

MADAM RIDES A BUS

- THERE was a girl named Valliammai who was called Valli for short.
- She was eight years old and very curious about things.
- Her favourite pastime was standing in the front doorway of her house, watching what was happening in the street outside.
- She had no playmates of her own age on her street, and this was about all she had to do.
- Valli use to stand at the front door was every bit as enjoyable as any of the elaborate games other children played. Watching the street gave her many new unusual experiences.

- The most fascinating thing of all was the bus that travelled between her village and the nearest town.
- It passed through her street each hour, once going to the town and once coming back. The sight of the bus, filled each time with a new set of passengers, was a source of unending joy for Valli.
- she wanted to ride on that bus, even if just once. This wish became stronger and stronger.
- Valli would stare wistfully at the people who got on or off the bus when it stopped at the street corner

- Over many days and months Valli listened carefully to conversations between her neighbours and people who regularly used the bus.
- she also asked a few discreet questions here and there. This way she picked up various small details about the bus journey.
- She learnt that the town was six miles from her village, the fare was thirty paise one way and the trip to the town took forty-five minutes.
- On reaching town, if she stayed in her seat and paid another thirty paise, she could return home on the same bus. This meant that she could take the one-o'clock afternoon bus, reach the town at one forty-five, and be back home by about two forty-five...
- On and on went her thoughts as she calculated and recalculated, planned and replanned.

- Well, one fine spring day the afternoon bus was just on the point of leaving the village and turning into the main highway when a small voice was heard shouting
- Valli stops the bus.

The conductor stretched out a hand to help her up. “Never mind,” she said, “I can get on by myself. You don’t have to help me.”

The conductor was a jolly sort, fond of joking. “Oh, please don’t be angry with me, my fine madam,” he said.

She was given a seat right up in front.

It was the slack time of day, and there were only six or seven passengers on the bus. They were all looking at Valli and laughing with the conductor.

Valli was overcome with shyness. Avoiding everyone’s eyes, she walked quickly to an empty seat and sat down.

It was a new bus, its outside painted a gleaming white with some green stripes along the sides. Inside, the overhead bars shone like silver.

Directly in front of Valli, above the windshield, there was a beautiful clock. The seats were soft and luxurious.

Valli devoured everything with her eyes.

- She started to look outside, she found her view cut off by a canvas blind that covered the lower part of her window.
- So she stood up on the seat and peered over the blind. The bus was now going along the bank of a canal. The road was very narrow. On one side there was the canal and, beyond it, palm trees, grassland, distant mountains, and the blue, blue sky.
- On the other side was a deep ditch and then acres and acres of green fields — green, green, green, as far as the eye could see. Oh, it was all so wonderful! Suddenly she was startled by a voice. “Listen, child,” said the voice, “you shouldn’t stand like that. Sit down.”

- She is upset on being checked by an elderly gentleman.
- Valli does not want anybody's help and wants to feel independent. She enjoys every bit of her journey to the town. But she is careful enough not to get off the bus in the unknown town.
- On her return journey, a sad accident spoils her mood and she just keeps to herself throughout the journey. She does not seem to be satisfied with one ride and wishes to make another attempt in future. She made sure that her mother did not know about her journey.