

80 Drivers

(Driving Golden Gate Transit Bus Route #80 between San Francisco and Santa Rosa)

80 drivers aren't always on time
in spite of their best wishes
sometimes you'll
miss your connections:
a jaunt to the laundromat
to wash your clothes
or to Safeway
for some pasta you're missing
an interview for that job
you need so much
or the first date, never kept
with a woman you should have married;

from mundane to blessed.

Although you may get upset
you'll soon see all
of those special cases
and, of course
there's traffic
always, there is traffic.

Walking the aisle of an 80
can be interstellar travel
each new seat or two
an alien universe, unbound by local rule
whether sensed by sight, smell, sound or mood--

You'll hear Sonoma bound retirees
arguing quietly, over nothing
see teenage girls from Marin
whispering to girlfriends over smart phones
about ex-boyfriends;

Meet immigrants bound for house cleaning or construction jobs
perhaps an old German lady, gloating to a stranger
about her upcoming retirement
or a young, single mom on a suspended license

getting home late from daycare with kids
in every seat a special soul.

And, too often, because riding a bus
is not for the upper classes
an ex-convict
seeking a job, too
trying to stay out of jail, or running from the law
a strung-out waif kissing an old man
for quick money
meth freaks scoring dope
or someone planning murder.

Drivers tell stories (some I've seen)
of parking at highway bathrooms
so old men won't have to pee in their pants
fighting off drunks
trying to ride for free
arresting perverts
for exposing themselves on-board
even the time 20 cops rushed Shirley's coach
with raised shotguns
because someone thought they saw a man
who just robbed a gas station
climb on board
(front page, I. J. next day)
not always so mean, but all in a day's work
special cases, like you, and me;

Separate, one from another
a universe apart
searching for a passage
through a lonely life
on her own
his own
their own
alone.

Then you find out what they make
and you're dumbfounded
because you thought they must be getting rich
and ask yourself, why?

Why do it?
why would someone, anyone, drive us around so selflessly
such a thankless, tedious, malignant task
there must be something else, there's got to be something else!

But you forget about it, because you're spent.

'Till soon after comes a Thursday evening
you catch a late 80 home
the driver catches your eyes when you board
she says, "Haven't seen you for awhile."

And you can't wait for tomorrow
because you've been beat up all week
though, finally, the boss is happy
and you'll be getting paid
so, the family is happy
the wife's car's running, too—and, boy
has she been looking goooood!

If the weekend goes well, you may even go fishing.

Carlo has the air on, just enough
and instead of napping, as usual
you're wide awake
(though you don't know why).

An ingenue in the front seat's talking
to the back of his head
about her upcoming wedding
children are humming nursery rhymes
even the vagrant mumbling
in the seat behind you is
making sense.

The sun's melting down outside the coach
in a bonfire of ruby glory
while you're right on time
sure, you'll pull into the mall
the second you're due
'cause Kevin's not stopping for nothin'.

Then you figure out what it is
what's *really* going on
why Gus is steering with a grin “pasted on:”

You see he’s not your chauffeur
he’s a guide
lighting the passage, showing the way
all together now, you can’t be afraid;

‘Cause Mike (my Studley friend from high school)
and the rest, drive with *total control*
bucking 60 tons of rumbling junk, going 70 per
guiding you home
leading you home
shoving you home

Through that yawning
gorgeous
sunny and bright
world famous
wide opening
Golden Gate.

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