Downtown They Only Come Out at Noon

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I took the bus downtown, the other day. My chevy threw a rod and I had to get down to the city building to make a court date. It was for a speeding ticket—damn city cop gave me seventy miles an hour in a fifty-five zone. He caught me down on the Jeffries. Said he clocked me at eighty, but said he'd give me a break—some big break, eh? I told him I didn't much care to stick around that part of town and that I was in a hurry to get the hell out of there. He wasn't laughing, man. He just shook his head and told me I'd have to go down before the judge on account of my bad record.

Anyways, I don't go downtown much, especially on the bus. Me and Detroit just never got along. I can't take it down there for more than a couple hours. I got on at Verniers, and sat in the back with all the morons. I can ignore the morons, but I started to wish I hadn't sat back there for all the damn smoke. Some of these people you'd just like to bust in the mouth, man. This old lady kept sucking away at her thin little cigarette so much that her nostrils looked like a dual exhaust in full blow.

At McNichols, this old, grubby guy got on. He wasn't staggering much, but I knew he was tanked. Well, people avoided this guy like he had the plague—you know how people are. So he just looked around like he knew everyone was looking at him. Then this guy looked down at me, and I said to myself, "Aw, man, here he comes now."

I tried to look away, because I didn't want to have words with this guy, but he looked down at me anyway and said something real low and garbled. I couldn't make it out at first. So he said it again.

"Do ya know where we's goin'?" His breath just about put me out.

"Hey, I knew where I'm going, buddy. Do you know where you're going?" I said. That was about enough for me—this guy didn't know which end was up. He looked

around like he wanted to say something, but didn't exactly know what. He finally went on.

I was thinking about a lot of the bars down around town and about to get myself into a flare up again.

"He up there, does he? Then let me on the bus then..."

"Where are we goin'," he asked.

"We downtown."

"But..."

"It'll get him, "What are you gonna do, Van Dyke? That's all that he travels and there's no one who might just as Conner's."

Just don't Elliot put.

"But..."

"We they know long?"

"I He"
around like he was trying to figure something out. He almost fell on his ass about ten times, because those buses don't exactly glide. And the guys they get to drive them don't know what brakes are for. They'd just as soon crease some guy's rear end than to engage those air brakes these things got on 'em.

I was kind of getting a headache from the pewky smell of the bus, when this old drunk starts acting like his head's about to roll off his shoulders. And he looks down at me again.

"Hey," I said, "Why don't you try grabbing the rail up there?" So it took him a half an hour to get a hold of it. Then he took his other grubby hand and sort of tapped me on the shoulder.

"Do ya know where we's at, now?" he said.

"Yea. This is Cadieux, and next comes Whittier, and then...

"When're we's gonna get to Mount Elliot and Van Dyke?" he asked.

"We ain't going there, buddy. This bus is heading downtown to Larned and the bus depot..."

"But they said we'd, ah, go to, ah, Mount..."

It took him too long to spit it out, so I just told him, "Who in the hell wants to go to Mount Elliot and Van Dyke--the only thing there is a great big cemetery that's been trump tight since before I was born. That's all that's there--nothing but the old Mt. Elliot Cemetery, and there ain't room enough there to bury a bug. Nobody travels down in that part of town anymore. If you do, you might just as well kiss it good-bye. That place is as bad as Conner and Mack--those cats won't be foolin' with you. Just don't go around there or you might just end up in Mt. Elliot permanently."

"But they told me this bus, ah, was, ah, goin'..."

"Well they told you wrong," I said to him. "Maybe they know what's best for you. Have you lived in Detroit long?"

"I been here all my life."

He was beginning to talk so I could understand him.
I decided to help this old guy out, because I'm that type of dude. Most people would've just ignored the old son-of-a-bitch.

"Look, tell me where you want off, and I'll make sure you get off there--okay?" I said.
"Goin'?" he asked.
"Gone ta hell." This guy was really snowed, man. I had to hold up my guard so he wouldn't spit all over me. Some people just can't hold their shit in too many doses.
"Look," I said, "Charlevoix is only a few blocks up. You oughtta get off there and go on in and see if Rick can help you. Yea, there's a little coffee shop on the corner. Rick owns it. He can help you. He's a die-hard down here."

"Goin' to Mount Elliot. That's where'm goin'," he said. "Been living here too long."

Speakin' of Rick, he's a pretty funny guy. I don't know a whole lot about him, I just know he's a little strange--that's all. Rick's got this gun, a silver magnum or something, and he puts it in his pocket. Rick says you can't take chances. Well, when I used to work down at the warehouse on Charlevoix, we used to eat at Rick's. One day this Rick went and blew his fuckin' toe off with the gun, and the guys down at the stockhouse laughed for weeks about it. The strange thing about it was that when they took him down to Detroit General, he was pronounced dead about four times. The guys laughed about that, too. We knew what kind of quacks they have running that place.

There wasn't a soul on that bus that made a peep, except for this drunk guy and me. People are funny sometimes. Well it was right then, anyway, that the driver said something about Mount Elliot. I knew I couldn't talk sense with this guy, so I bent over and asked the guy in the seat across the aisle.

"Do you know where this bus is heading?" I said. Sure as hell, what do you think he told me.

"Mount Elliot and Van Dyke," he said.

"Thanks, father," I said because I noticed his collar underneath his overcoat. Well I wasn't about to go on to
Mount Elliot—I had a court date to make. Why in the hell do they send buses of people to a place like that anyway. There's nothing there, except a big old graveyard—and it's trump tight.

I got off at Charlevoix. The driver told me that another bus was coming along that was going out to Larned Street. I had about fifteen minutes, so I thought I'd go in and see Rick—see what was going down with him.

"Rick's dead, man. Been dead for some time," this one cat told me.

"You know who I mean--the guy with silver magnum--"

"Yea, I know who you mean—you mean Rick. He's been gone and buried for about six months, now."

"What did he do—shoot himself with that silver magnum or something?," I said.

"Well I don't know zactly. One day he just wasn't fellin good. They took him down to the hospital and threw the sheets over him."

The new owner tried to get me to buy one of his house specials—some kind of soup—but I don't think I could take it. I can't eat downtown food too much. So I just had some coffee while I was waiting for the bus. It was fifteen minutes late.

It's funny about Rick and all. Sometimes I think guys like that old drunk would be better off dead. Sometimes you just have to sit back and look at this place. I have friends from out-of-town that say they've never seen so many brick houses in a row. One guy told me this place reminds him of rows and rows of tombs. Some people have funny ways of describing places. I don't particularly like some things about this place. But like I said I don't go downtown much.

*Honorable Mention in the Annual English Department Writing Contest, Creative Writing Category.