

## Wonderful

I'm nestled in the plushy velvet  
seat of a tour bus, not your standard  
bench seat on a school bus,  
but cozy, inviting, gently reclined  
wearily returning home  
from a D.C. eighth grade trip,  
the rest of my classmates spread  
fore and aft in the darkened hull  
as we glide through the night,  
interior running lights dimmed  
to a soft glow, vague shadows  
moving in hushed pantomimes  
of adolescent longing or loneliness.

Maria is the oldest girl in our class  
and I the youngest boy, and yet  
here we are, inexplicably cuddled  
together, regardless of her even  
older boyfriend, whom she tells me  
she has no plans of leaving. No,  
we're just here for the ride  
for the fleeting warmth of kisses  
sweet, tender, new, a discovery  
in the secret folds of night's dark  
cloak, like a magic trick a novice  
pulls off for the first time  
that leaves everyone charmed  
and wondering what comes next.

## Wonderful etc. for Sixfold

## Encounter

Portland bus to Boston, South Station  
the only available seat, on the aisle,  
we sat together by chance. From the window  
she wanted to see the world outside  
gliding by, informing her deeply  
there was more than what she  
came aboard with. There were pines,  
to be sure, but people, too –  
breathing and moving and free.

I was going south, home to a family  
I'd left behind years ago, eager to escape.  
She was going nowhere, only there and back,  
a day's respite from a life she couldn't leave.  
Turns out the minister's wife was just a woman  
seeking God's answers in mysterious ways.  
Young, pretty, already a prisoner in a small  
town, heart and soul chained to a church  
she no longer worshipped in nor desired.  
My only solace was listening without judgment;  
I like to think that made a difference.

Months later I passed through her town  
and inquired at the post office for the local  
minister, was told they were no longer there.  
I like to think she made it out –  
on her own bus.

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## Rude Awakening

I was thinking how bus stations  
are the saddest places that humans  
congregate. So many people leaving  
perhaps never to pass that way again  
or all those just in between stops  
so far from where they want to be  
alone, carrying their baggage  
waiting for whatever is coming.

Once in the New York Port Authority  
bus station beneath 42<sup>nd</sup> Street  
waiting for a connection to Portland  
somewhere well after midnight  
I sat at a round carousel, back  
pressed into the cheap padding  
legs extended, shoulder to shoulder  
with other travelers like numbers  
circled on the face of a large clock  
as the other clock on the wall clicked  
toward our various departures  
and we waited, dozing or reading or  
staring hazy-eyed into thinning crowds.  
Feet propped out before me rested  
on my sole battered suitcase sitting  
on the littered tile floor. Eyes closed,  
drifting, half listening, muffled voices  
shuffled footfalls, faint metallic messages  
echoes, reverberations, coughs, snores  
a rustling of turning newspaper pages  
the pattering of a nearby fountain  
water splashing on rocks, tiles  
close, too close, jolting awareness  
something not right  
eyes snapping focusing transmitting  
an arc of water rising and falling  
in continuous fluid stream hitting  
the floor, spraying droplets up, out  
and tracing the source in reverse  
I discover the semi-sleeping man  
now next to me, sprawling legs parted  
pants undone, hand on his faucet  
guiding the direction and flow  
of his personal parabola of piss.

Sometimes the bus you're waiting for  
just can't arrive soon enough.

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## Unholy Alliance

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We weren't the first or the last  
foreigners to take up their space  
and steal their time. It was 1973.  
Two Aussies and me on the bus  
from Herat to Kandahar, high  
on the Afghan plains, a desolate  
stretch of moonscape and sky.  
The locals – quiet, indifferent –  
bearing us along with themselves,  
allowed us the rear echelon  
along with our worldly travel gear,  
knapsacks and backpacks.  
We three bonded like a molecule  
in a strange universe, attaching  
ourselves to familiar elements.

The bus stopped inexplicably  
on the barely discernible road,  
not a human structure to be seen.  
A local traveler boarded carrying  
his world in a rolled rug.  
Indeterminately aged with sharp-  
boned features under leathery brown  
skin, wrinkled, weathered, bearded  
in a *Perahan Tunban*, traditional  
long-shirted pajamas worn under  
a suit coat, and capped with a turban.  
He inched down the aisle toward us.

There was talk. Some broken English.  
He needed the last remaining seat  
next to me, heaped with our gear.  
“Fuck ‘em, Mate. He can get the next one.”  
But...how long, I wanted to know, before  
the next bus. Tomorrow, the answer.  
“They got nothin’ better to do. Tell ‘em  
to bugger off, Mate. That’s our gear.”  
The universe held its breath.

In the aftermath of that decision,  
allegiances were sundered.  
But for me, questions still remain:  
What does it mean to be a man?  
What are the common bonds of humanity?  
And when does regret forget?

## **Farewell**

in a bus bound for somewhere else  
i'm waving goodbye one last time  
a rain-streaked window glistens  
you're standing on the other side  
i can't tell the wet of tears  
from smudges of glass  
haloed orbs of watery light  
shine dimly through thickening dark  
refracting prisms blur  
my own burning eyes  
and salt-stained cheeks

## **Wonderful etc. for Sixfold**