

My Summer Photo

By Gary Lonesborough, Bega High School

The train is late. I glance at my watch. Nine o'clock; any minute now. Trains can be late, I thought. It happens all the time. The hot summer weather must be forcing people to take longer breaks today. My pink, Hawaiian shirt is drenched in sweat and my sky-blue jeans are hotter than they have ever been. It is meant to be the hottest summer in fifty or so years, so they say.

Hallelujah! A light comes shining from the deepest darkness of the tunnel. A city train comes streaming through. I pick up my bag and photo frame: an old woman sitting at the beach with her granddaughter, soaking up the scorching sun. The train stops in front of my face. I step inside and take a seat. Again, I glance at my watch. Ten past nine. A stirring feeling grows in my stomach as the train doors close.

I grip the metal bar as the engine begins to roar. The stirring feeling in my stomach grows with every second that passes by. At speed, we shoot out of the tunnel. Over a bridge we ride, ever so high above the ground. The train is filled with light. I gaze out the window. As far as my eye can see, there is water. Boats stride beneath the bridge, the sun shines through the masterful mountains that surround the track. Nothing in sight that could distort the water, it was beautiful. Oh how I'd kill to be down there.

I place my bag beneath my legs but I keep the photo frame in my hand. I look at my watch. Twenty minutes to ten. I'm late. My hands are moist. It's so hot on this train. Across from me sits a boy, couldn't have been in his teens. He wears a woollen, grey jacket and a purple beanie. His skin was pail and clammy; his eyes, drowsy as if he hadn't slept for weeks. He

looks at me and smiles. Around his neck, a pendant hangs: a golden crucifix. I look down at my photo frame and see a golden crucifix sitting around the old woman's neck. The memory of the necklace is as fresh in my mind as the sweat rolling down my temple.

My watch is heavy on my wrist. It is three minutes to ten o'clock. A voice over head interrupts my thoughts. "Next stop, City hospital." I retrieve my bag from beneath my legs and prepare for a quick getaway. Almost instantly, the outside areas change from bushlands to city rush hour, the neon lights shining viciously through the train. The hospital comes into sight and grows closer. The train comes to a halt. The doors open. I grip my photo frame tightly. I leap off the train and race for the hospital, the sun burning my skin as I run. I look at my watch one last time and see the hand tick over to ten o'clock.

I nearly slip over as I arrive inside the hospital. On replay in my head "Room three two six, room three two six." The elevators are busy. I have no more time to waste. To the stairs I sprint. I run as fast as I can up the concrete mountain till I find the third floor. I come to a door with the number three above it and bust it open, walking quickly up the corridor. Smash! I look down to see my photo frame broken, the glass shattered. My heart sinks. I drop to my knees and begin picking up the glass. A nurse comes to my assistance. "Don't worry," she says with the softest voice, "I'll take care of it." I smile gratefully, pick up the photo and continue with my bag to room three two six. After careful walking, I finally see the number I've been searching for and I can breathe again. But something is wrong. As I enter, I see a group of people overcrowding the room: doctors and nurses, the devastating white coat. A nurse stares into my soul, her eyes about to break down. She stares at me for a second then bows her head. I move past her frantically.

The train was late, too late. It happens all the time, doesn't it? Why today?

An old woman lies quietly and peacefully in her bed under her thick, grey blanket. Her face is so still and silent. Around her neck rests the golden crucifix that stays forever in my mind. I sit in the wooden chair beside her bed. I feel a great wave of sorrow pulsate through my body. It is a feeling I have never felt before. I place the photo gently on her chest.

“There you go, Granny, your favourite picture. I know you loved it like nothing else.”

The end.