On the Bus

by Carolyn Blount Brodersen

On the bus,
A humble woman
with wonderful hair,
   Cotton candy
   Spider-silky
   Spun golden
   Straight strands
   Alive with light
Her only mark of beauty.
Each day
She wears the same
   blue polyester
   short-sleeved shirt
   faded dirty jeans,
And lofts a covered coffee cup.
Once, I tapped her arm and said
   your haircut looks great, it suits you.
She said thank you too fast,
   then resumed looking down.

On the bus,
Mr. Lou-the-driver
   greets Felicia’s grinning face,
      (more smirk than smile).
Her palsied hands clench
   and unclench the air.
He backs her into her spot
   left side, front,
And straps her safely in.
She hugs his neck.
Sometimes she squeezes him
   without letting go.
Gently, Lou unfurls her arms,
Then carries us all away
   on his regular route.
Her wheelchair lines up with Juan’s
   who lurches in a silent dance
across the aisle.
His greasy red bandana
crowns long stringy locks.
They flirt with each other
in loud-slurred syllables.

The bus crowds as it rumbles along,
gathering momentum and passengers
looping along the coastal freeway
Each sunny-cool morning.

On the bus,
The afternoon crowd is freer, dustier.
Lucky riders catch the express.
We filter fumes
for forty minutes.
I sit near my bus-buddy
whose name I haven’t asked.
She mostly wears purple—
It echoes her long black hair.
We brag about bargains and kids
and the annoyances of life
till we get to our stop.
Smelling like bus we roll home.

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