

Jadene Felina Stevens

For Calvin: The Driver of Greyhound Busses

New York City to Washington, D.C.

Calvin boards the bus
his gray uniform ironed
his trousers creased precisely

his fine gray cotton gloves
spotless as he slides them on
banters with the boarding passengers.

This highway is familiar to him.

He says he's been driving for years
knows every rut and pothole
on this midnight run

he neither speaks too often
nor too little
his voice bears the same dignity
as his carriage

lending grace to this conveyance
filled with those who travel
in the dark

heading for a better place
or at least a different one.

Two men in the back seat
rock in their altered dreams.

A blind woman
and her granddaughter
share a pungent orange.

One young man in jeans
slouches by the window
the seat next to him

remains empty.

He wears skull earrings
empty eye sockets stare
from his t-shirt

the smell of the unwashed surrounds him.

Two old men trade jokes
soft humor
pages of the newspaper.

The woman in the front seat
talks incessantly, tells Calvin
he reminds her of Cleavon Little.

The young man with the skull earrings
bends low to smell the shoeless foot
sleek in its nylon, of a sleeping woman.

When we stop for coffee
Calvin recalls passengers to the bus early

drops the strange young man's backpack
on the pavement -
drives away.

Calvin like Charon
never loses his concentration
on these journeys

as we each move toward
the already familiar places
of our dreams

ticket holders
with anticipated destinations

willing, for these few hours
as our dull bones settle
into the cushions

to let Calvin guide us
across the rivers we cannot see
but know are there

trusting him
to get us to the station in time
to make our next connection...

Note: The ferryman was Charon and those he would not admit to his boat were the unfortunates who had not been buried. They were doomed to wander aimlessly for a hundred years, with never a place to rest in (227). Charon ferries the souls of the dead across the water to the farther bank, where stands the adamantine gate to Tartarus. Tartarus was sometimes used as a name for the underworld. Charon will receive into his boat only the souls of those upon whose lips the passage money was placed when they died...(39).

Jadene Felina Stevens is an award-winning poet who has been widely published. Her poetry has appeared in *Yankee Magazine*, as well as *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Cape Women Magazine*, *Aurorean*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Transnational Perspectives (Switzerland)*, *Psychopoetica*, *Doors Out of Dorset (England)*, *Brevities*, and elsewhere.

She is a three-time winner of the Phi Theta Kappa *Nota Bene Literary Awards*, and received PTK's highest award, the *International Citation Award* (1997). She has won awards in the Writers Digest Poetry Competitions, The New England Poetry Club Poetry Competitions, The Arkansas Writer's Conference Awards, The Katherine Lee Bates Poetry Competitions, etc.

She is founder and Director of the Saltwinds Poets and has led an informal monthly workshop of the Saltwinds Poets for 18 years