



Stories for the Train

Tales on the go

0:9:00

You'll Never Walk Alone

By Angela Bell

The bus stop is deserted except for Rita. She is wearing jogging bottoms, sandals, a denim jacket and red sunglasses. The wind is bitter as it swirls her hair around her face, she tries to hold it back with her hand as a man wearing an overcoat and carrying a briefcase arrives. He looks at Rita, and after a few moments, glances at his watch.

'Has the bus been yet? Excuse me, have you seen the bus?'

'Bus? No, no buses.' Rita replies nodding.

'Oh right. Have you been waiting long?'

'Yes, a long long time.'

'Right'.

'I've lost my...' She looks around searching for something, walks around the bus stop several times then looks at the man. 'Have you seen my bag?'

'No sorry. I didn't see you with one.'

Rita lifts up her sunglasses and stares at the man. She looks at his briefcase.

'Is that my bag?'

‘No, that’s mine. Are you ok?’

‘I’m just... I’m just waiting’

Rita puts her sunglasses back on and sits down. She looks down at her feet and notices that she is wearing sandals, she curls up her toes then starts to fiddle with her hair, twirling it around her fingers. A bus arrives and the man waits for Rita to get on first, she doesn’t move. Eventually he shrugs his shoulders and gets on, staring at Rita as the bus pulls away. She removes her sunglasses and puts them in her pocket as a woman wearing a duffel coat and carrying another one in her arms runs towards the bus stop.

‘Rita, oh my God Rita, what am I going to do with you?’

‘Mum.’

‘C’mon, come here.’ Stella tries to put a coat on Rita.

‘Stella, I was just...’

Stella finally gets the coat on Rita, she links her arm and gently encourages her to walk with her. Rita keeps looking at Stella.

‘Is mum home?’

Stella shakes her head and pulls Rita closer. As they walk down the road Stella starts singing ‘*You’ll never walk alone*’ and eventually Rita joins in. By the time they turn the corner their voices are so loud that when they pass a man walking his dog, he has the urge to sing too. The three of them finish the song together, the man smiles then walks into the corner shop.

Rita is standing in the kitchen looking out into the garden. There is a single swing, swaying in the wind, as it twists and turns, she smiles. She can see a young Stella bent over the seat, she runs around in

circles until the chain can twist no further, then she lifts up her feet and the swing unravels spinning Stella as she laughs and screams. As the memory fades, Rita's smile dissolves. The swing is still moving. Rita places a hand on the glass door as if to capture the image or to bring it back. It doesn't. She opens the door and walks across the wet grass in her bare feet. As she reaches the swing a robin lands on the seat. Rita bends down.

'Hi.'

The little bird chirps, then flies down onto the grass, and begins to peck at the earth.

'Searching for bugs, for bugs, bugs.' she repeats as she sits on the swing and watches the bird.

Rita begins to move her feet, forwards and backwards in a rhythmic motion. The wind has died down, but the sky is beginning to turn black. The bird grasps a worm, and as it dangles from its beak it flies away. Rita watches it fly as she swings higher and higher. Finally she screams as she lets go and lands on her feet. She lies down and looks up at the sky. As it begins to rain, she puts out her tongue trying to catch the rain drops. Then she stands up and walks back into the house, leaving the door open.

Once inside she goes over to the fireplace. On top of the mantelpiece is a black and white photograph, she picks it up. It's a photograph of Rita in her late teens holding a little girl. She gently rubs the photograph and hums a tune. it's fading with time or perhaps with her touch over the years. She puts it back then goes out of the kitchen and up the stairs.

'I'm back!' Stella calls out once she opens the front door.

As she enters the kitchen, she can see pots and pans scattered all over the floor. Stella shakes her head as she steps over them, seeing the patio door open she looks out into the garden.

‘Rita?’ She closes the door, goes back through the kitchen and runs up the stairs. ‘Rita?’

As she reaches the landing Rita appears from her bedroom, holding a pale pink blanket.

‘Hello. How are you?’

‘I’m fine Rita. I went to get the milk. What’s that?’

‘What?’ Rita looks at the blanket, then puts it behind her back.

‘Let’s have some tea and toast.’

Stella guides Rita down the stairs. As they walk into the kitchen Rita drops the blanket on the floor. Stella picks it up and notices the two initials sewn into the corner, SS.

‘I couldn’t find the toast.’ Rita says as she bends down and starts to gather all the pots and pans.

‘Was this blanket mine? ‘Rita, was this my blanket?’ Stella asks as she helps put the pots away.

‘I can still smell you’ Rita takes the blanket from her, holds it to her face, closes her eyes and breathes deeply.

Stella closes the cupboards then takes some bread and pops it into the toaster.

‘Sit down Rita.’ Rita sits at the table still holding on to the blanket.

‘You were so tiny.’ Tiny hands, tiny feet.

‘Were you there when I was born?’

'Yeh.' Rita gives a little shudder then pulls the blanket away from her face and plonks it on the table.

'Is the toast ready?'

'Hold your horses, it'll be ready in a minute. What did I look like?'

Rita shrugs her shoulders and starts fiddling with her hair. The toast pops up and Stella butters it then brings it to the table and sits down.

'C'mon Rita, Mum never told me anything. Was I a whinger? Did I have Hair? Or was I bald?' Stella starts laughing.

She looks at Rita, who has started to bite down on a piece of toast. Stella picks up the blanket and smells it, she can feel Rita's eyes glaring at her, so she places it back on the table.

'I think you have a wealth of information in that beautiful head of yours.'

Rita smiles. Stella goes over and puts the kettle on. As she makes the tea she looks out of the window into the garden and sees the swing.

'I used to love that swing. Shit! Your doctor's appointment. We better get a move on.'

Rita looks awkward sitting opposite the doctor. Her eyes glaze over as he speaks to Stella.

'So, where are we at now do you think?' asks Dr Steinberg,

He has been wearing the same brown and beige clothes for the last thirty-five years and appears to blend in with the dark oak furniture in the room.

‘What do you mean?’ asks Stella, as she takes out a tissue and blows her nose.

Rita puts the pink blanket on her face, taking deep breaths, she closes her eyes. Doctor Steinberg looks at her briefly then begins to explain to Stella how the effects of dementia can cause all sorts of problems, and if she wants to continue looking after her sister, she will need to understand the consequences.

Rita was fifteen. Over the last few months she had put on weight, but she did not know why. Only when she got home from school with severe stomach-ache had her mum noticed.

‘What have you been up to? How could you do this to me? Get out of my sight!’ her mum had screamed.

Rita ran up the stairs and buried her head into her pillow. Eventually her mum came into the room, gave her two paracetamol and a hot water bottle.

‘I’m going to get the doctor. Stay in your room and don’t make a sound.’

Rita waited for the front door to slam then stood up. Placing her hands on her stomach she could feel that something was inside. As she felt around the solid lump of rock, it began to move. A large stone was floating, turning and pushing against her flesh. She froze for a moment, then picked up the hot water bottle and pressed it onto her stomach. The pain moved like a tornado around her body, strong and powerful, with gusts of energy that made her want to scream. She didn’t. She bit down into her arm. Suddenly she felt some water trickling down her legs. She lifted up her nightdress. Her

legs were trembling as the rosy coloured liquid trailed down to her feet.

The bedroom door opened, Dr Steinberg walked in followed by Rita's Mum. He stared at Rita, who quickly pulled down her nightdress.

'It's too late for that young lady, should've thought about doing that before you got into this mess.' said Rita's mum forcing her onto the bed. 'I'll wait outside while the doctor examines you.' Rita held onto her mum's arm, 'Don't be silly, it's the doctor, he's here to help.'

As her mum went out into the hall, Doctor Steinberg moved closer to Rita.

'I'll be very gentle,' he whispered.

She could see his green eyes peering through his glasses as the mole on his cheek glared at her. She hadn't seen Doctor Steinberg for nine months, his face was the same and so was the smell of his tobacco breath, a penetrating odour that Rita had never forgotten.

'Yes well, look I just want to say that this will all be over soon. Your mother wants this to be a private matter so once it's done, we won't discuss it any further. Do you understand?'

He had spoken these words to her the last time she had seen him, at the surgery. It was a private matter, something that should never be spoken about. Rita felt cold. A numbness had taken over her body. Rita's mum came back into the room. She could see them talking but couldn't hear what they were saying. Her mum started to cry, and Doctor Steinberg rubbed her shoulders, just the way he had touched Rita nine months ago.

Thankfully the labour was quick. Rita was given her daughter wrapped in a pink blanket. As her mum tried to take the baby, she buried her head into the blanket and breathed deeply, holding her carefully and as tightly as she could.

‘Give her to me.’ Rita handed over her daughter tentatively. ‘I think we should call her Stella after your Nan,’ said her mum as she closed the bedroom door.

Rita stared at the ceiling, exhausted and alone, she could hear Stella’s cries as she wiped her face with her hands.

As Dr Steinberg finishes explaining to Stella that it would be best to put her sister into a home, she strokes Rita’s arm and dabs her eyes with a tissue. She takes a moment then looks at Dr Steinberg. He shows no emotion as he peers over his glasses at Rita.

‘I’m going to look after her. You know, sometimes, the consequences, no matter how difficult, are worth it.’ Stella says as she helps Rita up from the chair and puts on her coat.

‘All mine,’ mumbles Rita placing her head on Stella’s shoulder.

Stella smiles as she kisses Rita’s hair just as a mother would kiss her child. She opens the door to leave, just as the sun shines through the window behind Dr Steinberg, placing him in the shadow and casting light onto Rita, as Stella takes her arm.

‘C’mon love, let’s go home.’