

The Angle

Volume 1964 | Issue 1

Article 2

1964

Look at the destination marker

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Recommended Citation

O'Connor, Paul C.S.B. (1964) "Look at the destination marker," *The Angle*: Vol. 1964 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/angle/vol1964/iss1/2>

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"When I got on the bus that day on my way to work I was surprised to see how few people there were on it. Usually it was crowded at that time in the afternoon, but today there were only three people."

Cover Page Footnote

Appeared in the issue: Volume 9, Spring, 1964.

Look at the destination marker

By PAUL O'CONNOR, *C.S.B.*

When I got on the bus that day on my way to work I was surprised to see how few people there were on it. Usually it was crowded at that time in the afternoon, but today there were only three people.

At the next stop after I got in, the bus stopped and let in an old lady. She sat down on the long seat near the driver to get change out of her purse. No one else on the bus was talking, so her voice sounded loud when she spoke. "I waited for this bus here yesterday and it was a half hour late. That was the first time that ever happened to me on this line." She was not angry, she was merely passing along information to the driver. "How much is it again? I always forget."

"Twenty cents, lady."

"Last week I took the wrong bus and it was five blocks before I knew it. I had to walk five blocks back and wait for another bus." She got up and put her money in the slot and then sat down again on the same long seat. She was the only one on it. "I thought the bus was going up town, but it turned down another street. I never saw that bus before, I had to walk back five blocks."

"It runs once every three hours, lady, you should look at the destination marker before you get on a bus." The driver stopped for a light and the old lady was silent. The bus started up again and I saw the old lady put her purse down next to her on the seat. Then she began to bend over from the side as if she were going to lie down on the seat. She almost did lie

down, but just before her head touched the seat she fell to the floor. She uttered no sound. I watched all this in silence and amazement. No one stood up, no one said anything. The driver saw what happened and stopped the bus on the side of the street. As he rushed out to call an ambulance he told us not to leave the bus. All four of us were still in our seats. A girl two seats ahead of me turned and asked me please to come up. I walked up and as I stood next to her seat, she stood up. The old lady lay in the isle on her back. A boy who was about twenty came up from the back of the bus. A middle-aged woman sat in the back of the bus and looked out the window. The three of us standing in the front looked at the old woman. Her head was cut and slowly bleeding. "She must have hit her head on the base of the seat when she fell," I said. The boy bent down and felt her pulse, "it's weak," he mumbled. We all stood there and watched a big vein in her foot. It would pulse very quickly and then slow down and almost stop. Then it would speed up again. No one said anything for a while. Everyone stared at the old lady and the vein on her foot. I broke the silence. "I thought she was going to lie down on the seat, then she fell." The girl said that she just heard this funny noise and looked up and saw the old lady on the floor. We all watched the vein stop pulsing, and then start up again, slowly. The driver ran back into the bus; he was sweating and white.

"Did she fall because I started the bus too quick?"

"She started to lie down and then fell. It wasn't because the bus started too fast, don't worry about that," I said.

"I have been pushing a bus for twenty years and nothing like this has ever happened before." The vein in the old lady's foot was jumping very fast again and all of a sudden it stopped. We waited to see it start again. "You will have to put your names and addresses on the form for the company." The driver handed four white slips of paper over to us. The vein in the old lady's foot was motionless. The driver asked me to bring a form to the old woman at the back of the bus.

"You will have to put your name and address on this as a witness," he called back to her.

"Yes, yes," she answered. I walked back and handed it to her. She took it without looking up and began to fill it out. I came back and stood next to the girl.

"In twenty years nothing like this happened before. I don't think I started the bus too quick."

"It looked like she had a stroke," said the young man.

The girl sat down and said, "I think she is dead."

"Twenty years and this kind of thing never happened before." The three of us in front filled out our forms and handed them over to the driver. I went back and got the woman's in the back of the bus. She handed it to me and looked out the window.

The driver opened the back door and told us to get on the bus that had pulled up next to ours. As we drove away, I heard the mechanical wail of an ambulance siren.

OLD MRS. CRAKER

old Mrs. Craker, the widow lady,
rocked gaily in her chair,
laughed a high cackling old lady laugh,
grabbed the jug with both wizened hands,
tilted her old gray head,
and drank like a demon.
setting the jug down again, she laughed some more
in her empty parlour, and swore softly to herself,
that she reasoned, she just reasoned, she could rape
a full grown bear, in under three minutes,
even at eighty-three.
then another artery hardened,
and she soon forgot all about it.

—W. PATRICK POST