



THE ROAD TAKEN

By Ben Amato

“You know you’ve been staring out that window for the last twenty minutes?” The bewilderment in Mary’s voice brought Dave out of a trance. He slowly turned his head to the right.

“You see lots of things from this bus,” he said as he slowly turned back to the dark tinted glass. “Every picture tells a story.”

“I see the same signs, the same trees and the same traffic as you do,” Mary said with a playful dose of Brooklyn in her voice. “So what picture do you see?”

The Friday afternoon bus was filled solid, as usual, with suitcases, shopping bags, mp3 players and laptops. Also as usual, sunrise Highway was just as stuffed and uncomfortable. The ritual dash from New York to the Hamptons was underway, sometimes hurtling eastbound at four miles per hour.

But for the previous twenty minutes the scene outside of Dave’s window had resembled a semi-still life. Reality appeared frozen and incredibly vivid in the hot July sun. The ninety-degree heat made the miles of stopped cars, in front and behind them, shimmer in a haze. Dave enjoyed the surreal look of the world, comfortable in an air-conditioned perch inside the Jitney.

“Yo, Adrienne, come take a look at this,” he said in a Rocky-like voice, mimicking Mary’s attitude. “Look at the brunette in the red convertible, the Mercedes with the top up.”

“Where?”

“Right there, one car up in the middle lane” Dave pointed.

“Yeah? Nice car.”

“Now look back two cars. See the white Jeep,” Dave motioned towards the rear. When she leaned over, her perfume made him pause for a brief moment.

“The guy in that Jeep has been bobbing and weaving, trying to catch up with her. Look, there he goes again.”

As the left lane began to inch ahead, the Jeep lunged and cut off a very angry minivan. He roared ahead, maybe twenty feet, and came alongside the bright red car. The bus crawled forward and came to a jerking stop along side both of them.

“There’s some sort of *thing* going on,” Dave motioned towards the window.

The Jeep guy was talking on phone but locked in a very pre-occupied stare at the red Mercedes. The brunette behind the wheel was also on a phone, but toying with her shoulder length hair.

“She’s been keeping an eye on him. Look, there.” Dave gave Mary a nudge. “Did you catch her glance?”

The Jeep guy was fidgeting in his seat, when all of a sudden he bolted and hopped out of the car. With firm, determined motions, he dashed to the jeep’s rear and started to unzip the canvas top. He took off the side window, and then the rear. He made his way around and stood right outside the Sebring’s window.

The brunette at first ignored him but then turned and stared straight at his butt. He unzipped again and climbed back into the jeep from the passenger’s side.

“I think she’s enjoying the show,” Mary said. Dave detected a touch of envy in her tone.

“Look at this.” Dave poked her arm.

The convertible’s windows started to drop. The brunette’s hand grabbed a small, black lever just above her rear-view mirror. With a firm, exaggerated tug, she brought her top down.

There was a flurry of motion within the Jeep. With a flourish, his canvas top popped open, leaving the Jeep guy standing erect in the front seat. He manhandled the top down into the back and then turned, giving her a big smile.

“Are they hooking up?” Mary asked, this time with a trace of awe.

Dave turned from the window with this huge grin. He had been sitting next to Mary for over an hour, but now looked at her for the first time. He liked the life in her eyes.

“Yeah, I think so,” he stammered out. At that moment he realized he hadn’t been this nervous in years. “Well, I hope so, anyway.”

The traffic was taking root in the pavement. Everything was motionless except for the drivers of the two cars directly outside.

“Oh my God,” Mary blurted out. Dave smiled.

The brunette was reaching into her blouse and soon her bra straps appeared, first dropping off of her left shoulder. She leaned forward, fidgeted and with a whoosh, out came a black lace bra through her other sleeve.

With sweat soaking his chest and back, the Jeep guy popped out of his seat again, this time taking the canvas door with him. He stowed it in the back and came around to the lady’s side and took off his other one.

“She blew his doors off,” Mary laughed nervously. So did Dave.

The brunette reached over into her backseat and brought out a gym bag. After fishing about, she removed a bikini top and slipped it first up one sleeve and out the other, then tying the straps around her neck.

The Jeep guy was back in the driver’s seat, removing his work boots and socks.

The Mercedes removed her blouse and finished adjusting her very skimpy top.

“I want the window seat.” Mary said and sat up straight. She turned to face him. A huge smile filled her face. “What do you think it is? Lust? The heat?”

“I hope romance,” Dave softly replied. Now the envy was in his voice.

“Love at first sight?” Mary snickered, as if repeating the punch line of an old joke.

“Yes. Magic on Route 27. Two people stuck in traffic, side by side,” Dave answered in a calm, serious voice. “When your life is ready to change, it’s like an earthquake. Anywhere, anytime, your path is crossed and everything’s different after that.” Dave stared into Mary’s soft but unbelieving eyes.

Movement in the traffic caught their attention and they pressed into the window. The lane Mercedes was in moved ahead. The Jeep guy stood up and waved. He pulled a smart phone from his chest pocket. He put it on the dashboard and then stripped off his shirt, balled it into a tight ball, leaned over into the rear and shoved it deep into the backseat.

Dave started sweating. Mary was breathing, somewhat heavily, into his right ear. He liked it. Mary was smiling.

The Mercedes came to an abrupt stop and she ripped open her gym bag and threw both hands deep into it, fishing around for something. The Jeep guy was still erect, picked up his phone and started texting. He stood there waiting. Waiting.

The traffic started moving again. The bus jerked forward, throwing Mary and Dave together back into their seats. Both flew back up to the window, just in time to see the Mercedes peer into her phone.

Dave, Mary, the Jeep guy all held their breath. Seconds passed. The bus revved its engine and inched ahead. The traffic started to move. In one last frozen moment of time, one huge satisfied smile broke out on four faces. The Mercedes turned. Rose up in her seat and waved with both arms to the Jeep.

“What do you think they sent each other?” Mary whispered. “Telephone numbers? Names?”

“An address? A meeting place?” Dave replied.

“That’s going to be some date,” Mary sighed. She wished it were hers.

The traffic began to crawl ahead. The soon reached an exit ramp and out zoomed the Mercedes. It raced down the ramp and right behind it was the flash of the Jeep. In seconds, both disappeared and the bus crawled further east.

Mary and Dave sat in silence for about ten minutes. Both looked out the window from time to time but they really were just stealing glances at each other. The silence grew but then both had mentally made some mutual decision and all of a sudden, they spoke.

“I’m Mary Johnson,” she raised her right hand towards him.

“I’m Dave Casper,” he said. He reached out took her hand and didn’t let go of it for the rest of the evening.

Just out of sight on the service road, the Jeep slowed for a red light. He tapped on his smart phone and glanced at his rear view mirror.

He looked at the screen and read;

“Pick up the kids, grab some Chinese food and meet me at the dock.”

The Mercedes pulled up behind him as he finished texting his reply.

“Grab some Chinese food, meet me at the dock then we’ll pick up the kids.”

She smiled, adjusted her bathing suit top. Her huge grin was all the reply he needed.

Great minds think alike. Linked hearts think better.