

H o g h e r d

Rob Sherman

Hogherd

A Play Which Is Difficult To Stage

By Rob Sherman

Cast

THE HORSEMAN

A stout man in his early forties; the driver of the bus.

THE DANCER

A young woman in her early twenties. She wears a brightly-coloured dress and her hair is dyed blonde and dishevelled, festooned with slivers of meat.

THE WARDEN

A waif in his fifties. He wears a baseball cap and cheap clothes.

THE SEER

A woman in her eighties. She wears a green mackintosh and a brightly-coloured shawl over her hair.

THE WARLOCK

A well-groomed young man, with gold jewellery and smart hair, a mobile phone permanently held to his ear.

THE FEASTER

A chubby girl in her late teens, clutching a large number of shopping bags. She wears bright colours, in wool.

THE BARD

A dishevelled young man with thick, bushy hair. His clothes are dark and do not commit to anything in particular.

THE GELDING

A man in his late twenties/early thirties, wearing an unfashionable hat, and a band t-shirt emblazoned with the words "Hello My Name Is Shaun" across the back, just below the collar.

HOG THE FIRST

A tall young man in his early twenties with sparse facial hair and a lean face. He has bad acne.

HOG THE SECOND

A short young man, clad as his fellows are in sportswear. He has less severe acne. His hair is elaborately shaved into patterns and amongst the patterns the word 'C-LOVE' can be discerned.

HOG THE THIRD

A fat boy in his late teens. He is younger than FIRST And SECOND, with smoother skin, and wears a hooded top.

HOG THE FOURTH

A tall young man, though not as tall as HOG THE FIRST. He is the youngest, and wears a cap.

N.B. All of the HOGS have thick, wiry body hair, either on their faces, arms, hands or a combination of all three. When HOG THE THIRD removes his top, he reveals a hairy back and shoulders. Their sportswear is complimentary, beautiful, not a uniform but a swatch of colours that mesh. They show their teeth at every given opportunity, and one of them, if it is possible in the casting, has a snaggletooth.

Scene

The play takes place on a double-decker London bus, in the middle of the night, and runs for between 25 and 30 minutes. The play is written to be performed either aboard a Routemaster bus itself, on the lower deck, or instead in an improvised, long, narrow space, the actors seated before the audience in rows which correspond to the seating of a Routemaster bus. The audience, which I think must, by necessity, remain small in number, are sat directly behind the BARD, and indeed his large hair should obscure small portions of the action for those in the front rows.

The actors never turn to face the audience completely: at most, they should reveal a small sliver of their features if the text demands it. All voices are artificially amplified, with the exception of those of the HOGS, THE HORSEMAN, THE SEER and THE WARDEN.

Lights up on a long, narrow stage-set. There are the sounds of an engine, other traffic passing, the shuffle of feet, the coughs of the passengers, and the strobe of street lights. THE HORSEMAN, at SLR, is obscured by a set of stairs extending to the top deck of the bus. The other characters are distributed in a way that seems casual, yet provides the audience with a clear view of all of them, as if they were part of a frieze.

There are six passengers. Opposite the stairs sits THE WARDEN, occasionally looking back into the bus with a vacant stare. In the next row back sit THE DANCER and THE SEER. In the next row past this sit THE WARLOCK and the reclining FEASTER. In the final row sits THE BARD, and THE GELDING. There are occasionally rustles and coughs. It is very late.

THE BARD

I always like sitting back here. I feel like I'm holding reins. I'm the hog-herd. Before sun-up is when work begins, and there's a whole genealogy of it before me. The cocktail of sweat in the tines of this seat that would provide a DNA of herders. I am suited to early rising.

THE BARD turns his head to the right. His face is obscured in shadow.

THE BARD

You cannot see, nor should you look - it is best not to draw attention to yourself on a night like this - on my right, here, next to this nerd - no, not a nerd, just a guy, is something wedged between two seats. I have resolved not to touch it until I reach my destination. I really need to, you know, touch it, in the way that that sort of thing becomes important on a night like this, but you know the sort, the sort that pick up rubbish in a place like this, on a night like this. If he takes it with him, so be it, but if not, it's mine. To recycle. I wonder who cleans up after us?

I'll angle my hand so that nobody sees. It might blow out into the road. I can't tell if it is made of paper, but it is fluttering in that one breeze I can't find.

There is a faint rustle.

THE BARD

One of them is eating, down there, and trying to hide it. I could spoil it so easily for her.
One cough.

THE BARD raises a hand to his mouth as if to cough, but thinks better of it. THE FEASTER, however, seems to sense this movement, and turns her head slightly, before lowering it again and rummaging through her bags.

THE FEASTER

Mustard, pectin, crème fraîche, poached eggs, boiled bacon, rocket, fettuccine, smoking hams and sausage, piles. I won't cook it, I'll brew it all. I'll distill it. I'll make it posh. I'm a

princess in the kitchens after dark, setting a place at the long, polished table. I have finery somewhere, somewhere... Fuck, I could eat.

Her head turns outwards slightly, and she wipes the window, peers through. A pause, while she continues to look.

THE FEASTER

Oh god, one of them there, out there, with his scarf uparound his ears, was holding chips like a paper-bag-fire. They were glowing up his jawbone from the inside. Seven teeth were rotting, just from that one pack. He's right, you know. He's got the right idea. Food is for warmth, not greed. FUCK I could eat right now!

She coughs, without amplification.

THE FEASTER

So, let's walk through it one more time. The door unlocks at my key. I lay my hand on the jamb, keep the cats in with my left foot, set the stove with my right, kindle the microwave, open the window to let the smell out. Eating from mum's tray would be best. It clatters, but I'm sure she won't wake. But I'll have to clean it. Or drink a beer so that she can sniff it on me, or eat something that I can hide in the pattern. Roses, is it? Madras, then, I can hide a madras. Or lavender? Oh god, I hope it's not lavender. I can't think of anything that I can eat that is lavender. Nothing in nature.

THE BARD

It doesn't matter how quiet you think you are, we all know you have too much food down there.

THE FEASTER

What if she hears me? What will I say? "Yeah mum, like, I'm smashed, but don' worry. I just did a bit of shopping! Full of starchy, inedible shoes! Yer, I know! I'm mad! I'm down! I'm fucking wasted! We don't even eat this stuff, do we? No. No. Don't know where it came from. I'll just throw it away then. What am I like? No, couldn't touch it. Not hungry at all."

She sighs, unamplified, reaches down, and there is another rustle.

THE FEASTER

What if they hear me? One of these rubbish bags? One of them will be watching me, noting this all down. Maybe they'll tell Mum, if they see her in the Corn Exchange. I have to... I'm only allowed to have a bite of this if no-one else coughs in the next ten seconds.

Six seconds pass, and THE WARDEN coughs. THE FEASTER stifles a sob.

THE FEASTER

In a few minutes I'll be dead of it.

THE DANCER

I think I'm alive.

THE DANCER wraps her hands around herself, pinches.

THE DANCER

Woop! Still here. And warmer. I'm like an egg snuggled and twitching at the bottom of a pan. I'm ready to go again. If a kebab were to walk into my belly I really couldn't help it.

What is it with girls and kebabs? What part of me dislocates to let such a scrap of caustic skin in? Skin in. The stopper, stops. Unstops. That's all it is. A drain emptying. We wear the dress, we spoil it with grease. And men watch us do it. Yes, I'll be sick.

That'll do nicely, and with ease.

She leans forward in her seat, retching (unamplified), and holds her own hair back. THE SEER's head turns towards her slightly, but she does not react. THE SEER lifts a bag to the chair beside her, and brings a chocolate, unseen, to her face. After a few seconds, the DANCER's head re-emerges, and turns slightly towards the SEER.

THE DANCER

I wish you still had the power to make me feel sorry.

THE SEER hums a short tune, and holds it for a second or two. THE BARD leans forward.

THE BARD

Now, if you could only see, but you can't, of course, there are two little blisters on the back of that

girl's heels. I saw a German woodcut at the B.L. where two hill-goblins were dancing in a knot of iron-bark that looked just like those blisters. There are calf muscles that you can't see, but they are the most wonderful things on this bus. And when she leans forward like that the goblins plot to kill each other, but are too amazed at how fine the hair all over them. They just want to touch each other. She clutched her chest when she got on. Morrow Park. As if she couldn't breathe. This must be recorded for posterity.

He pats himself down.

THE BARD

I'll text myself.

He bows his head slightly. THE SEER hums again , for a few seconds. THE DANCER brings her head back up, burps, and wipes her mouth. THE DANCER tilts her head slightly towards THE SEER.

THE DANCER

Ooh, I do like your coat, though. Your arms... they're all blurry. They're like those moon landing photos where nut-jobs said you could see pizza delivery people walking around.

You're covered in hoaxes. They aren't real arms. You need some blood. Bugger, I need some blood. And some onions. Someone's eating. Someone is eating. How brave. Where are we?

She tilts her head towards the window.

THE DANCER

Is that a golf course? There isn't... What we must look like! We're in the middle of nowhere.

What a stupid great lump of a bus to bring down these tiny lanes. No-one lanes. A self-important little streak of light. All of us trying to stop swaying, to work out where we are! You want to see me try and stand, it'll just turn into a dance for all of you dirty fu-... things. Let's all stop trying! There's something under the wheels that you don't get in the middle of nowhere. Something. I'm nearly there. I hope he doesn't see how stupid I look.

She tilts her head back towards THE SEER.

THE DANCER

He would really like your coat on me.

A pause.

THE DANCER

If you eat another chocolate I can have your coat.

THE SEER eats another chocolate.

THE DANCER

Thank you.

THE FEASTER breathes on the window again, and starts making cryptic marks as she lists the following items.

THE FEASTER

Bananas, lychees, goose shortening, Caramac, passion fruit, ganache, hoisin. Don't put the bananas with the hoisin, they'll bruise, and the lychees stink everything up rotten. I've missed something, obviously. And now I have no idea where we are.

She wipes at the window, squints, and sits back. She tilts her head to SR. THE WARLOCK uses his phone, up til now held to his ear, to scratch the side of his head, before returning it to its position.

THE FEASTER

He's not saying anything. What a loser. What a joke. But can he hear me? Is that why he isn't looking? I may just let it out and get it over with. But why can I hear a phone? Is it him? What if that... tramp asks me for a sandwich? I really don't have any, I promise. He keeps knocking his head when we hit bumps, but he won't put a hand out to stop himself. What an idiot.

THE BARD

Almost finished.

He lifts his head again.

THE BARD

If I were him, down there, looking like that, smelling of... what was it? Not even waste. Beyond that. Well, smelling appalling, anyway, now is about the time I would shout something threatening and incoherent.

THE WARDEN begins to shout, above the noise of the bus.

THE WARDEN

ALL ABOARD!

He takes off his cap and throws it in the air. All the other characters except THE HORSEMAN, THE WARLOCK, THE SEER and THE GELDING exclaim as one.

THE FEASTER

Pervert! Pervert! Pervert!

THE BARD

Do shut up!

THE DANCER

Give me your coat!

THE SEER hums, once again, with a slight rise in cadence. THE GELDING merely screams, and raises his hands a little too quickly to his head. THE HORSEMAN sticks his hand out of his compartment, pointing to the door opposite him.

THE HORSEMAN

Shut it or get off! Last chance. It's too late for all this bollocks!

THE FEASTER

Go on! Fuck off home! Go on! Go and die in a ditch you prick! You utter arsehole! Go! Get off! Go! Please! Go! Please please please!

There is an urgent rustling. She is screaming now, but barely moving.

THE FEASTER

I warn you, if you get out of that seat to do anything other than get off this fucking bus, or ask me for my fucking sandwich, I will kill everyone on this bus. I will behead that old bitch down there with the acids in a wet wipe. I promise. Please. Either go or shut up!

THE HORSEMAN

Last chance, Steve!

THE WARDEN gives one last whimper, and settles back down.

THE HORSEMAN

Pick that up! You know I can see you! I talked to Rajesh, I'm not a fucking pushover, Steve!

THE WARDEN

I'm helping.

THE HORSEMAN

I've done this a thousand times! I do not need help, so shut it and leave people alone!

THE WARDEN gives THE HORSEMAN the finger.

THE BARD

I don't think I have to write this down, but when I get off I am going to give the driver a handshake. They'll see it all the way back here. Just to let him know he's loved and appreciated. Imagine, having to ferry a troughful of us back and forth all night. Out into the dark, and back into the light. Letting us percolate off into the woods, knowing full well we'll be back again the next day. He's the generation after, the son of the man who brought the white-line lorry to us, to paint the markings down the middle of the road for the few of us twats who live out here, in the dark. To fit the cat's eyes for us to cook by. Thank you. Thank you for herding us. For letting me herd with you. Thank you. I can't tell him this, of course; you know the sort, who talks too much to the driver on a night like this, in a place like this.

THE DANCER hiccups, unamplified, and quickly raises a hand to her lips.

THE DANCER

Maybe the bloody B-Team behind me will throw this fuck-wit off. There's nothing like a bit of chivalry. The one at the back. He knows I saw him.

Another rustle.

THE FEASTER

I just can't enjoy this. I can't. Do I eat the cheese or lick up the sauce first? But I don't want to look at my spit on the bun while I eat the rest. I could just pretend its icing. And what if they smell it? Unless...

She rustles again, delves deeper.

THE FEASTER

Oh! Oh thank god! Sprite! Lemon Sprite! It... Sprite. I can't believe it. I'd forgotten. How considerate of me. The city's joss. Wiping me clean. Making me invincible. That's right! That's right. I smell pure, now! What can you smell! Nothing! Nothing rotting, nothing putrefying in my nose-pits like a viper! Just pure death. I wash my hands with it too, the seat, everything. This is just perfect! And only twelve minutes out! I'm mistress of the route, the number secret, the times locked, and home just after mum's lights out.
Wonderful!

THE GELDING stretches up to his head again, raising a hand as if to count.

THE GELDING

Autumn Grove, take the roundabout to Burnt Earth Way, take the first right to Hamlet Lane, first stop is Moon Hill... now.

The bell sounds. An electronic voice says "Moon Hill".

THE GELDING

I'll hit that bell down there in 12 minutes. It's just a case of reaching forward and touching it with my finger. Don't be ridiculous. It's a simple matter. You aren't too tired. Why would you fall asleep? It's not that late. Grow a pair.

The bus stops, and its side door opens. No-one moves.

THE BARD

Now, I'm sure you can see this, of all things, but nobody is getting up. Nobody lives at Moon Hill.

THE DANCER

Who lives at Moon Hill? I'd like to live at Moon Hill.

THE FEASTER

It's so fucking cold with that door open. Please shut it.

THE DANCER

It's closer to it all, just think, I could be home now. How different life could be.

THE FEASTER

Please let it end. You're making the pasty cold. You'll smell all the different steams escaping. You'll all remember me.

THE DANCER

The hair's up all over me.

THE FEASTER

Shut the door. Shut the door.

THE DANCER

What a small difference a stop makes.

The door shuts.

THE FEASTER & THE DANCER (Simultaneously)

Thank you.

The bus moves off again.

THE GELDING

I shall do it in four seconds.

Four seconds pass, and THE GELDING coughs, unamplified.

THE FEASTER

Now fuck! Now fuck this! More! Another ruin!

THE GELDING

Shall I move?

THE FEASTER

Who's there? And why haven't I seen you?

THE BARD

Now you down there or up there really can't see this, but the guy next to me, he's shifting about, he's playing with something in his pocket. I think he's going to move. Wise or bold. Finally something to note.

THE FEASTER

Please don't look. Just smell the Sprite and be at peace. Don't approach the altar. I drape you in napkins, boy. I assume you are a boy, though I hate girls equally.

THE GELDING

What must they think of me?

THE FEASTER

Don't look down here. Don't look in the bag.

THE GELDING

Crouched back here, in the dark, like a favourite cauldron.

THE FEASTER

I'm not eating. Not now. I can wait until I'm home. Don't be so filthy.

THE GELDING

But where to go? Where is eleven minutes spent best?

THE FEASTER

Stop it. Stop looking at me. Who are you? Why can't I see you?

She tilts her head towards SL.

THE FEASTER

Stop hiding. I can't see you. The window's moving too much. I bet the speed bumps are your fault as well.

THE GELDING

Not there.

THE FEASTER

Where are we? Where was that - Moon Hill? What a waste of a journey. Where are you?
When will you leave? Give me a sign. I'm so hungry.

THE GELDING

Not by her. I don't want her.

THE FEASTER

Hiding back there. Have you realized you're touching yourself yet?

THE GELDING

I can see the smoke rising off her. She's coated in it. I don't want that following me. No.
She doesn't deserve the company. I might touch her. No.

THE SEER hums, again, as if inviting him. THE GELDING takes a sharp intake of breath. THE DANCER gives a small squeak of surprise.

THE DANCER

My days!

THE GELDING

By her.

THE DANCER

Oh my days, who the hell was that?

THE FEASTER

I'll take another bite when he gets off. I'll wait. I don't care if he stays on the whole way.
I've got all night, potbelly. I'll shrivel up to the size of a single cous before I let you win. You
think that you've stopped me. I will wait for you.

THE GELDING

By her.

THE DANCER

I can still feel myself shaking. You got me going, sexy. I can still feel all the little teeth in my
stomach going, mlem mlem mlem. Come down here.

THE GELDING

In three.

THE FEASTER

Stop it. You'll fall.

THE DANCER

Come down here, sweetheart.

THE GELDING

Two.

THE DANCER

Whatever you just did, it felt amazing. All across the back of my legs, like you were right there.

THE GELDING

Wait.

THE WARDEN

Where are we?

THE GELDING (As if slowing a horse)

Wait.

THE DANCER

Tell him!

THE HORSEMAN

Shut up. I'll tell you when to get off.

A pause.

THE WARDEN

Tell me now.

THE HORSEMAN holds his hand out of his cabin.

THE HORSEMAN

Only passengers can ask me questions. Show me your ticket then, Steve. Show me you're a passenger.

THE WARDEN bows his head.

THE WARDEN

You said/

THE HORSEMAN

I know it. I know what I said. A little further, so be quiet.

THE DANCER

The further we go, the less you belong, arse.

THE GELDING

One.

THE GELDING stands, a little too quickly, and without turning walks down the bus to the seat next to THE SEER. The heads of the other passengers turn slightly to follow his journey. Halfway down the aisle, the bus hits a bump, and he smacks his head on the bar and makes a small but obvious trip on one of the steps. THE DANCER runs her arm along the back of the seat beside her, her palm turned upwards, her fingers curled as he stumbles past her. She keeps them open for a few seconds as he sits down next to THE SEER, before returning her hand to her side and her head facing forward. There is a rustle. THE BARD coughs and shifts across in his seat slightly. During his following speech, THE BARD'S hand moves slowly along the back of his seat, extending as THE DANCER'S retracts. At the speech's end, he raps loudly on the seat beside him. The GELDING cries when he talks.

THE GELDING

I'm having a good night. I'm having a good night.

THE BARD

There, I told you he would move. He was definitely brave. I like him a lot now that he's broken the rule. You know the rule, right? Never stand up. Never let the others see you.

Watch your step as you go downhill. If they see you fall you are finished. But he's not finished. We see him and he's not finished. And more and more I think that this little scrap of something, this ticket here by my nail, is his, and he's forgotten it. And now he's the leader of all of us. He's the one in the ear of the driver. Because, maybe it's vital to him, maybe it answers a question somewhere, somewhere where he feels safe, somewhere that he can retreat when they've slogged glue out across the streets to pick everything up, and the country is pried open to vend him nothing but his own body hair. Maybe there's a bowl of hot something waiting for him, and maybe there's a carpet that he feels between his toes like the back of a fat pet or his girlfriend's hair, or maybe he refuses to take a coat with him because he knows what this ticket means, he knows what it really is, and he wants to be cold, and lonely, because he knows when he opens that lock he'll realize that the cold was

only out in the hills, and the kestrels are nipping over the fields like the fingers of a partner who taught themselves massage from a book, or a widow, wading through the itchy cross-hatch she has knit herself into, who knows that, somewhere, at this hour, there is a petrol station that still has fresh parsley, and he can rub pumice on his feet and tell himself that the journey was just a horrible, terrible nightmare, populated with the likes of us. Of course, you cannot see this.

Another rustle.

THE FEASTER (With mouth full, crying)

I couldn't wait. I hope you're happy, you coyote. What have you started?

THE BARD

What is that fucking smell?

THE FEASTER

I really hope you are ecstatic.

THE BARD

Why do things bother smelling of anything, here? Who do they benefit? Nothing hunts by the light of a bus-lamp.

THE DANCER turns her head slightly to stage-left. THE SEER and THE GELDING look straight ahead. The THE WARDEN looks back at them, languidly. He laughs, to himself, and begins to pick his nose.

THE DANCER

Are you okay, my love?

THE GELDING vigorously scratches the back of his head. THE SEER begins to hum again, in between his placations.

THE GELDING

Help me. Help me, grandmother. I have shamed myself. Just for eleven minutes, help me. Please. They all saw me. They all saw me fall.

THE DANCER

What do they...

THE GELDING

Grandmother, please.

THE DANCER turns her head slightly further towards THE SEER and THE GELDING, so that the audience can almost see her face. THE BARD sits up in his seat, straining to see down the bus to the events unfolding at the front.

THE BARD

What...?

THE GELDING

Oh god.

THE BARD

Did she...

THE DANCER

Yes.

THE BARD

You cannot see this, there is no way at all that you could ever see this, so don't try to look, don't you dare, but the old girl just gave him something. Reached into her bag, and pulled something out, and put it into his hands. And...

THE GELDING

Oh god.

THE GELDING brings his hand to his mouth. THE BARD sits back.

THE DANCER

Shit.

THE BARD

She gave him a chocolate. She gave him a chocolate from her bag.

THE DANCER

How can she do that?

THE BARD

He's gathered his council, and that's that.

THE DANCER

Oh, shut up. What do we do, when this happens? Do we let it happen?

THE BARD

This is not supposed to happen. But what do you do? Remember the rule. I'm not bold enough to break it. I belong back here. You decide. Ask the guardian.

A rustle. THE WARDEN leers up at the BARD.

THE BARD

You can have her, rule-breaker. You can have her.

THE DANCER

Fuck you then, mate. You want her, not me. You can have her.

The bus bell chimes.

ELECTRONIC VOICE

Offa's Terrace.

The bus stops, and the door opens. A pause. THE HORSEMAN's hand appears.

THE HORSEMAN

Well?

A pause.

THE HORSEMAN

Who was it for Offa's Terrace?

A pause.

THE HORSEMAN

Someone asked for Offa's Terrace. Not my fault if you're still on here when we get to the depot. I'm not giving you a lift. Who was it?

The following characters speak in unison.

THE DANCER

No.

THE BARD

No.

THE GELDING

No.

THE FEASTER

No.

THE WARDEN raises his hand.

THE WARDEN

This is me.

THE HORSEMAN beckons him over. THE WARDEN rises and goes to him. THE HORSEMAN'S VOICE is hushed, but still audible.

THE HORSEMAN

Steve, please. It ain't. You're further out yet. I can't let you off.

THE WARDEN

No, I do remember, now. This is me.

THE HORSEMAN

I know where you go, Steve. What will your missus say?

THE WARDEN

What's a missus?

THE HORSEMAN

Laura.

THE WARDEN

Wife?

THE HORSEMAN

Yeah.

THE WARDEN

Haven't got one.

THE HORSEMAN

Well, the wife you haven't got has got my phone number. Sit down.

THE HORSEMAN shuts the doors and the bus pulls away. THE WARDEN pulls at his hair, lowers his head with a violent shake. A pause. THE BARD lowers his hands, and looks to his right.

THE BARD

A second medal for you, good sir.

THE DANCER

I thought... Offa's Terrace.

THE BARD

Now, if I could just...

THE DANCER

Wait!

THE BARD

I'm nearly there. Just one more twitch. It's stuck on something. There's gum down there, other things.

THE DANCER

He's not here, yet, he's...

THE BARD

Hmm? Who said something?

THE DANCER

I thought he would get on. And hit his head again. And sit in the luggage rack again. He said so. He said so. He said so. He said he was here every night. And now I feel more sick than ever. The bitch that's eating, she will get such a belt I swear. Smacking her lips like she hasn't got any shame. What is in it? It smells like sewage. Go and fuck yourself, and you, my love. All of you. You made me forget about him, for a minute. What... what was his name? Upstairs. That's all I knew. He liked to go upstairs.

THE BARD

You can't see this, but we're rolling over sheep land.

THE DANCER

Should I go? I've never been up there before. No-one ever looks happy mounting those steps. They always glance back at us, like they're apologizing before they run up them and whack their shoulders on the wall. I've never seen someone come down them.

THE BARD

It's almost there. I've almost got it, and I'm not sure that I will give it to him, if it is his. It's just got me thinking of the phrase, this weird popcornish sort of phrase but maybe that's the reason I'll keep it. "Bus-Relief". They'll like that upstairs I'm sure. They'll come down for it. I won't forget it. We're chiselled out of the warm. The poor fools outside don't know us, but they see us, and learn a little something.

THE DANCER

Will he be waiting up there? "I know you, babes." He's still wearing the uniform. And those trainers. They were like twin cockatoos, hanging from those bars while his friends laughed. Is he up there?

THE DANCER and THE BARD bow their heads.

THE DANCER
I'll just text him.

THE BARD
I'll just text myself.

A pause.

THE GELDING
Grandmother?

A pause.

THE GELDING
Grandmother?

A pause.

THE GELDING
I danced for forty minutes tonight.

A pause.

THE GELDING
Grandmother.

A pause.

THE GELDING
There's actual sweat on my t-shirt. Are you proud?

A pause.

THE GELDING
Grandmother?

A pause.

THE GELDING

Thank you for the chocolate.

A pause.

THE GELDING

They didn't even have a proper dancefloor or anything.

A pause, and then a rustle.

THE FEASTER

Maybe they're all dead. Nobody's moved. I might have a chance.

THE FEASTER sits more upright in her seat, and looks down.

THE FEASTER

Eucalyptus, mint extract, latex, xylitol, white teeth and the voice of a winged bull.

A pause. A rustle from further down the bus. THE WARDEN smiles at her, not unkindly.

THE FEASTER

Pigman. Gaoler. You can't smell it. It's gone. I've hexed it off with the lemon robes of office.
I'm a priestess. These are merely supplications.

A pause.

THE FEASTER

If I can't eat something right this second, I'm going to go insane slightly maybe.

Another pause. A rustle.

THE FEASTER

Oh, fuck all of you.

She half-stands.

ELECTRONIC VOICE

Scrofa Avenue.

The bus starts to slow. THE FEASTER falls back into her seat. A sound outside rises, a mingling of voices and jeers. THE WARDEN looks around and then quickly back, his face pale and troubled. THE GELDING shifts in his seat. THE DANCER puts her hands together in front of her for a moment. There is an obvious bristling throughout the passengers.

THE GELDING

Protect us. Please.

THE DANCER

You listened. You listened, whatever you are. He is here.

THE BARD

There's always a glottal in the bad neighbourhoods. It's easier for the ungulates. White hoofs, scarred with the condiments they drop.

He draws his hand up from his pursuit of the ticket. The bus stops, the front doors open and the light comes on. The four HOGS pile on-board, laughing and singing.

THE BARD

We're not safe here.

THE FEASTER

No. Not this. Not fresh like this.

THE BARD

Drive on. I was so close.

THE FEASTER

Drive on.

THE GELDING

Drive on.

THE DANCER

It's not him. Drive on.

THE HORSEMAN sticks his hand out to stop the HOGS passing, but HOG THE THIRD and HOG THE FOURTH skip past him and begin to mount the stairs. Their voices are nasal, but with a hint of a rasp, as if they are losing their voices.

THE HORSEMAN

Here, that's two quid each! Get back 'ere.

HOG THE FIRST takes the hand and slaps it.

HOG THE FIRST

Get to fuck.

They move into the cabin and begin mounting the stairs, but fight and pull each other down.

THE BARD

I didn't think hogs came this far out. Most of the compost goes to the centre; I didn't volunteer all those weekends for nothing. One of the best things about this route is the long lines of them you see, waiting to get herded back inside, to rut. Not out here. It's quiet here.
Let us be.

THE DANCER

Let us be. I'm not to be played with.

THE GELDING

Yes.

THE FEASTER

Go.

HOG THE FIRST notices them and waves cheekily up the bus, and hawks in his throat. THE WARDEN goes to stand up, but HOG THE SECOND smiles at him, and stamps his foot between his legs. THE WARDEN sits back down and stares at the floor.

THE BARD (With real venom and mounting anger)

Not fucking now. Not after all this time we've spent together. Put your fucking cleft away. What gathers there? What do you splash in? We have no way of knowing. Fuck off out of here. Pay your way or fuck off. We've all got tickets, all of us.

THE HORSEMAN

Right.

There is the sound of the engine being shut off, and the lights dim, and the four HOGS start to complain. They find a note that they hold, for a few seconds, before collapsing into laughter.

HOG THE FIRST

Nah, mate, we don't mean nothin' by it. It's cold. 'Ave a fucking heart.

THE HORSEMAN

We aren't going anywhere until you all pay me two quid.

HOG THE SECOND

We ain't got two quid, mate.

THE HORSEMAN

Eight quid, and if you don't, sod off, then. These people got to get home, too.

HOG THE THIRD

It's gone on the slotties. You like a fiddle, don't you, driver?

THE HORSEMAN

You should of thought about that first.

HOG THE SECOND

It's illegal to turn us away in winter. Queen's orders! You've got to let us on, it's a right.

THE HORSEMAN

You ain't got no right. Now pay up.

HOG THE FIRST looks down the bus at the other passengers. All remains silent, for several seconds.

HOG THE FIRST

My mates, my fuckin' ... look, we need some, what, eight quid right? Lend us it between 'yer all. Go on.

THE BARD

Take your hat off, at least.

THE FEASTER

Someone give them eight pounds.

HOG THE FIRST

And someone's munchin', too! Come on, give us a bit, who is it?

He sniffs the air. She screams.

THE FEASTER

NO-ONE!

THE DANCER wraps her hands around herself. Her tone is frenzied.

THE DANCER

Please. What about her? Please. Take it off grandma. I shouldn't be bothered. They won't want her.

THE GELDING

Grandmother?

THE SEER reaches up, and takes off her shawl. Curled white hair springs up in response. The HOGS look between them with wry smiles on their faces.

THE DANCER

That's not what I meant.

THE BARD

That... that is really beautiful.

THE FEASTER slightly turns her head to the left.

THE FEASTER

What about this guy? Why is he still on the fucking phone? They will take one look at him and pull out the webbing between his fingers just to get at it. They just need it. The side of his head is swollen. His fingers are chafed. He'll have cancer of the hemisphere after all this. Please, put the phone down. I'm making you. With my brain. Don't bring them back here. Please.

HOG THE FIRST

Come on, eight quid, don't be stingy. We want to get home as much as you, yeah? I live with me mum, she'll be wondering where I am. Please, there's a fucking wood out there, nothing, I'll die of it, please.

HOG THE SECOND

Just sit, yeah? Fuck him.

HOG THE SECOND gives a hacking cough.

THE BARD

Small lungs and worms in the belly. Useless. Not even good to eat.

HOG THE FIRST turns to THE HORSEMAN. The others hang from the banister.

HOG THE FIRST

No. Come on, mate. I'm a fucking brickie... I'm a worker... I work too. I know what it's like. I know you.

HOG THE SECOND

Leave it.

HOG THE FIRST

Shut it!

THE HORSEMAN

You don't know me at all. Now, get off my bus.

HOG THE FIRST

Come on, mate, just... these people want to get home.

THE BARD

Just let them go. Let them upstairs. What's in a principle? They have their place. Let them climb the stairs and let us all know. You've earned two honours already tonight.

HOG THE SECOND

Nah, let's...

HOG THE FIRST

I said no. Come on, mate, I'll get it when I get back home? I understand you. I work night shifts all week, just for a bit of shifty at the weekend, yeah? Dancing with girls. Night workers. Can't sleep, yeah? Not when the sun's out.

He looks at THE DANCER as he says this.

THE HORSEMAN

You ain't working now. And you ain't like me. Now pay or go. And don't look at her.

HOG THE FIRST looks back at THE HORSEMAN for ten seconds, and then turns, hawks and spits down the bus. It lands near the feet of the THE SEER. He stands and stares, barely containing his rage. THE WARDEN begins to laugh, and HOG THE FIRST catches him across the cheek, knocking his hat off again. He looks up the bus.

HOG THE FIRST

Come on then! Come and fucking make me, you old butters fuck-wit! Come and fucking make me! I'll fucking skin yer!

THE BARD

You can't see this, but my hand is nearly at that stub of ticket. I at least want my own if I'm going to die. I'm not going to be like them. I feel so awful. How could I do it? I'm no better than they are.

THE SEER hums again, a different note, a rising intonation.

THE BARD

He only looked away for a second, and I slipped past him. Onto his bus. For the sake of a couple of quid, I'm a fucking usurper. I'm no hogherd, I'm the hog, I'm the unguilate. I'm the bristled. No ticket, no right. I need that ticket. Fuck them. Where is it... just... there. It's mine.

He sits up in his seat.

THE BARD

We... we can't die. They can't make us. We're like the parts of some great weapon. No-one can make us. She's the twang of the bow, I'm the fist of the slave, he's the spring of the ratchet. I'm one of them now. Those with the right.

THE FEASTER

None of us have got anything for you. Keep your water to yourself. Have that decency.

THE GELDING

I'm five minutes out. I'm five minutes out. Look what you've done.

THE DANCER

I would dance with you if you were slim and stupid, but you're not. You scalped another for that beard. It's a mask not a hide. If he were here he'd kick your teeth in. You aren't like us.

THE BARD

You aren't one of us.

THE FEASTER

Here in the dark.

THE GELDING

It's like looking out of bed with those you love the most.

THE FEASTER

Yeah, we'll all have a good laugh about you when you've gone. Imagine your house. Imagine your room. Imagine what it must be like to look down in the mornings and realize who you are.

THE GELDING

You don't live around here. You're lying. You've just come to kill a bus-load of strangers. How pathetic. It's already been done, in Canada. You aren't cool. You're slaves to the worms in your belly.

THE BARD

You come out here to eat and fuck and cause trouble for us. It's so quiet here this morning, and we are all thinking of quilts and down. Go.

THE FEASTER

You don't own us.

THE DANCER

Please.

THE GELDING

Leave us alone.

THE FEASTER

Let us be thick-skinned.

THE DANCER

Let me eat a kebab and not care about your looks.

THE GELDING

Let us live for our grandmother.

THE SEER holds the note, humming in the background.

THE BARD

Give us our four minutes.

THE DANCER

We will take our own legs home.

THE BARD

And the legs of others to consider in bed.

THE GELDING

Grandmother will get the bus tomorrow. It'll happen again.

HOG THE THIRD and HOG THE FOURTH come down to the main deck again, and look with confusion down the bus.

HOG THE FIRST

I have a right, same as you.

THE BARD

Where's your ticket? This... this is not his ticket. It can't be. It's for Moon Hill. But it's mine now. It matters. It'll get me home. Where's yours?

THE DANCER

Where's your ticket?

THE FEASTER

We entered a pact, when we first came here.

THE GELDING

I met someone new.

THE DANCER

We came to love one another.

HOG THE SECOND rises, and the four stand in a line.

THE BARD

You can't see this.

THE DANCER

We came to love one another.

THE FEASTER

We came to think.

THE DANCER

Well, I came to love someone. I've forgotten Upstairs. I don't need him.

THE GELDING

We came to eat.

THE BARD

You can't see this...

THE DANCER

I came to know that there is a line of light that runs from the centre to where I sleep. And he isn't up there. He's not the same as you. His place is down here, with us.

THE GELDING

I came to count minutes and find new family.

THE BARD raises his hands in the air.

THE BARD

Wouldn't it just...

HOG THE FIRST

I have the right.

THE DANCER

I came...

THE FEASTER

I came here to support my own sagging waistline. At seventeen! I came here to prepare for that fucking tray! It's like I have to let my stomach out onto it! Just to avoid her voice!

THE BARD

Wouldn't it...

THE SEER'S humming rises yet further in urgency. The others take it up, finally, apart from the BARD.

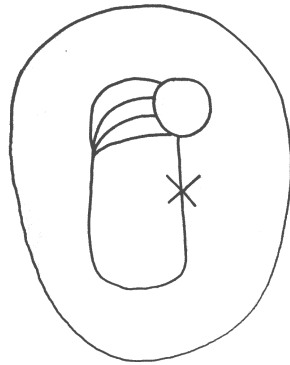
THE BARD

You can't see this, and there is no point asking, but wouldn't it just be better if we all did this?

He lowers his arms, stamps his feet and everyone except THE WARLOCK, THE WARDEN and THE HORSEMAN rises to their feet in a jump and a bang.

Lights.

END



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