

The Bus

Grandad says we've been on this bus a long time, and we've never had an accident. It's true that the ground's been a bit bumpier lately, but we're still going uphill, and he says we've had bumpy times before.

It's an old-fashioned bus, with no doors, but a platform at the back. That's where Una the conductor stands, although she doesn't do much. We've plenty of sandwiches for the trip, though no-one seems to know where we're going, or when we'll arrive. We've never seen the driver, but I suppose he's busy. With the back being open, we used to get cold in the winter, but the Gadget Sellers put some heaters in, so we're comfy now. And when they put the heaters in, the bus started to go faster. What was even funnier was, when the Gadget Sellers put some fans in, to cool the people at the front who were getting too hot, the bus rolled through the countryside faster still. Grandad scratched his beard and said no good would come of it.

Apparently it used to be boring on the bus. There was no-one to talk to but your neighbour, and not much to do. You could get up and walk along the bus, or go upstairs, but that was difficult and dangerous (although Grandad claims he used to do it). But in the end, the Gadget Sellers had an idea to make the seats move about. So now we can go all around the bus, to visit friends. And they also figured out how we could send Messages to each other, so now the Messages whizz up and down the bus all day long. Needless to say, the bus is going still faster now. Maybe that's why it's getting bumpier.

Upstairs, at the back, live the Cats. Grandad says the Cats think they're in control of the bus, just because they can look out of the big back window and see where we've been. Una tries to keep them from arguing, but they don't take much notice of her. And upstairs at the front are the Whitecoat family. They say they think they know what's happening – but when they explain to us, we don't understand. The Cats say the Whitecoats are talking rubbish, anyway. Downstairs, all we know is, we like our Moving Chairs and our Messages.

That's just as well, because the bumping has got worse lately. Una's just come down, looking all pale. She says the Whitecoats – the ones that talk in big words – have got all excited. They're shouting that someone needs to stop the bus. I mean, fancy that! We all laugh, but Grandad just rubs his beard, and thinks. Apparently the Whitecoats are saying that we're going up a steep hill, and they think there may be a big cliff at the top, and we're going to fall off. But the Cats at the back are saying, how do we know it's a cliff, and maybe it'll just flatten off. Maybe then the bumping will stop! And the Gadget Sellers, well they're saying that's all nonsense, because we can just go on climbing forever. They've got lots of good ideas, they say.

For all that, some of us down here – especially Grandad – are looking a bit worried. Bang! We go over an especially big bump. And now there's lots of rain blowing in at the back of the bus, and we're getting soaked. And apparently, so many people have got on the bus that the sandwiches are beginning to run out.

Oh dear! One of the Whitecoats has just come downstairs – he shouts we've got to stop using the Moving Chairs, and stop sending Messages, and even turn the heaters off, because we're going over the cliff. The bus must be stopped. Someone laughs at him, but a few people are crying, and some are angry, saying he's a fool. Upstairs we can hear the Cats arguing again. One man asks, how *on the bus* can we stop sending Messages? If we stop, how can we talk? How can we get about, without our Moving Chairs? And won't we die if we don't keep warm? But the bus is creaking a lot, and lurching about – we're going so fast now – and someone smashes the front

window to talk to the driver. But there's no-one there, and we can all see the cliff edge rushing to meet us.

And I turn, in time to see Grandad jumping off the platform.