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The Villagers Knew Better

by Stuart Carruthers

The village of Innisraig sits below the dominating mountain range that emerges from the Atlantic Ocean. Its small fishing fleet manned by the generations of families that lived there. The steep winding road that drops down into the village has a scattering of bleak houses either side and the streets around its harbour are usually deserted. Innisraig isn't on any tourist map and that's how the few hundred local residents like it. The single storey dwellings built from local granite and sculpted by the cruel northerly winds hid dark secrets that no one dared talk about.

The bus driver instantly recognised the woman with the striking red hair as she climbed aboard his empty bus. Checking his mirror on more than one occasion, he finally plucked up the courage to engage her in a conversation.

"Helen, your Helen Ryan? We went to school together, Pat Burn, Jesus I haven't seen you in years, are you still living in New Zealand?"

"South Africa."

"That's right, South Africa, you haven't changed a bit, what's it like in New Zealand?"

"South Africa."

"Sorry yea, how long are you home for? Not much has changed as you can see, it still rains every day and the wind cuts you in two."

Question followed question. Helen concluded that her answers were irrelevant so she just sat back and stared out the window across no-man's land.

There was no signpost for Innisgraig, just a nondescript left hand turn in the road.

As the bus slowly came to a stop, Helen stepped down onto the cold wet tarmac.

“I’m sorry for your loss Helen, I’d often carry your brother home from town.”

Shaking her head from side-to-side, she quietly said thank you.

“Do you know what happened Pat? I mean what are locals in town saying?”

Pat instantly gave the impression he didn’t want to say anything.

“Come on Pat, you must have heard something?”

“I’ve gotta go, sorry, tight schedule on the busses. Look I’m sorry for your loss but if you see Jean O’ Connors, she may be able to answer that question, but you didn’t hear that from me, goodbye.”

As the bus pulled away Helen wondered why Pat had mentioned Jean.

The fifteen-minute walk down into the village brought back a lot of memories, not least the hidden faces that followed her every step. They knew she wanted answers.

But the villagers knew better.