

Andy

The Busker

I'd say that I am able to clearly recall every bit of that day... well almost every bit. You see, it wasn't common to have a busker show up in town and it was even rarer that we would have one so weird. I know that weirdness is entirely relative, but even to me, (the person most people in the village at the time thought of as totally weird) this guy was a little off.

He had positioned himself at the entrance to Fells Park; exactly opposite the local shopping centre. A good spot; his potential audience would be held there at the pedestrian lights and there was plenty of room for him to place his cap and not have any lingering onlookers inconvenience passing pedestrian traffic.

On that day, I was not alone as I watched the busker and the 'goings-on' playing out around him. When I arrived he was playing an amazing rendition of 'Smokestack Lightnin''; originally by Howlin' Wolf I believe. Of course, when I say 'playing', I mean he was singing beautifully, but his right hand strummed only air across his stringless ukulele, while his left hand, which had every finger shortened by one knuckle, slid pointlessly, but in time with the song, up and down the instrument's neck. His voice was amazing, really, really good! And he was so involved I don't think he even knew we were watching him. He certainly didn't notice Bethyl Crank who stood only centimetres in front of his cap, muttering as usual to Clive – her dead husband. He'd been killed, along with his favourite pet cat, Mooney, in an unfortunate and a rather suspicious house-fire a couple of years back, poor guy. I'm no fan of cats for a reason I'll tell you about shortly, but that must have been a terrible way for a crippled old man and his cat to die. The only thing Bethyl was able 'rescue' from the house before the fire caught hold was Clive's walking frame. Strange... The busker definitely didn't notice when Bethyl 'accidentally' dropped her small change purse directly into his hat and deftly picked up a couple of two dollar coins and a fiver as she recovered it. I'd seen her pull this trick in church too!

Standing next to her was Fred. I've never known his surname and he has never given me opportunity to ask. Fred likes to talk at you; he doesn't care if you are not listening or that you may be involved in a completely different conversation with somebody else. Fred needs his opinions to be aired and he needs to be sure that you understand that everything he has done, he has done far better and twice as many times as you have. He was dressed as usual in threadbare chinos and one of his many sauce stained t-shirts – this day's shirt informed us that Black Sabbath are 'God's of Rock'. From what I could hear, as I performed a series of perfect *petit battements* (*small*

beats), Fred was reminding the busker that the correct way to play the ukulele was by strumming strings and that if necessary he (Fred) could have the instrument restrung and perfectly in tune within minutes. This skill he was advising the busker comes from his time as part of a military musical troupe. I managed a beautiful *glissade* past Fred, successfully giving myself another couple of feet between me and Sir Tibbet, Arabella Huntington's cat. Arabella was a dear old thing; she enjoyed collecting ceramic-ware and often took long train trips across the country to pick up special pieces for her collection. She stood just to the right of Fred and quietly tapped her most sensible shoe in time with the busker's song. Arabella was not the reason I moved, it was her wretched pet Sir Tibbet that necessitated the rather lovely move and the donning of my old tutu, which I kept in my roomy and functional, brown leather shoulder bag, for just these occasions. You see many years ago, when I was a younger woman, I had a promising but short engagement with the Australian Ballet Company. On my debut opening night with the company, dancing the lead in 'Giselle', I was startled while backstage by the theatre cat and tumbled down a small flight of stairs tearing my Achilles tendon away and ruining my professional career – understandably, cats piss me off and this is the reason for my unusual method of coping with the stress of finding myself confronted by one of these beasts of Satan. After donning the subtle pink lace, I always dance a few steps of that wonderful ballet I was supposed to perform on that loathsome night... you know I still cannot bring myself to perform the *saut de chat* (*jump of the cat*) even when I am in the depths of a dance fugue.

Anyway, as I unconsciously began a *changement battu* (*step change*), I realised the busker had begun a new song. This was a favourite of mine, Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' and my involvement in the song and my desire to keep as far away from Sir Tibbet, accounts for the reason I was not alert when the busker leaned forward and his jacket fell open. I realised a split second after he bowed and only had time to perform a magnificent *pirouette* before his vest exploded, ripping us all apart with a mixture of tweed, metal fragments and bone. To this day I still wonder what that was all about; maybe in my next life I'll find the key to that day's events.