

Boy

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And so, the bus chugs along. The bus conductor never seems to get a chance to get to me because at every bus stop some people get off and other new people get on and find places to sit nearer the front, and he looks after them first. By the time we get to Montayn Long, the bus is sardine packed, and a policeman, bulging out of his uniform, winds his hefty way to the back of the bus, and plonks himself down next to me. Oouf! He puts his feet out in front of him, loosens his belt, tilts his policeman's hat down slightly, lets out a loud burp, and closes his eyes.

Disgusting, I think to myself, and move a few inches away from him.

'Been stuffing himself someplace,' I think cruelly, 'No doubt bribery. Whisky and grilled seafood.' I don't know, maybe it's unfair of me.

Then I forget about him. I lift up into the clouds. Dreaming away out the window, scenery skimming past. Three or four days. Not three or four hours. I see myself riding a horse bareback in an open field. I see myself lying on my back eating a toffee apple, the sweet and the sour shocking my taste buds. I see myself kneeling down, rinsing my hair at a crystal clear spring, and shaking my head so that water drops fly in all directions. My face blue like Krishna's. And the girl, I see her hips moving, the girl from Kandos. And I see myself running in a wide space, wearing my Baya's running shoes.

'Fares,' the bus conductor says, 'All fares.' He doesn't take money from the policeman because they travel free. They get their travelling money from the government and then they travel free as well. Even I know that. I'm busy getting back to thinking about his burping, his free travel, his free whisky and seafood, when the conductor puts his hand out to me. I dive into my trouser pocket to get out my money.

But my fingers bump into something hard and oval-shaped that I don't seem to recognize the feel of, deep down in my pocket. I decide to fish it out and see what it is, and just as I get it out into the open there, in the palm of my right hand, at that very moment, I remember what it is, and freeze: the measure of grass rolled up in cellophane with the end twisted round. A puliah. Cannabis. My errand from Mamu Dip to my mother. For the Granbasin service. Errant me. Error-making me. Errand boy. Fool's errand.

Some god, please, save me.

The bus conductor looks up at the sky, as if to say what kind of a freak is this anyway in my bus, what kind of fool. Derye gopya, he mouths. Then he looks at the policeman with a behind-the-back-of-the-teacher look to me, and I hear him mumbling, 'Fucking screw loose,' and looking in my direction. Instead of turning the handle of his ticket machine, he turns his hand around his own head, implying I'm off my head.

I am.

The policeman is transfixed. Maybe he's drunk. Or just blanked out. His eyes are open, but stare absent-mindedly into space, focused about two foot ahead of him. That's luck for you. Most likely he's got this act so that he doesn't have to pay and at the same time he doesn't even have to negotiate not to. Thinking his own thoughts, he is, self-importantly. Not paying a blind bit of attention to us. Thank you, god. Whichever one. The god of fucking screws loose. The god of good luck charms. The god of Baya's bracelet. The god of messenger boys.