when I would not have my grandparents around. I suspected Grandad would be the first to go, and Grandma would follow soon after. When that day came, I would regret having not been more involved. I had made a pledge at one point to phone my grandparents on my days off from work. I felt this was a habit I could successfully maintain.

However, so far nothing had changed, and the only contact I'd had with my grandparents was at family get-togethers.

I set out on my way to work, and halfway down the hill the sky began to spit at me. The rainfall grew heavier as I rummaged around in my bag for my umbrella. Once I got it up it offered little protection from the diagonal slant of the rain, and by the time I arrived at the train station my clothes were soaked. My toes were wet in my shoes, and I was chilled to the bone, my teeth chattering.

I sloshed on-board, scanning the carriage for a seat. My eyes happened upon a schoolgirl sitting with her feet on the seat opposite her. Munching away on chewing gum, she looked at me once before recommitting her gaze to her phone screen.

A number of young children were going stir-crazy at the other end of the stifling tube of eternal boredom. Occasionally their mother groaned at them to calm down. I slipped my earphones into my ears and willed my destination closer.

As the train clickity-clacked its way through the inner-northern suburbs of Brisbane, I subtly observed the schoolgirl across the way. She oozed bad attitude—stark black eyeliner, manicured

fingernails, and bleached blonde hair with unsightly regrowth, swept up in a floppy ponytail. What exhausted parent had she left in her wake that morning?

The train arrived at Mitchelton station, and the girl stood up as well. We disembarked and headed toward Dawson Parade.

It was not the bus driver's fault that death stepped in front of him. And I hope that witnessing the incident compelled the schoolgirl to tell her parents she loved them. At the end of the day, none of it mattered. Who hated whom, who did what to whom. You could never possibly know when you wouldn't have another chance to fix it.

It was just another day for me until the bus hit me. I didn't see it coming, and what I would have given to speak to my grandma one last time.

ENDS