

SUICIDE MISSION

BRAD BISIO

With crazed crack eyes,
he boards the bus
from the back entrance.
The hatchet in his hand hangs at his side.
The driver sees all in her rear-view mirror
just another day on the route.

The man sits at the first seat he sights
next to a woman whose wide-ass spread
hangs over into the space next to her.
There's still more than enough room
for his frail frame, clothed with filth-caked cloth.
His lips are parted enough to see
a tooth missing and rotting teeth.

When the bus rolls on,
the man lowers his gray-bearded chin
to check the polished blade. He scrapes
the back of a fingernail against its edge.
White shavings like crushed crystal
fall to his forearm on the tattooed wings,
"171st Airborne" scrolled above them.

The bus halts blocks before
the next stop. Two of San Francisco's
finest enter with their belts loaded:
cuffs, club, holstered steel, a second clip.
They instruct each row to exit
behind them as they walk past.

We are all that remain—three of us
in the last few rows, plus
the woman next to the bearded man.
The frontman gives his orders,
but The Beard ignores him.
The same man draws his nine-millimeter,
extends stiffened arms and repeats himself.

Without taking his eyes off the gun, The Beard
unleashes a backhand swing
like an uncoiled spring. The woman's head
falls against the window, hanging
from the remaining tendons of her neck.
The carotid spurt reaches my lap.
I cringe, the shot echoing
throughout the bus.