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Greyhound Days

Debra Marquart

Iowa State University, marquart@iastate.edu

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Greyhound Days

Abstract

Because your mother is the Typhoid Mary
of travel. Because lightning, blizzards,
everything but locusts, plague her travel days.
Because that one time in Minneapolis,
some pilot-error, failing engine part, or
threat of nuclear disaster necessitated
an overnight stay, she now refuses to fly.

Disciplines

Poetry

Comments

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Too often, she will recount for you
the cold shuttle ride to the hotel
with the other stranded passengers.
No PJs, toothbrush, or clean undies
where all night she watched the green
hinge click of digits until the three a.m.
wake-up call. Besides, she says, what sane
person sets off in Bismarck westbound
for Bozeman by catching an eastbound
flight to Minneapolis? So it's Greyhound days

for her. And for us, this day after Christmas,
it's the drop-off drive to the truck stop
on the unlit edge of town, where we stamp
our feet and puff our cheeks in the snowy dark,

waiting for the Greyhound with the goth girls
and the tattooed boys, with the gaunt-cheeked,
luggage-less chain smoker, and that one
young mother who's been criss-crossing
the country with two toddlers and a colicky baby
since your own Greyhound days. You realize

at the purr of the diesel engine approaching
and the downshift of gears, at the slash
of air brakes, before the folding doors
unfold and passengers disembark, you realize
you do not want to let your mother go
alone into this high northern night
through mountain passes, frozen wheat fields,
past oil rigs pumping thin elbows in the dark.
But she grabs the nearest passenger,
the scruffy-bearded, nose-pierced boy
with jet-black hair dyed, just like yours was
in the eighties, and begins to drill him—
Is it warm on the bus? Are there seats available?
Is the driver nice? —which, he answers
to your amazement, tossing his smoke
to the sidewalk in a splash of sparks,
making you realize your mother

would be an excellent person to have along
at a rock concert or the holocaust or any
other huge natural disaster, this survivor,
who grabs her floral bag to board the steps
not looking back, as you watch her
through smoky glass, moving down the aisle,
checking each seat, row by row, with those eyes
that always saw everything, until she chooses
the best one, left side, one row behind the driver,
and stashes her bag, never once looking back

at you, down below in the cold, waving *goodbye,*
be careful, waving *safe travels,* waving *love you,*
even as the driver downshifts, you see your mother
leans forward to chat—dark silhouette of her hand
on the headrest—even as he undoes the brake,
turns off the interior light and the bus jerks
to a start, you realize you are still waving,
waving at the darkness now, waving at the spot
where you imagine she must be sitting.