

## The Last Train

Wearily I board the train. It is old-fashioned like the ones I remember from my childhood with a corridor running down one side and individual compartments with seating for six people. I slide open the door to an empty compartment and settle next to the window. I am cocooned in brown leather, brown wood. The brass fittings gleam softly in the dim light. I smell the dust of a thousand journeys. The train pulls out of the station and I am gently rocked as it slowly gathers speed. It is dark outside and I can't see anything beyond my ghostly reflection in the window staring back at me, dark eyed.

It has been hard this last couple of years. Illness has taken its toll and I am tired to death, but the pills, medicines and operations are all behind me now. I close my eyes and feel my body relax. For the first time in a long, long time I am at ease.

It was lovely to see them all earlier. The little ones are growing up so fast. Picture postcard memories flicker through my mind: my parents, my little bed with my teddy bear on the pillow, my baby sister in her cot, the tobacco smell of my grandad.

The little ones will soon be teenagers and I remember those awkward and exciting years when everything was vivid and new. They still have so much in front of them. I recall the college years, my first job where we met, our wedding day, our home, the babies, the rows, the holidays, the love.

Back full circle. I doze.

The door slides open and the conductor smiles at me. He has kind eyes behind half-moon glasses, a midnight blue uniform, gold braid round his lapels, a peaked pill box hat. He shimmers in the light.

"Certificate please, madam"

I am confused. "Sorry I don't have a ticket. I didn't see anywhere to get one"

"Don't worry madam, it's probably not been filled in yet. It won't be long."

I am reassured, but still puzzled. "Where am I going?"

"The next stop is the terminus."

"Am I coming back?"

"No, this is the end of the line."

I hear muffled voices from the compartment next door. I strain to hear the conversation....

"Do you think she can hear us?"

"There's no research to say either way, but I like to think people can hear and that they get comfort from the voices of their loved ones. Don't be afraid to hold her hand."

It feels like someone is stroking my hand but there is no one there.

The train follows the curve of the railway line and in the distance I see we are heading towards a clean, clear light, and I understand. Peace descends upon me and I fade into the endless night.