

Red Dog 4

Red Dog rode regularly on his best friend John's bus, or indeed any other driver's bus he chose, sitting in the seat immediately behind the driver. Nobody could share his seat. One day Nancy, a new secretary, sat beside him, and he was very affronted and tried everything to get her off – he growled, he rolled his eyes, he pushed. But Nancy, refusing to be outfaced in front of a bus-load of sniggering miners, persisted for days until Red Dog gave in and decided he quite liked her.

This time, Nancy is about to discover Red Dog's major fault.

Episode 4 – Nancy, Red Dog and John

There weren't many single women around the place in those days, so if one of them turned up, it caused a lot of excitement and interest in all the single young men. They speculated as to what she would be like and whether anyone had a chance of going out with her. If anyone was spotted chatting up a girl, the other men would rib him about it, saying, 'Fancy your chances, eh, mate?' and 'What makes you think she'd go for a skinny little runt like you, when there's proper blokes like us?'

John got to know Nancy a little because Red Dog let her sit next to him behind the driver's seat of the bus, so that he was able to have snatches of conversation with her as he was driving along. They first got to talk properly because one day Red Dog made a smell so bad (yes, that's the fault!) that they had to evacuate the bus completely, until it was safe to go back on. Even Red Dog got out and waited, wagging his tail and being friendly, as if he expected to be congratulated.

John looked shyly at Nancy, and she smiled back. They both bent down to pat Red Dog on the head, and their hands touched. They both laughed, a little embarrassed, and John said, 'Did you hear what happened yesterday? There was a new driver on the bus, and he tried to throw Red out.'

'Really?' said Nancy.

'Yeah, and Red Dog wasn't having it, and he was growling at this driver, and then the blokes started shouting and jeering at him.'

'And then what?'

'Well, the blokes made it clear what was what, and the new driver had to let Red stay on. Anyway, when the driver asked about it at the depot, we told him all about Red, and now he knows better.'

'I saw something funny the other day, a bit like that,' said Nancy. 'Red was in the shopping mall, and you know it says "No Dogs" on the door, and he was lying there in the entrance because it was like an oven outside, and he likes the air-conditioning, and no-one ever tries to move him because he isn't just any old dog.'

'Yeah, I know,' said John.

'Well, there's a new woman working in the mall, right? She's called Patsy or something, and she didn't know about Red. She sees him lying there, and all the blokes have come in because it's lunchtime, and they're sitting round

eating their sandwiches and legs of chicken. Anyway, Patsy sees Red Dog and orders him out, and he refuses to move. So she grabs him by the collar and drags him out, with his feet sliding on the tiles because he's determined not to go. She closes the door, and before you know it Red Dog's come back and he's lying down exactly where he was before. Patsy starts to kick up a fuss, and tries to drag him out again, and then all the fellas start having a go at her, you know, cat calling and throwing chicken bones and orange peel, so finally she gives up, and now she knows not to bother him again.'

'That's my dog,' said John, and one of the miners tapped him on the shoulder. 'Listen, mate. We've got to get to work, so be a good fella and see if it's safe to get back in.' John put his head in the bus and sniffed. Then he announced 'Sorry, guys, it's still a bit ripe. You'll have to wait a bit more.'

The miners groaned, and John said to Nancy, 'There's a new film on at the Open Air. Would you like to come and see it?'

'What is it?' she asked.

'Can't remember,' said John. 'Supposed to be good, though.'

'All right then,' said Nancy. 'I'll take your word for it.'

On the evening of their date John cleaned out his car and sprayed it with air freshener and mosquito repellent. He shaved carefully so that he didn't cut himself, splattered his face with slightly too much aftershave, and put on a clean new shirt and freshly pressed trousers. He had had a haircut that afternoon, and had polished his shoes. The only things left to do were to give Red Dog the slip, and pick up Nancy. Picking up Nancy wouldn't be difficult, but Red Dog would certainly give him a problem, because Red was so devoted to him that he followed him nearly all the time, and couldn't bear to let him out of his sight for very long. When John played football, Red Dog ran on to the pitch and joined in, and when John was playing cricket, Red Dog would find out about it somehow, run on to the pitch, get to the ball before the fielders, and then play keep-away with it.

John was determined not to let Red Dog interfere with his night out with Nancy, so he called Red Dog and told him to hop into the car. He drove him all the way to the Hamersley Iron Transport section and left him there, telling the drivers to keep him busy at all costs. Then he went to pick up Nancy, and drove her all the way to Karratha to the Open Air cinema.

He parked the car alongside all the other ones, and very soon the lights went down and the film began. John had unrolled the sunroof, and the stars sparkled in the sky above them. It was a lovely warm evening, and the crickets were scraping away in the long grass. John held out a can of Emu to Nancy, saying, 'Like a stubbie*? It's good and cold.' (*can)

'No, thanks, John,' said Nancy, shaking her head. 'Never could get a taste for beer.'

John was disappointed because he liked to have a beer himself, but he knew that it wasn't very nice to kiss someone who has been drinking it, when you haven't had any yourself. It tastes horrible and stale. As he was hoping to kiss Nancy later on, he reluctantly decided not to have one himself. He

pretended to be watching the film, whilst thinking about how to put his arm round Nancy's shoulder without it being too obvious. He waited for a scary bit in the film, and when Nancy squealed, that was when he put his arm round her, just to comfort her, of course.

The next problem was working out how to kiss her, and there just didn't seem to be a decent opportunity. He thought he would probably have to wait for that awkward moment when he was leaving her at her door and wishing her goodnight.

She laid her head on his shoulder and snuggled up a little, so that John was able to put a small kiss on her temple. Things were definitely looking up. He was about to take the risk of kissing her properly, when there was an urgent scratching on the door of the car. John had several scratches on it by now, where the paint had been scraped away.

'Oh no,' he said.

'What was that?' asked Nancy.

'It's Red,' said John. 'He's found us.'

Red Dog scratched again, and John sighed.

'Aren't you going to let him in?' asked Nancy.

'Not if I can help it. You know what he's like.'

'Don't be mean, John. Let him in.'

'He comes to see all the films,' said John, 'and he always wants to sit with someone he knows. He must've got a lift.'

'I'll let him in,' said Nancy. She opened the back door, and Red Dog jumped in, his tongue lolling happily and his tail wagging.

'You shouldn't have done that, Nance,' said John.

For a while it looked as though everything was going to be fine. Red Dog settled down in the back and watched the film, becoming excited only when there was an animal on the screen, and John managed to get his arm around Nancy during another scary bit. Once more her head rested lightly on his shoulder, and once more John kissed her lightly on the temple. Red Dog put his feet upon the back of the seats before him, and pushed his head in between them. 'He's jealous!' laughed Nancy, and John told him to get back down and be quiet. A romantic scene was developing in the film, and John chose his moment to move in for that big kiss on Nancy's lips, when a horrible stink rolled over them from the back of the car.

'Strewth,' exclaimed John, and Nancy opened the door and jumped out.

'Red,' said John, wearily, 'you're a real dag*of a dog.' (* someone revolting)

Red Dog looked pleased with himself, and John and Nancy never did get to have that kiss. It was one more romance that nearly happened. John used to say that as long as Red Dog was his companion, he probably wouldn't be allowed to have a girlfriend.

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