

I Have Seen That Look Before - by SWS

The writing of this poem was prompted by an incident involving the writer that took place on a Madison City Metro bus at about 10:25 am on Saturday, December 3rd, 2005. Copyright SWS 12/3-4/2005 Contact email: teklu212003@yahoo.com

I have seen that look before
More than I care to remember
I have my own notion what it means
Although uncertain, I have always felt
Its aim is to send a message
Without verbalizing its hurtful intent
Like a lightning without deafening thunder
Usually I would challenge it with a defensive look
And the uncalled for contest of stares would come to an awkward end.
This time it came in a double dosage
One hard look followed by another
Encumbered with foul energy
Releasing itself through the fault line of a diseased psyche
Of a 40-year-old or so man occupying the seat
On a Madison City Metro bus directly below mine
In retrospect, he must have made up his mind
To make his message quite clear
When turning around for the second time
To ask me a question
In a comfortable tone as if discussing
The details of a dinner invitation to my place
“Are you a nigger?”

“No, I am not,” I replied calmly

My answer followed by my own question

“And what are you?”

As if the meaning of his entire existence depended on his answer,

He uttered it with an air of unbounded importance: “white”

My reaction then abruptly changing from an attempt

At a logical refutation to an uncontrolled rage

Who knows what would have happened

Had I not reached my destination?

While crossing State Street to get to my favorite coffee shop

I had to fight off a crippling fatigue

Mulling over the long road ahead to be traversed

For the moment the pleasant effect

Of the morning’s fresh snowfall was a welcome refuge.