

"The Residential School Bus"

Louise Halfe

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The Residential School Bus

A yellow caterpillar,
it swallows them up.

The little brown ones their stained
faces in the windows skinny and thick
black braids pressing hands
grease the glass.

On its back the caterpillar
carries and-sewn canvas bags.

Outside against the evening sun
the mothers, the fathers,
shrink.

They cannot look
at the
yellow caterpillar.

The building is huge
with long white empty hallways.

A child walks softly
the echo runs ahead of her.

The smell of Lysol
and floor was
overwhelms the memory of wood smoke
and dirt floors.

At night the little ones
press their bodies
between cold starched sheets.
Somewhere
someone
in the huge dorm
sobs quietly.

The child
clenches
two purple
suckers
underneath her pillow.

She won't eat them,
not for a
while.

They line up for breakfast
and receive wonderful bowls of porridge.

She loves porridge.
Her mama always made her porridge.

She looks up and sees
her favourite brother.

Ivan's ears look like
two gliding hawks.
They've given him a crew cut.

Charlie the eldest brother
is in the big boy's room.
She doesn't see him
and doesn't care.

Her eyes linger on
Ivan. They smile.

She swallows
the porridge
that is stuck in her
throat.

The Residential School Bus (Continued)

Geesuz
is always mad.

She sits too often
in the confessional.
She kneels too often
in front of geesuz.

The vision box
collects people
and makes them dance.

She turns the buttons
and the dancing people
turn into black and white lines.

She kneels
in the corner.

The girl
with the mean stick
and fat mouth
hovers near her.
She's a
huge night moth
beating her wings
against the dance.

They've arrived.
Wagonloads of
mothers, of fathers.

The children have been
berry picking.

Sister Treecow
is like that girl
with the big lips.

Sister's lips stick out
further. The arrival of
mothers, of fathers
makes her madder

The children
stand around the corner
of the building
wondering whose
mother, whose father
was there.

She didn't want to hope.

Father Brown
in his long black dress
calls out names.

Times are scheduled.

In the bare parlor
they sit,
mother, father, Ivan
and her big brother.

Their stiff hugs,
she wants more
but can't.

The stiffness stays.

The glass between the parlour
and the hallway is marked
with grease-stained hands
and smudges of
rain.

The yellow school bus
waits.