

Missing the Bus

by Linda Simoni-Wastila

Grey clouds tangled in leafless tree limbs and telephone lines. Gertrude twisted the watch, puzzling at the liver patches circling her wrist. Almost noon -- where was the bus? If she was late who would feed Norry her tomato soup and animal cracker lunch? Who would put her down for her afternoon nap?

The wind whipped leaves into an eddy of bronze and carried the raw smell of impending rain. Perhaps she should not have tarried for coffee after her shift -- her co-workers were such awful gossips. But what wicked fun. And she deserved some fun, Gertrude thought. She worked hard to put the potatoes in the larder.

A bus rumbled past. The Number 9 to City Square. Panic wormed through her stomach and seeped to her chest. Where was the 55 to home? Raindrops splattered her flannel slippers. She looked down at the deepening puddle. Where were her white shoes? She touched her head. Her nursing cap?

The sky cracked open. Gertrude hiccupped a rending sob and sank knee-first to the muddy ground. She clasped her hands in prayer. *Mother Mary, take care of Norry and bring me to her.*

A siren wailed lonesome. She scrunched her eyes and prayed harder. Behind her, feet pattered closer. Firm hands grasped her shoulders.

"Thank God we found you!"

Gertrude stopped her prayers. She wobbled up and let the kind-faced lady lead her down the street. Something about her eyes reminded her of Noreen.

