

## MADAM RIDES THE BUS



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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. There were no playmates of her own age on her street, and this was about all she had to do.

But for Valli, standing 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.

Day after day she watched the bus, and gradually a tiny wish crept into her head and grew there: she wanted to ride on that bus, even if just once. This wish became stronger and stronger, until it was an overwhelming desire.

Valli would stare wistfully at the people who got on or off the bus when it stopped at the street corner. Their faces would kindle in her longings, dreams, and hopes. If one of her friends happened to ride the bus and tried to describe the sights of the town to her, Valli would be too jealous to listen and would shout, in English: "Proud! proud!" Neither she nor her friends really understood the meaning of the word, but they used it often as a slang expression of disapproval.

Over many days and months Valli listened carefully to conversations between her neighbours and people who regularly used the bus, and she also asked a few discreet questions here and there. This way she picked up various small details about the bus journey. The town was six miles from her village. The fare was thirty paise one way – “which is almost nothing at all,” she heard one well-dressed man say, but to Valli, who scarcely saw that much money from one month to the next, it seemed a fortune. 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.

### **Summary:-**

‘Madam Rides the Bus’ is the story of a young girl who travels for the first time outside her village by bus. Valli Kannan is pseudonym of R.S Krishnaswami’s. He is an Indian Tamil writer, journalist, critic, translator. Valli is an eight-year-old girl who lives near a bus stop in a village and she loves standing in the doorway watching the routines of people at the bus stop. She grows a desire to ride the bus and decides to plan out everything from her expenses to her journey to the timings. She started listening to the conversations between her neighbours who frequently travelled by bus and in the process, would ask a few careful questions here and there to collect more information. So she now saves her money for two - way fair which was thirty each side (sixty in total) and plans that it is possible for her to go on a bus ride only when her mother is taking an afternoon nap.

When she had the required money, she went on the bus. The conductor was surprised to see a young girl, traveling by herself but jokingly called her ‘Madam’ and offered her the front seat. Valli observed everything very carefully the trees that seemed to be running towards them, a cow that suddenly moved in front of the bus and so on.

When they reached the town, Valli gaped at everything in amazement—the big shops and so on. The conductor asked her to get down and have a look at the sights, but Valli refused. She said that she had come only for the bus ride. The conductor offered to buy a cold drink for her but she refused.

On the journey back, Valli saw a young cow dead by the roadside. The conductor told Valli that it was the same cow they had seen earlier. Valli felt sad. The memory of the cow haunted her. When they reached the village, the conductor told her to come again, but to remember to bring the fare. When Valli reached home, she found

an aunty with her mother. Her mother asked her where she had been. Valli did not reply but only smiled secretively.

**Conclusion of this story-**

The story illustrates the desire of a small girl and how a bad incident makes her understand the matters of life and death.

**worksheets**

**Text book questions:-**

1. What was Valli's deepest desire? Find the words and phrases in the story that tell you this.

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2. How did Valli plan her bus ride? What did she find out about the bus, and how did she save up the fare?

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3. What kind of a person is Valli? To answer this question, pick out the following sentences from the text and fill in the blanks. The words you fill in are the clues to your answer.

- I. "Stop the bus! Stop the bus!" And a tiny hand was raised \_\_\_\_\_.
- II. "Yes, I \_\_\_\_\_ go to town," said Valli, still standing outside the bus.
- III. "There's nobody here \_\_\_\_\_," she said haughtily. "I've paid my thirty paise like everyone else."
- IV. "Never mind," she said, "I can \_\_\_\_\_. You don't have to help me." I'm not a child, I tell you," she said\_\_\_\_\_.
- V. "You needn't bother about me. I \_\_\_\_\_," Valli said, turning her face toward the window and staring out.
- VI. Then she turned to the conductor and said, "Well, sir, I hope \_\_\_\_\_."

4. Why does the conductor refer to Valli as 'madam'?

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### **Speaking-**

This story has a lot of people talking in it. The conductor jokes and laughs with Valli, some passengers try to show their concern for her, and her mother and her aunt spend time chatting. Read the conversations carefully. Then think of similar people, or similar situations that you have experienced. Mimic a person or persons who spoke to you, saying what they said, along with your replies.

### **Writing:**

Write a page – about three paragraphs – on one of the following topics.

1. Have you ever planned something entirely on your own, without taking grownups into your confidence? What did you plan, and how? Did you carry out your plan?
2. Have you made a journey that was unforgettable in some way? What made it memorable?
3. Are you concerned about traffic and road safety? What are your concerns? How would you make road travel safer and more enjoyable?