

# THE BUS DRIVER

---

**John Boston**

Harper drove a school bus full of kids. He was also addicted to meth, which is not a particularly good combination. He liked to think he had it under control as most addicts do, but the reality was, that the meth controlled him entirely. He had done rehab and managed to stay sober for about six months. He relapsed one night at a party and it's been a controlled descent downwards ever since.

He woke up thinking about getting high and went to sleep pretty much in the same manner. His life revolved around getting his next fix. He was fast on his way to becoming just another statistic.

His job was about the only thing he had going for him. He had applied several years ago when sober and had gotten his CDL. He liked to think of himself as a good employee. He figured if he ever lost his job, it was pretty much game over for him. There wouldn't be any coming back from that one.

Lately, though, he had decided just to throw in the towel and call it quits. This life just wasn't worth living anymore. He loved meth and despised it at the same time. He knew it was pure evil, but it made him feel so good, that he didn't care. He figured if the sober life was really all that great, he wouldn't have gone back to meth.

He wasn't just quitting his job, no, that would be easy. He was quitting life altogether. He was resigning from life, ready to take his chances with St. Peter at the pearly gates.

*Harper was hell-bent on killing himself as quickly as possible before the meth demons started tormenting him once more.*

Harper planned to sink the ship with everyone on it. Go out with a bang. He would just floor it and close his eyes. Whatever happens, happens. If he got killed, great. If some of the kiddos happened to go with him, even better. Harper liked to think of himself as a poet who did not use words, a painter who did not use a brush, and a builder who did not use tools. That's how his meth-riddled brain liked to see himself. In reality, most people, including the kids, just saw him as a middle-aged loser who drives a school bus. His delusions of grandeur aside, he was always punctual and on time.....even if he hadn't slept in two days.

*Come hell or high water, Harper was going to get these kids to school on time, unless they were to tragically die beforehand.*

"Harper, what's wrong with you?" asked Janine. She was one of the few pleasant kids on the bus. He almost felt guilty about killing her.

"You wouldn't understand. You're too young."

"Maybe if you break it down so that a ten-year-old will understand it, then I can help you," she said behind him.

"It's not that simple."

"I bet it is. Are you going to get a divorce? My parents are getting divorced. I have to decide which one of them to live with."

"I'm sorry to hear that. My wife left me a few years ago. I don't have any kids. Probably a good thing, I don't think I'd be a very good father." said Harper as he pulled into the school parking lot.

"I bet you would have been a great dad," she said as she stepped off the school bus.

Harper managed to hold it together until the last kid got off, then the tears started rolling down his face.

*No kiddo, I would have just screwed that up too, much like everything else in my life.*

His name was Louis. He was from a family even more screwed up than the one Harper had come from. He was constantly causing problems on the bus. Harper had let it go because he was black and he didn't want to be accused of being a racist. It was easier to beat a murder charge than it was a racist charge nowadays. On the ride home that afternoon, he had enough. Louis was going to have to be put in his place. Harper was the sheriff in these parts. Louis was just going to have to accept that or he was going to throw his ass off the bus. He pulled over, put it in neutral, and put the air brakes on. He walked back to Louis, who realized he had gone too far.

"Louis, what are you doing?"

"Nuthin. Just minding my own business."

"Uh huh. Why are these girls crying?"

"He was throwing spitballs at us," said Heather.

"Is this true Louis?"

"I was just having a little fun."

"Do you want me to call principal Lewis?"

"What? No, why you got to do that?"

"The next time I stop this bus because of you, he's getting a call. If he has to drive all the way out here, I doubt he's going to be in a very pleasant mood. Knock it off. Try talking to the girls instead of terrorizing them. It will get much better results."

Louis slumped back into his seat. Harper turned and walked back to the front of the bus. That wasn't so horrible. There might actually be some hope for these kids after all. It was a shame most of them were going to die in a horrible fiery crash.

He picked the kiddos up the next morning and was so high, that he could barely concentrate on the road. The meth made him feel like a God. If he had wings, he would fly. He actually got up on his roof one afternoon and decided to give it a try. He was just going to fall and let the wind take him away. He closed his eyes and fell forward. Fortunately for himself, he landed in the bushes, which broke his fall. He had broken his nose. When his wife found him, he was reciting bible verses as the blood was gushing out his nose. He was so high, that he didn't even realize he was hurt. She packed up her bags and left the next day. It was probably for the best, the marriage wasn't going anywhere anyway.

*At that point in his life, Harper was married to the meth as well.*

"Harper, you don't look too good," said Jeremy.

"Yeah, you look like you've seen a ghost," said Janine.

"That's called getting old kids. You'll look like me someday," he said

"Are you drunk? Your eyeballs are like huge," said Jeremy

"No, I am not drunk. I just didn't sleep very well last night."

"It just looks like you're drunk or high. My brother looked like that after he got done smoking heroin. I know what it looks like." said Jeremy.

"Jesus, kid. What, are you a doctor or something?"

"No, I just know when someone's been hitting the pipe."

"Jeremy, sit down. I don't have time for any of your nonsense."

Harper realized Jeremy was onto him. All of these little fuckers were onto him. All it would take is one of them to tell a teacher or Principal Lewis and he was good as gone. They wouldn't even wait for the results of the urine test to come back. He was going to have to put *Operation Bloodbath* into effect much sooner than he wanted.

He decided to take the long way around and use the highway. He could get the bus going seventy or eighty miles per hour, then just collide with something. He didn't know how many kids were using their seatbelts. He was supposed to check every morning, but he never did. He wasn't wearing his either.

*The time is now children. The time is now. God is practically commanding me to do this. Meth is the magical doorway between heaven and Earth. I can see the angels. I can feel the warmth of God all over me.*

Harper had just pissed all over himself and didn't even notice. He was that high, he didn't even notice.

He searched and searched for a nice big semi to run the bus into, but there weren't any. All it would take is one large truck. Maybe even another school bus.....wouldn't that be something?

He saw one pull onto the freeway from another direction. There was a barrier separating the north and southbound lanes. He knew exactly what to do. He would just launch the bus over the overpass at full speed. No way that barrier was going to stop him. He'd just run through the red light and break through the barrier. Victory was in sight. His sad and pathetic life was about to end with an incredible finish. This was going to be one for the ages. He could almost see the angels dancing in front of the bus.

He heard the loud thud and felt the bus pull violently to the side. His front tire had blown out. He grabbed the steering wheel and managed to slow the bus down, pulling onto the breakdown lane. The kids were scared as well.

"Shit Harper, what did you do?" asked Louis.

"We got a blowout. Not a big deal. Stay in your seats while I take a look. Do not go out on the freeway, am I clear?"

Everyone on the bus nodded, even Louis.

Harper got out and saw the rubber all over the road. Much to his dismay and delight, he saw a truck from the school district pull up behind him with his strobe lights on. He recognized the mechanic.

"Man, that was a close one. Good job keeping her steady. That could have been a disaster."

"Yeah. How did you get here so fast?" said Harper looking at the tire.

"I was working on my boss's truck that broke down a few miles from here. Thought I would take the freeway back, it's faster than waiting in traffic." said the mechanic

"There's a spare under the bus. I've got a jack in my truck. We can have a new one on there in five minutes. Why are you on the freeway?"

"I felt like taking the scenic route this morning," he replied.

Harper was fuming. He might not get another chance to do this after today. This might be his only chance to go out in a blaze of glory. It was now or never.

"I'll help you get the tire on. I'd like to get these kids to class on time."

"Someone might ask you why you went on the freeway and didn't stay on the approved route. I'm just letting you know."

"Yeah, thanks. Just put the tire on," said Harper as he bent down to use the impact wrench to loosen the lug nuts.

Jennifer Rider was fuming. Like literally frothing at the mouth type of mad. Her boyfriend of six months had just broken up with her by text. Six months of bliss, only to be taken instantly away by a text. Who does that? Apparently, her ex-boyfriend does.

*I think we should take a break and start seeing other people*

That's what it read. Of course, he had somebody specific in mind. She was sure it was that slut she had caught him talking to last week. That slut from bio-chem. The one with the perky tits and pink hair.

*Jennifer was going to have some very choice words for the young lady when she arrived at the community college.*

Jennifer was so busy texting, that she nearly hit another car. Not once, but twice. They honked at her and flipped her off. She didn't even notice them. She had bigger fish to fry. Her love life was in shambles and it was all because of this slut in their bio-chem class. Sluts are ruining the world for girls like Jennifer. She just can't compete with perky tits and pink hair. It seems that's why the guys want these days.

She got a text from her ex. She read it and immediately replied. She didn't even notice that she was drifting over the yellow line into the lane beside her. One car immediately slowed down and nearly hit her. She was so wrapped up in her own drama, she didn't even hear the noise the tires made as they hit the rumble strip. She didn't even see Harper or the mechanic on the side of the road. She was doing nearly eight miles an hour.

The mechanic had gone to the other side of the bus to get a lugnut that had rolled underneath the bus when it was taken off. He only heard the sound of Harper getting pulverized by Jennifer's car. He was killed almost instantly. He never even heard the car before it hit him.

Jennifer slammed on the brakes as she hit the k-rail. Her car slammed into it and the airbag deployed.

The police were on the scene in minutes. Jennifer's day had gone from bad to worse. She was taken into custody and charged with vehicular homicide. The only thing that saved her was the fact she had no alcohol or drugs in her system. If she did, she could have gone away for twenty years.....or worse.

Her life was in ruins. No one ever bothered to run an autopsy on Harper. He was pronounced dead at the scene. She received a year in jail and five years probation and the loss of her driving privileges for the next ten years. She was going to need a good bus pass.

There were some very dark days for her in the county jail. She was seen as a weak fish by the other inmates and had to be put into protective custody after trying to take her own life. Most of

her family and friends simply stopped communicating with her once she was convicted. As far as she was concerned, her life was over before it had even started.

The thought never occurred to her that by killing Harper, she had saved the lives of the other kids on that bus. They could all go on to live happy and productive lives simply because she had accidentally killed their bus driver. The world is a very messed up place.

*And in her case, it was getting more messed up by the minute*