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## Far Away, So Close

by Stuart Carruthers

Standing in the deserted concourse of Busaras station, the girl with the striking red hair doesn't know if she's coming or going. Holding back emotions behind her deep green eyes, she watches one bus leave after another. Until it's time to go.

Sliding into the inside seat, its brown fur-like cover had seen better days. Through dirty windows the city leaves her. Its not long before the green fields of the countryside bring a smile to her face. Stopping off at random street corners odd looking characters get on and off. The sudden clout of the luggage door awakens her. And on they go.

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Tuesday, twenty past ten. The bath's slowly filling up. On the radio a deep meaningful conversation about the rights of cats and dogs drowns out the annoying ringtone of her phone. And again and again. Outside golden brown leaves fall one by one as the words she hears down the line make sense. Slipping into the steaming hot water, her skin softens and floats. Submerging her head a childish pleasure returns. She'll wait until the water turns cold before emerging into a different world.

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It started when he left. The cold house on the hill was too big for the three of them. Separated by walls as thin as the ice on the inside windows, cruel thoughts emerged. Hate was a word often used. Across the table they sat in silence. When the end came it was painful. Mother had a look that would cut you in two. Brother and sister on different paths. A confused young girl walked into town via the park one day. By the time she left her mind was made up. As the train pulled into the station after work, she emerged into a dark cold evening and a house in the distance with no lights on. The walk across the park that night took longer than usual.

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As the bus rolled into a deserted town centre, Deirdre wiped the condensation from the inside of the window. Childhood memories came rushing back. A flicker of snow greeted her returning steps onto home soil. On the opposite side of the square Doyle's hardware shop was as busy as ever. She felt uneasy in familiar surroundings. Walking up the hill storm clouds overhead painted a picture of what was to come.

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As the door opened a familiar scent of youth returned. The kitchen was full of familiar yet unwelcome faces. Sharp unloving words, she saw right through them. Sean embraced her and she sensed he didn't want to let go. Holding her hand like this was the last time, he led her into the sitting room. Time stood still. The atmosphere in the presence of death took her by surprise. In the centre of the room, in peaceful silence lay a woman she once called mother. Leaning forward so her face touched hers, forgiving words whispered in silence. Deirdre inhaled her scent one last time and held her cold dry hands.

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The months passed quickly but a day didn't go by when Deirdre didn't think of that traumatic day in the town she once called home. Over a coffee with her friend after work she remarked,

"Your family's never in your past. You carry it around with you everywhere."

"You got what you wanted didn't you?"

"It arrived last week, but I haven't opened it yet."