

## MOONFACE GIRL

(1009 words)

It only took ten minutes for the number eight tram to cross the three kilometres of parkland on the left and high rise office buildings and units on the right of St Kilda Road. Unfortunately, in those ten minutes I discovered a new part of myself that unsettled me. It was Moonface who revealed to me my new fears and prejudices.

That short journey on this unusually cold spring day, turned out to be a journey into myself as well as into our new world. My journey started when I ascended the tram in the city. The warmth inside was welcome. I settled into the window seat looking forward to seeing the passing scenery. At first I felt smug, seeing people scurrying in the business district. Later I considered the boulevard; its opposing sides combined the best of nature on the left and civilization on the right.

My seat was one of four on the left side of the tram. That little compound carried its own contrast- the thrust of modern technology carrying it along on the one hand, and the mixture of human warmth, scents and sounds belonging to the four passengers on the other. The contrast was vaguely pleasant to me. I also indulged my pleasure in being the observer of both the outside and inside scenes; for although we four passengers were trapped so close that our knees could touch if we were not careful, etiquette demanded a safe distance that relegated each of us to at most discreet observers of each other.

I glanced at the woman sitting opposite me. She was nodding her head to music pumped from under her coat by a portable CD player, the give-away being the thin wires going into her ears. She seemed to me to be in her early thirties. Her hair, different blends of fair, was held flat by pins as it swept across her crown to her left shoulder. Her face was well proportioned, skin smooth and pale, with a few freckles. Her lips were pursed and thin, and the lipstick only enhanced their severity. Her nose was straight. Her concession to softness was simple black ear rings, hanging below the wires, matching them in colour. I mention her eyes last, because in spite of the rhythmic motion of her head, they were inexpressive. They happened to be light blue, but their colour mattered little. She wore a long beige plastic coat over a jumper. High brown leather shoes completed the picture. She was plain and unyielding, except for being moved by her music.

She was a little too old, and too stern, to be bopping like this, I thought. But I felt comfortable in her proximity, in spite of the fact that I did not exist for her. She was a variant of a cultural type that I recognized.

Everything changed when the passenger next to me and the person opposite left their seats, and Moonface- as I came to call her in the short time that our destinies crossed- sat down diagonally opposite me, and her friend next to me.

The feature about Moonface that immediately drew my attention was the swarthy colour of her skin, which, smooth and unblemished, covered her moon shaped face. She had long, wide open, dark brown eyes, taking up an unusual proportion of her features. Her lips were shapely, her chin formed a little protuberance on a wide lower curve of her

jaw. I could not see her hair, as she had a close fitting knitted woollen cap, with alternating rows of murky green, autumn brown, cream, and rusty red, pulled down over her forehead.

A thick black polo neck jumper covered her neck, under an open necked white blouse with steel studs instead of buttons. However, only the tops of these garments were visible, because almost from neck to ankles she wore a loose, flexible cylindrical tube of plain grey wool, whose folds suggested a not unattractive degree of plumpness underneath. Reaching up to the hem of this 'dress' was a pair of white leather shoes with medium high heels and little yellow and orange pom-poms dangling at the end of white shoe laces. She wore cheap decorative silver rings on her right thumb and on an assortment of fingers, but not the ring ones.

At first I thought that this around twenty year old girl was Indian or Sri Lankan, but then I wondered whether she was Middle Eastern; whether she was camouflaging her Muslim background by wearing reserved but not obviously traditional clothes. Against my will, my mind turned to Islamic suicide bombers. Under that loose dress, could she be concealing...? I looked again. Now I wondered whether lack of visible hair were signs that she was receiving chemotherapy for cancer and whether her moon face was due to cortisone medication. This time, in my mind, it was she who was in danger.

Moonface and her girlfriend started to talk. I noted my relief that they spoke with an Australian accent. The two got up and placed train tickets in the validating machine, which of course rejected them. They shrugged their shoulders, giggled, and sat down again.

Moonface's friend made enthusiastic sallies to her friend, covering all the important topics- cost of mobiles, shoes and where to get them (they arranged to go shopping for them together), who attended which party, and university studies. Moonface responded with interest, tolerance and good humour, moderated, I thought, either by maturity, or parental guidance; or perhaps, I found myself thinking, by some precocious knowledge of how hard life can be. Occasionally, however, Moonface broke into a real laugh, and it tickled something in my lungs too, but before it could reach my throat, the resonance was suppressed.

The tram arrived at Chapel Street. The girls dismounted to have a good time. I could see healthy dark hair jutting out from under the back of Moonface's cap.

She was not of a type. She did not want to be. I felt ashamed for my fear and distrust.