**The Zombie Dance**

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Courseware

**About This Book**

The Zombie Dance is a book for children of any ages.

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**Chapter 1: The City of Light**

Somewhere faraway in the Wild West world there is a dark, dark desert which stretches for mile upon mile of darkness – so dark that even the stars don’t shine. If you were able to fly like a huge circling bird high over the dark desert you could see a tiny pinprick of light in the middle of the dark, dark desert which is the city of light.

The city of light is bright, always shining with lights on every street. Everyone keeps their house lights on. There are shiny lights on every corner of every building and every shop is brightly lit all day - and all night.

The city of light never goes to sleep with its lights off! Ask the people why and they tell you they love to stay awake, they love to party and have fun.

Watch their eyes closely. See if they look sideways. See if they look you in the face. The reason why they keep the lights on is so different. The reason why they really fear the dark is simple.

They know about the zombie dance.

Stop for a moment and think. If you're on your own in bed and the wind is whistling in the trees outside the window and the window rattles then you might just be able to hear the dancing boots of the zombies somewhere behind the noise of the wind. If so, maybe you should stop reading now. Pull the covers over your head and think about Christmas.

But if you're really brave read on.

**Chapter 2: A Brave Girl**

There was once a small girl called Amelia who lived in the city of light and she was brave like you. You must be brave because you are still reading this story. You can probably pick up small spiders in your bare hands or walk past a wandering dog with red beady eyes without starting to run.

Once upon a time, Amelia heard about the zombie dance from her granny who was very old and not at all wise and who had been quietly drinking the cooking sherry from the bottom shelf in the kitchen.

Granny was doing the strangest dance across the kitchen like nothing you would expect your granny to be doing. She looked as if she was going forwards but she went backwards and she rolled from side to side and then from back to front like a snake on the prowl stretching out her hands and making patterns with them in the air. Her eyes were half shut and she jumped and stopped suddenly when she saw Amelia. She put her finger to her lips.

‘Shush,’ she said with a smile, ‘don't ask about the zombie dance.’

‘The zombie dance,’ said Amelia asking straight away, ‘what is it?’

And granny began to sing and dance again and the song went something like this. The zombies dance at the zombie house and you can hear their boots smash on the cobbles that crash when the wind is strong and the night is long and the moon is small so cover your ears and face the wall.

Then Amelia's mother came bustling in and Granny went quiet. ‘That's quite enough, mother,’ she said, ‘you've been at the sherry again haven't you?’

‘Not me,’ said Granny, ‘it was her, pointing at Amelia.’

‘Sometimes,’ said Mum to Amelia, ‘your granny says silly things. You're a silly old lady, aren't you mum,’ she said to her. Granny just smiled.

‘Shall we have a cup of tea?’ she said.

And that was it but Amelia thought to herself if the zombies are going to dance then I would like to watch.

And, of course, next time she asked granny about it, she denied it all. ‘I never saw them,’ she said, ‘it never happened.’

Amelia didn't believe her. Do you think Amelia was crazy? Perhaps she was!

She asked other people where the zombies danced. She asked her mum who told her not to be silly. She asked her dad who said it was stuff and nonsense but Amelia noticed how her parents looked at each other after she asked the question. They didn't look happy. They looked as if they had tasted something rather sour like lemon juice gravy.

She thought she would have to ask her granny on Sunday when they went to see her in the old people's home where she lived since she got the thing that made her forgetful and confused. Amelia couldn't remember what it was called but it made granny say strange things. Amelia enjoyed listening to her and to her mother telling granny to shush and be quiet when she started talking about the old man in the room next door who was trying to murder her and when she called the friendly nurse with the black hair Mrs Hitler.

Amelia could tell that this kind of being ill made you say things other people might think but they wouldn't say. That was why granny might be the only person in the whole of the City of Light who would tell her the truth about the zombie dance.

**Chapter 3: Visiting Time**

And that was also why, when the weekend came, she offered to go with her mother to visit her granny.

‘What a kind girl you are,’ said her mother.

If only you knew why, thought Amelia but she didn't say anything.

At the place where her granny lived, Mum had to go and talk to the top nurse with her hair pulled back tight in a starched white tunic with a watch on the front. She was so polished and stiff that she looked like one of Amelia's toy figures. She couldn't make a lot of sense of what was being said but there was a bit of a decline taking place, and a bit more confusion and something else she couldn't follow. Amelia wasn't aware that this might be important so she left her mum and the Playmobil nurse and went down the corridor to her granny’s room.

Granny was in her bed propped up with pillows. She was looking older to Amelia but her eyes were as sharp and brown as ever against her pale skin. She smiled when she saw Amelia.

‘Hello, little girl,’ she said, ‘have you come to visit me?’

‘Yes,’ said Amelia leaning over to kiss her cheek.

‘And, what is your name?’ asked Granny.

Amelia was about to say, Granny it's me, Amelia, because the old lady was obviously more confused than usual, then she thought twice.

Leaning over the bed, she put her mouth close to her Granny’s ear. ‘Kind old lady,’ she said, ‘tell me about the zombie dance.’

Her granny started, sat up and looked straight into her eyes.

‘You have brown eyes,’ she said, ‘like me. That's a coincidence. I knew another little girl with eyes like you but I can't remember her name.’

‘But you can remember the zombie dance,’ said Amelia in a whisper. ‘I know you can. You saw the zombies dance. I know you did.’

There was a long pause before she spoke. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘but it was a very, very long time ago and I was very young. They danced in the moonlight with drums and fire and their faces painted. And, the music ...’

‘Where is it?’ asked Amelia. ‘I have to see it.

‘No one must go or talk about it. Stay in the City of Light. It's safe there. Safe.’

The old lady was looking around her, darting glances towards the door and window.

‘It's alright,’ said Amelia. ‘It's safe here.’

Granny lay back on the pillows and sighed. ‘But it was fun,’ she said.

‘Tell me,’ said Amelia, ‘where can I find it. Tell me, please. I have to go to see the zombies dance.’

The old lady looked at her again. There was another long pause and Amelia felt like a sweet being unwrapped by her stare then she lifted a bony finger and called Amelia closer. Amelia put her ear close to the old lady’s lips.

‘Highway 91,’ she said in a throaty whisper. ‘Three miles and then down the salty creek to the left. I’ll see you there,’ she whispered. Then, she smiled, lay back on the pillows and seemed to be asleep.

Mum arrived with Nurse Playmobil. ‘Where were you, Amelia?’ fussed her mother. ‘You should have told me where you were going.’

‘You were busy,’ said Amelia.

‘Poor granny,’ said Mum. ‘She has been asleep like this all day. They think she might have had something called a stroke which makes your brain slow down.’

Amelia nodded, thinking hard.

‘She’s getting very old now but she’d like us to sit with her quietly and, hopefully, she will know we're here.’

‘She will,’ said Amelia confidently.

‘You're a good girl,’ said the nurse her starchy front creasing into a smile.

If only you knew, thought Amelia. Mission accomplished!

**Chapter 4: The First Bus**

Things happened to Amelia. Probably not what you were thinking either. She went on holiday. She started a new class. She made some new friends. For a while she didn't think about the zombie dance. Then she did and she looked on the street map for Highway 91 and it wasn't there. And then she looked on Google Maps and it wasn't there and then she looked on Google Earth and there were more Highway 91s than you could ever visit in a lifetime. She also kept an eye on the bright yellow city buses because they went everywhere and had their destinations on the front to say where they were going. There was every road but no Highway 91.

Maybe granny got the number wrong, she thought. The City of Light was built on a grid with ten roads going one way and ten the other. There were lots of highways, even a Highway 101 but there was no Highway 91. There was a Highway 90 and a Highway 92 but there was definitely not a Highway 91. Amelia knew. She had checked.

She thought about going back to see her granny but she was what everyone called ‘getting worse’. Also, people whispered a lot about her which Amelia thought she had been told was rather rude and so she wasn't altogether surprised when her mother told her one day that they wouldn't be visiting granny any more as she had gone to live with God.

‘She's dead then?’ asked Amelia.

‘Well, yes,’ said her mum, ‘she is.’

‘That's a shame,’ said Amelia.

‘Yes,’ said mum, ‘would you like to talk about it and heaven and things.’

‘Not really,’ said Amelia, ‘I have bigger things on my mind.’

Her mother smiled. She is taking it rather well, she thought. If only she knew!

It was the next day when something very strange happened to Amelia. Perhaps it wasn't strange really. She was thinking about her granny and thinking about Highway 91 and keeping an eye on the buses and they say that if you wait long enough for a bus, two will probably come along together. Of course, the people who say this never ride on buses but the fact is that Amelia didn't see one Highway 91 bus or even two for months and months but, all of a sudden, they were everywhere.

She saw the first one when she was shopping with Dad. It was waiting as they came out of the shopping mall, a little dirtier than some of the other canary yellow buses but otherwise the same and lined up with three others, a 26, a 75 and 14. On the front, was a destination board that lit up in coloured lights it distinctly said Highway 91. Amelia stopped and looked, then she looked again and then she stared.

‘What’s the matter?’ said dad. ‘You look like you’ve seen a ghost.’

As he spoke the bus engine groaned into life and it pulled away turning into the traffic.

‘Nothing,’ she said, ‘I was looking at the buses.’

‘You get a lot of them here,’ said dad. ‘They bring people to the shops.’

Can anyone go on them?

‘You need a ticket. You get one from the machine by the bus stops or you pay on the bus.’

‘So you need money as well?’

‘Yes, to pay for the ticket. Two dollars a ride.’

‘That’s a lot!’

‘Not really, not for grown-ups.’

‘It would be for me,’ said Amelia.

‘Why would you want to go on a bus?’ said dad. ‘We have a car.’

‘True,’ said Amelia, ‘I clearly have no need of buses.’ But what she actually thought was, I need a ticket!

She saw the bus again as they were driving home. Amelia's dad was a careful driver. He often said that the best way to drive was to think that all the other people in their cars were homicidal maniacs. Amelia didn’t know what they were but she thought that if that was a fact, dad was right to drive carefully.

The City of Light has very wide roads with as many as five lanes of cars going in each direction. It can be very confusing if you don’t know where you’re going but dad always knew and the way home was the same every time so he knew exactly when to go from one lane to another and where to slow down and where to speed up, just a little because he was a careful driver, and where to turn.

He was doing all these things when Amelia saw the bus. Really though it was like the bus saw them. It came up behind them clanking and clattering went past them in the next lane and then pulled out in front of them. Amelia saw the number in the rear view side mirror where it said objects may be closer than they seem and above the writing in bright yellow lights she could read ‘Highway 91’.

In front of them, it slowed down. Dad had to slow down too, and then he pulled into the next lane to overtake it. He checked the lane was clear and turned on his indicator light before pulling out because he was a careful driver and, quite suddenly, the bus did the same but with no lights and no signal. ‘Idiot,’ said dad and, as if it could hear him, the bus slowed down again so dad had to almost stop suddenly and when he did that the bus zoomed away again. Most buses have lights that come on when they stop but this bus was different. It stopped without lights but when it shot off again it was lit up like a lighthouse. Dad was cross, so cross that he almost forgot to go into the lane they needed to be in to drive to their house and he had to change lane again quickly and then a lady in a small red car hooted at him as if everything was his fault today. The bus whizzed away into the distance.

Dad didn’t say anything for the rest of the journey home.

**Chapter 5: The Next Bus**

The next day was Sunday and Mum asked Amelia to come to church and bible class.

‘Do I have to?’ said Amelia.

‘I’d like it if you did,’ said her mum. ‘You could say a little prayer for Granny in Heaven.’

‘What’s heaven like?' asked Amelia.

‘Sort of nice,’ said her Mum. ‘If you’ve been good you get lovely things, and everyone is kind and there are no bad people.’

‘Don’t you get fat?’ asked Amelia, thinking of ice cream with cookie dough in it.

‘No, you just stay as you are.’

‘What if you were fat before?’

‘Then you get thin. God manages everything that way.’

‘What if you go to Heaven when you’re like me? Do you grow up there?’

‘No, you stay as a perfect child. God looks after you.’

Amelia wasn’t so keen on that. She was looking forward to growing up. She wasn’t so keen on the bible class either. They had a preacher who told them a story about how Jesus turned water into wine for the grown-ups which she could see they would be pleased about but there was another story about a boy called Eric who laughed at a little girl in a wheelchair and pushed her too fast. The next day when he was out on his bike, God arranged for a large truck to run over his legs crushing them beyond repair so he was in a wheelchair too. Then, Eric felt sorry for what he had done and was nice to the little girl and to everyone else. Amelia found this story slightly odd if God was meant to be so kind.

Things got better after the bible class. There were lots of people at the church and now they were all trying to drive away but there were two buses parked in the road one pointing one way and one the other. So, the road was mostly blocked and all the people who had just been to church and thought about God were in their cars hooting their horns, red faced and angry and shouting out of the windows while they tried to push in front of each other to get out of the car park. The buses had that slightly grubby look as if the canary yellow had been out in the rain or a sandstorm. Amelia didn’t have to look twice at the destination, Highway 91. The strange thing was that both buses had the same signs but were pointing in different directions. I need $2, thought Amelia.

More and more people were streaming out of the church and milling around outside. People were shouting to the people in the cars for some to go backwards and some to go forwards and a few we're banging on one of the buses but there was not much point as neither bus had a driver in it. One man tried to open the bus door but it was locked shut. Other people were just standing and watching. No one was looking back into the church except for one person and that was Amelia.

You might wonder why with so much happening she would be looking in the wrong direction but what had caught her eye was a nice big pile of dollar bills thrown on a big silver plate by the people from the church as they left. There was a notice by the plate which said on it 'For the Upkeep of the Church and the Pastor'. The pile of notes was so untidy that no one could have counted them yet and all of a sudden there was a light breeze as if someone had opened a door somewhere and two of them were caught in it and lifted up into the air where they floated, up and over each other a couple of times, drifted like autumn leaves and then spiralled down to the ground right at the tip of the polished toe of Amelia's Sunday shoes. She only had to bend down and they danced into her hand.

Amelia was a good girl. She knew about money and how it kind of belonged to people but it also looked as if the church had plenty of money. It looked like it had been painted recently and the preacher was smart and oily as if he ate enough for several people. She didn't think either of them would miss $2 as the dollar bills nestled in her hand and her fingers closed around them.

She looked around for her mother who was talking to a fat cross lady who said that the trouble was that the buses were all driven by ‘lazy good for nuffin’ (that was how she said it) ‘hignorant people’ but she used a much worse word. Amelia was shocked. She knew that was a terrible, insulting word for Mrs Fatso to use especially after going to church and pretending to be praying to God who loved everyone whatever their colour. Maybe Mrs Fatso's God only likes pasty people with stretched skin like her, thought Amelia, which might help to explain why he ran people over with trucks or maybe it was just Mrs Fatso pretending to love everyone while only loving people who looked like her. Amelia didn't like her at all.

What she did like though we're the two dollar bills in her hand so leaving her mother busily chatting she walked or sidled, which is a way of walking a bit sideways so people hardly notice you, round the front of one of the buses and to her great surprise the door which several people had been pulling on a few minutes before made a noise like a hum, a clank and a slap of air and opened in front of her with three steps leading into it.

Now, there was another surprise because there was a driver in the bus as well which was very odd as before the bus had looked completely empty. He was an old man with dark black, wrinkled skin, a grey grizzly beard and he looked at her with old white eyes rimmed with red and waved her to get aboard with his hand.

'Time to go, young lady,' he said with a big wide smile. Amelia thought he looked nice, like someone's granddad.

Even as she climbed onto the first step, Amelia saw a flashing sign next to where the driver sat and a slot where people put the money for their fares. She climbed the next two steps, opened out the first dollar bill and slid it into the slot which whirred, ate it up and then did nothing. Amelia remembered. She needed two dollars so she flattened the crumpled second bill and slid it in after. This time as the machine whirred, the door clanked grumpily, whooshed air and closed while the engine began to chug into life.

'Take a seat,' said the driver, 'it is quite a ride. Here,’ he said, passing her a bottle of water. ‘You’ll want this.'

And, as he spoke the bus pulled away from the arguing crowds of churchgoers who were so busy shouting and being cross with one another that they hardly even saw it go or noticed how quickly it was speeding up.

**Chapter 6: On the Road**

Even Amelia noticed what an extraordinary bus ride this was, even though she wasn't even sure she had ever been on a bus before. First of all the bus didn't seem to behave like a proper bus. It whizzed past queues of people who looked a bit amazed and cross as it shot past. Second, it didn't stop where traffic was supposed to. Because the City of Light was built on a big grid system there were lots of places where one road crossed another and in the centre of the city there were traffic lights at these junctions but as you went further out of town there were four way stops. At these crossings everyone stopped and then, in turn, went in the direction that they wanted to go in. The bus didn't do that. Instead it shot up to the junctions and if the traffic lights were red it weaved across through the traffic and if they were green it screeched to a stop. At the four way stops the bus simply didn't stop. Cars hooted their horns, big trucks blasted their hooters and the bus zoomed on.

As it sped along, the driver was singing loudly and tapping out the rhythm on the steering wheel, his whole body moving with the bus, swerving when it swerved, and upright and straight when it stopped. Occasionally, he turned round and smiled his big smile at Amelia and then the bus seemed to drive along by itself.

Amelia had no idea where they were but soon they left the city behind and were out in flat open country with a few raggedy trees and spiky bushes. There was a sign coming up ahead and there it was, Highway 91, just as if it had always been there.

Three miles, remembered Amelia, left down the salty track or was it right? She couldn’t remember. Luckily, the bus or the driver clearly knew because all of a sudden the brakes on the bus screeched and it swerved to the left and began to bump its way down a long straight track which looked like it might have been a proper road a long time ago but now had spiky grass growing at the edges and potholes in the middle. The bus driver seemed to know the road swerving around the potholes riding up on the verges to avoid them then crashing back down. Amelia held on tight to the seat in front, holding herself in place as the bus bounced along. There was nothing on either side of the road but scrubby grass as far as you could see.

Then the bus began to go downhill and as it went downhill it seemed to speed up. Amelia held on tight as the bus swerved round curves first down a steep hill and then what was almost the side of a cliff. There was a deep, deep valley and across it the cliffs on the other side rose up as the bus went down and down. Amelia watched the driver but he didn’t seem at all bothered about going so fast, tapping out a rhythm on the steering wheel as it whizzed through his hands and they swerved round yet another corner. As they went round the next corner, Amelia could see the bottom of the steep, steep valley and the high narrow rock walls rising all around them. This must be part of the canyon.

Amelia knew what the canyon was although she had never been there. It was the deepest hole in the Earth anyone could imagine with tight narrow valleys and no one lived there except the vultures and the bears. There were stories of people who walked down into the canyons and never came back! Amelia wasn’t surprised by this when she saw how steep the road was. She could easily have ridden down it herself on her little bike but she knew that she would have never been able to ride back up!

Suddenly it went darker. Not dark like night but dim as if you were in the shade in a forest. Amelia realised the bus was now so deep down that they were in a place where the sun hardly shone. There are no trees but there were big strange spiky cactus plants covered in sharp prickles and thorny bushes like the worst brambles you could ever imagine and the road was getting narrower and narrower as the bus reached the bottom and, suddenly, the track levelled out and the road became flatter. The engine of the bus which had been quiet all down the long slope splattered and roared and clanked. The bus sped up and then, quite suddenly, it stopped.

The driver turned, big smile wide on his face. ‘That was some drive young lady,’ he said, 'and now you’re here. Hop off, and enjoy your stay.’ As he spoke, the bus door whooshed open and Amelia felt the heat from outside rushing in. Outside seemed to be the middle of nowhere and Amelia wasn’t sure that getting off the bus was a good idea.

‘Don’t worry,’ the driver said, ‘this is an official stop.’ As Amelia stood uncertainly on the step, the driver also said, 'Don't forget your change, and handed her a dollar bill.'

'But I thought the fare was $2,' she said.

'Not for you,' he said, 'you're half price. Take it, you might need it. Now, off you go or you'll be late.’

Whether or not she was at an official stop wasn’t really what Amelia was worried about. It was more to do with being somewhere where there wasn’t anybody else around and there might be vultures and bears but she was brave and, although she could imagine being eaten by a bear and having vultures pick the bones clean, she had been waiting a long time for this bus so she carefully stepped down the three steps and looked around her.

The first thing she saw was the bus stop. Sure enough there it was just like outside the shops although rather dusty and rusty and bent over slightly at the top. It didn’t really look like an official bus stop. It looked more as if someone had stolen one from the City of Light and put it here as a joke. This was obviously the end of the track as far as buses were concerned because there was a circular space for them to turn round in.

As she looked round, she saw the canyon’s steep walls on both sides and back was where the bus had just come from so there was only one way to go. While she was looking round, the door on the bus whooshed shut and it clanked forward, went round in a big circle and blasting black smoke started to pull away up the road. As it passed Amelia going the other way the driver waved and smiled. The lights on the bus flashed on and off and then it grew smaller and quieter in the distance and was gone around a curve.

**Chapter 7: Eat at Joe's**

Amelia didn’t have much idea now of what time it was but her tummy was telling her that she might be hungry. The road continued as a track wandering lazily along the bottom of the canyon. Suddenly, Amelia felt very alone like when you suddenly realise you’re out a bit late and it’s getting dark and home is a bit further away than you thought it was and then you start to hear things that aren’t there and you keep looking round to make sure nothing is following you. And then you see shapes in the shadows and you want to scream but you have to run.

'Don’t be silly, said Amelia to herself, ‘it’s not even dark,’ but it did occur to her that it might be going to get darker later.

It was then that she saw the bear. It was quite a big brown bear and it was nosing and snuffling its way out of the woods some way in front of her. Amelia knew that the best way to deal with a bear was to make herself look as big as possible but that was quite difficult for a little girl, to walk with sensible strides and not to run and that was quite difficult when you were scared and not to climb up a tree because bears can climb trees better than people.

So, she tried to walk sensibly even as the bear walked onto the path and then it turned round and looked at her. It looked at her for what seemed like quite some time but it probably wasn’t and then it turned its head around and began to walk along the road in front of her. Amelia didn’t move but then the bear turned around again, looked at her, turned back and walked again along the road.

Well, at least I’m not his dinner, thought Amelia. It looks as if he’s trying to get me to follow and, after all, there isn’t really anywhere else to go. So, she followed the bear. This turned out to be a good choice because all of a sudden the path split in two. You could go left or right and both trails continued across the canyon floor without any hint as to which was better. The bear went left, ambled along the road then stopped and looked back.

Left it is then, thought Amelia and she followed the bear.

She was glad she had because she noticed that on the side of the track nearest the canyon, there was a wooden fence and on the other side of it a small field. So, someone lived down here then and, suddenly, Amelia didn’t feel quite so alone.

The reason for this was that she could now see the outline of what was definitely a building of some kind and better still it had a chimney on the top of it out of which emerged a friendly curl of smoke. Surely that must mean a fire and someone who lit it. The other thing was a sign by the side of the road, an old wooden painted sign but on it Amelia could read, she was good at reading, Joe's Diner. Better still she knew it said diner and not dinner and that might mean food as well. Her tummy rumbled quite suddenly at the thought.

So, although the building turned out to be nothing more than a single storey rickety old shack which appeared to be made up of planks of wood nailed on top of other planks of wood, some of them at odd angles like a plaster or a patch stuck on the layer below and with small dirty windows Amelia didn't care. When she came to a small wicket gate and a path marked out with edges made of bits of rock she turned straight in, walked up a couple of steps and pushed against the blue wooden door which obligingly opened.

She was surprised at what she saw inside. This was certainly a diner but it was also much cleaner than she had expected after seeing the outside. You could almost say it was spick and span. There were round tables, blue check table cloths and a little vase containing some fresh lavender stalks on each of them. There were chairs around each of the tables and at the end of the room was a sort of counter. Amelia walked up to the counter wondering what she could have for one dollar - her change from the bus ride. She didn't have to wonder for long as she then noticed a cardboard sign on the counter which said, Today's Special! Burger and Fries! 1$.

Then she heard a noise and the door behind the counter slowly opened.

'Well, there's a nice surprise,' a kindly voice said, 'we have a customer.’

It was a little old lady who came through the door, quite short and slightly hunched up with sharp bright eyes. She reminded Amelia of a nothing so much as a hedgehog, well a hedgehog in a checked dress and with a large green shawl.

‘Hello, little girl,’ she said, ‘you've come a long way to see us today.’

‘I have,’ said Amelia. ‘All the way from the City of Light.’

‘Well, that is a long way,’ said the hedgehog, ‘and did you take the bus?’

‘Yes,’ replied Amelia.

‘You must be hungry then?’

‘Well I do have a dollar,’ said Amelia and I'd like a burger but then I won't have any money for the bus fare back.

‘You won't need any,’ the old lady answered. ‘Yours was a return ticket I expect. A lot of them aren't but I think yours probably is to judge from the look of you.’ She smiled.

‘So, one burger and fries it is, coming up in a few minutes. You have a seat and I'll be right with you.’

Amelia looked around and chose a table over near the window where she could see out into the garden. She wondered if the bear was out there anywhere still but there was no sign of it. There were some small birds though and then she saw what she thought was a chipmunk. It was a bit like a squirrel and she had seen pictures of one but she didn't think she had ever seen one in real life. It ran about on the grass, turning over leaves and picking up whatever it found in tiny claws. She could also smell something delicious cooking behind the counter.

She was interrupted by the sound of the little shelf in the counter being lifted and the old lady came through with a tray which she put down on the table.

‘Here you are,’ she said, ‘and I've brought you a drink as well. It's all part of the meal deal.’

‘Thank you,’ said Amelia who was polite as well as hungry and who could barely keep her eyes off the large juicy burger on the table in front of her. The fries, you might call them chips, were hot and crispy and there was a large bottle of tomato sauce as well.

‘Enjoy,’ said the old lady, disappearing behind the counter. Amelia did just that.

**Chapter 8 Dancing Time**

After Amelia had finished and eaten everything on her plate as she had been taught to do she thought about what to do next. It was just beginning to get dark outside and she wasn't sure about what to do next or whether she wanted to go out on the path again. Then the old lady popped out from the back again. Amelia picked up her plate, arranged her knife and fork and took it up to the counter.

‘You'd better be on your way,’ said the old lady with a twinkle. ‘You don't want to miss anything. Out the door and turn left, you can't miss it.’

‘Thank you,’ said Amelia and with this advice she went towards the door. ‘Thank you for the food as well.’

‘You're welcome,’ said the old lady with another smile. ‘Enjoy yourself.’

Amelia wasn't sure about that. It was beginning to get dark outside and she remembered the meeting with the bear. Other creatures in this forest might not be so friendly! However, she hadn't come this far to be scared and she was determined to go on. She could also hear music ahead of her or at least the beating of drums in the breeze on the warm night air. It'll be alright, she thought.

As she walked along the track, the noise grew louder. It was like hearing a big party from the next street. Suddenly Amelia noticed other people walking in the same direction as she was through the trees. Sometimes they only looked like shapes and almost transparent so you could feel that you could see the trees through them and they didn't seem to make any noise as they moved across the twiggy wood floor. They ignored her but she didn't think that they meant her any harm. Then there were lights, fountains of blue and orange lighting up the sky like silent fireworks with vivid flashes and sudden flares of colour. The music was getting louder as well with a steady thudding of drums but now snatches of music as well with the sound of trumpets and saxophones bouncing off the noise of the drums.

Ahead the track swerved around to the right and as Amelia came around the corner, she realised that this was what she had come to see. In and amongst the lights and the drums there were many dancing people moving together in time to the rhythm of the music. A group would start to dance in one way or another and then more of them would join in so that whole sections of the crowd were swaying and jumping together and waving their hands in the air and then that dance would fade away and another would start somewhere else in the crowd. The people themselves were brightly coloured as if their skins were painted in deep reds and blues, and hot and glossy with the dancing so that they glistened in the night and the flashing lights. Even as Amelia watched, the crowd was growing. More people were coming out of the woods to join the dance and the shadows started to turn into brightly lit figures as they moved among the dancers and began to move with them.

Amelia watched spellbound. This was what she had wanted to see and the dance was moving faster and louder. She found her own feet were trying to join in drawing her towards the swaying crowd and her hands were starting to sway and dance with the music. She knew how easy it would be to join the dance now. Also, as the noise grew louder and the music crashed she noticed that the dancers were coming her way. It was as if the track she had come out of was at the end of an airport runway and coming towards her was the zombie dance in all its noise and magnificence. Now there was a lead line of dancers spread right across the field moving in time, legs up and down, arms waved and bodies swaying and they were coming straight towards her. Amelia really wondered if she might be crushed by them but then almost at the centre of the line she saw her granny. It was a surprise but there was no doubt. That was Amelia's granny pounding her way across the field and swinging her arms and stomping her legs like a teenager moving with the crowd and dancing like she danced all that time ago across Amelia's kitchen. She was thin and bony but she moved and swayed like a dancer, everything in time and the whole line and everyone behind now moving to the same dance, hands in the air together and then bodies swaying so that the whole crowd was like a single giant animal.

And then as if this wasn't all strange enough, another thing happened. As the dancing line came closer to Amelia, the dancers at the front, including Granny, began to rise in the air as if they were walking up invisible steps and then there was smoke wreathed around them as if they were going up into the clouds and the music was suddenly quieter. And then her Granny caught her eye and Amelia saw these piercing eyes looking straight at her and she smiled the broadest grin as if it was the most normal thing in the world to be rising into the sky and seeing your granddaughter come along to watch. Amelia couldn't help but wave and smile back and then her granny simply waved as she swayed and smiled again and then there was smoke and coloured cloud and she was higher and higher and gone.

Suddenly, it was quiet. The dance was over. Amelia looked around and there was no one to be seen. All that remained were some wisps of smoke and the faint throb of drums and in the sky some stars were peeking through. Amelia realised it was late!

She turned around to set off back along the track. She didn't like the idea of walking all that way back and hoping that a bus would arrive out of nowhere. She wanted to be where people loved her and all of a sudden she felt lonely and anxious.

‘Time to go, young lady,’ called a voice. ‘Time to come back!’ Amelia turned and behind her was the old bus driver and the bus. She didn't need to check the number or to need another invitation to jump on board but as she ran towards the small step up into the bus she tripped. She felt herself falling. There was a crash and the lights went out.

The next thing she knew she was looking into the bus driver's eyes again. He was leaning over her but now he was wearing a white coat although his eyes were still as warm and kind.

‘Come back,’ he said, ‘that's right, time to come back,’ and Amelia noticed that she wasn't on the bus but was on her back and she wasn't in the canyon because there were lights on the ceiling and she couldn't see stars or smell the smoke. There was, instead, a clean smell which she recognised almost straightaway as the hospital.

‘Welcome back,’ he said and then his face drew back and there was her mother instead and she was crying and smiling at the same time and her dad trying to be brave but nearly crying as well.

‘I'm back,’ said Amelia, ‘but I did see Granny and I saw the zombies dance. And there was a bear and a bus.’

Her mum looked at her father, ‘Yes, there was a bus and it knocked you over but you're going to be all right now. Thank God.’

‘I'm not sure he helped,’ said Amelia, ‘but the zombies were great.’

‘Don't worry,’ said the doctor coming into view again. These things happen after a bump on the head and he leant down closely as if looking into her eyes to check she could see and then he winked at her, a big wink, which Amelia knew meant this is a secret, don't spill the beans and he stood back.

‘She can go home with you,’ he said to her parents, ‘but lots of rest and no school for a week. She'll need building up as well; maybe a nice juicy burger tomorrow would help.’ And he turned and winked again at Amelia. ‘You'll be fine little girl,’ he said, ‘you'll be fine,’ and she was.

**Chapter 9: Back Home**

The week shot past and soon Amelia was back at school and playing with her friends. It turned out that in the traffic chaos after church she had run out towards a moving bus which knocked her down and she was unconscious for almost a day. No wonder her parents were so worried.

She also found out that they didn't want to talk about her dreams, which was what they called them when she told them what had happened. She thought they might have been pleased to hear that Granny was smiling and waving but, instead, they gave each other that funny look and went quiet. They suggested to Amelia that her friends wouldn't be interested in that story either and it would be good to keep quiet about it. These things happen when you're concussed, they said.

That was fine by Amelia, she remembered what she remembered and no one could change that. She knew what happened. It also didn't change her or that's what she thought anyway but one odd thing did happen. It was in the kitchen, one day when she went to get a glass of milk and a biscuit, she suddenly remembered the dance and before she knew it her hands and feet were away dancing and her body was swaying. This is fun, she thought and she went on dancing but, afterwards, she was careful not to dance like that when her parents were around, although her friends were jealous when she let the music take over at parties and danced and swayed and waved in ways they couldn't copy without looking gawky and likely to fall over at any minute.

She kept on dancing, often on her own, in the kitchen and lots of other places, late at night, on hot summer evenings. In fact, anytime when the air was warm and the sky was colourful and, once a long, long time later, she was caught dancing in the kitchen, moving and swaying and stamping her feet by a little girl who she was fairly sure was her granddaughter.

‘What's that Granny,’ she asked. ‘What are you doing?’

What do you think Amelia said to her?