

CYCLES

by Robert L. Crowe



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(at open a young girl is already seated on the bus. An older woman enters down the aisle)

ANNE: Excuse me, miss. Is this seat taken?

DARLENE: No, but there are lots of seats on the bus with no one in them ...

ANNE: Thank you. *(sits)* You know ... an old lady like me has taken a-many of these long bus trips. I'm rather used to it. Besides, I figured maybe you'd want some company. You know, some girl-to-girl conversation.

DARLENE: Lady, you must be 50 years older than me. I don't know what it is we got to talk about. *(they sit in silence for a few moments)*

ANNE: So ... how far you going?

DARLENE: *(sighs)* Next town.

ANNE: Oh, me, too. It's about an hour from here. You been riding long?

DARLENE: Seven hours. That's how long I been on buses today. I'm tired. I don't feel much like talkin'.

ANNE: Oh ... sure. I understand. *(pause)* I know it's none of my business, but are those tear stains on you face?

DARLENE: *(pause)* Maybe. *(wipes face with hand)*

ANNE: Do you want to talk about what's bothering you?

DARLENE: No.

ANNE: I'll bet you I can guess what the problem is.

DARLENE: Look, lady ... I been travelin' a long time, I'm tired and I don't want to talk. Anyway, there's no way someone as ancient as you could understand my problems.

ANNE: *(pause)* Sure ... and I don't aim to bother you, honey, but I can't help smiling. It seems that the young never catch on. They always believe that running from something is the way to solve problems. You sound just like I did once, only it was a long time ago. I said those exact same words to my mother, right before I left home. Got on a bus ... not quite as nice as this one ... and took off.

DARLENE: You? Ran away from home? Did they have buses a hundred years ago?

ANNE: *(smiles)* Yes ... You know why I did it? Because I was smarter than everybody else ... at least I thought so at the time. I sure got an education. I got surprised at how much everyone else knew that I didn't know.

DARLENE: Now you're startin' to sound like my mom ... always sayin' how dumb I am. What is it about you old people? You always think you're smarter'n us kids ... you think you know everything about everything jist because you're old, and you don't understand it at all.

ANNE: No, I don't think that I'm smarter than anybody else. But a lot of the young people today believe they're smarter ... just because they're young. It's simply that whether you are young or old, when you start thinking you know more than everyone else, you just made a big mistake.

DARLENE: Oh, I got me a bus-stop philosopher here! You old people assume you ... are ... always ... right! I mean, isn't there a chance that we may be right some of the time? You judge me for runnin' away from home, and you did the same thing! You think I'd be better off in that crummy little apartment watchin' TV with my mother, the talk show queen? ... and waitin' for my father to come around every once in a while breathin' booze that would melt a plastic flower. You think that's smart ... to stay there? *(stands)* Maybe I'd better find another seat someplace else.

ANNE: *(puts hand on arm)* No, sit down. Sorry to upset you. *(Darlene sits)* It sounds like you had good reason to leave. *(looks to a distant memory)* That's better than the reason I had to leave home ... at least I guess so.

DARLENE: (*calming down*) Yeh? Was it school? I bet it was school. I dropped out of school. Did you hate school, too?

ANNE: Oh, my dear, no. I was Homecoming Queen. Those days were glorious!

DARLENE: You? A Homecoming Queen?

ANNE: Yes. Underneath this weary old skin ... (*strikes a queenly pose*) ... is royalty! (*they both laugh*) It doesn't mean very much ... being a Homecoming Queen ... but I thought it did at the time.

DARLENE: Then why'd you leave home? Your parents beat ya?

ANNE: No. They were nice people ... solid, middle class America. I left because I was bored with life. It was a nice life, but it was boring. Everything was planned and predictable and I wanted some excitement. For instance ... they bought me a bicycle.

DARLENE: What's wrong with that? I'd love a bicycle!

ANNE: I wanted a motorcycle.

DARLENE: (*laughs*) I have trouble picturin' you on a motorcycle.

ANNE: So did my parents. And I left a perfectly lovely home because I wanted to see the world.

DARLENE: Well ... my home wasn't perfectly wonderful. It was perfectly putrid. My dad beat us around a lot. Mom called the police a few times but they couldn't do much of anything. And we couldn't call them everyday ... like we probably should have. I tried to get my mother to leave a lot of times, but for some dumb reason, she just stayed.

ANNE: Did you just leave home today?

DARLENE: You know. I don't think of it as *home* ... I just think of it as a place ... and no. I left a week and a half ago.

ANNE: You've been traveling a week and a half?

DARLENE: Naw. There was this ... boy.

ANNE: Oh.

DARLENE: We were in love ... or, the way it turned out ... *I* was in love. He told me how wonderful it was all going



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