

**Richard Cecil**

## **Allegory Detour**

*"And because the right way was rough in that place,  
they chose to go out of it."*

— John Bunyan

Construction on the Straight and Narrow Path,  
where a chain gang bossed by Righteous Indignation  
sledge-hammered boulders into paving pebbles,  
forced me to detour either left through fields  
of blood-red poppies, following the sign  
pointing down a weed-cracked concrete highway  
towards a ghost town called Political Compassion,  
or right down slick new tar towards Self-Fulfillment,  
whose booming suburbs glittered in the twilight.  
Righteous waved us left, but up ahead  
I saw Fashion turn her silver sports car right,  
followed by Prudence, driving Prosperous High's  
Econo-Van full of only children,  
followed by Hoggish and Carnal's giant camper  
with its comical Retirement license plates.  
Insensitive and Greedy followed, swinging  
wide their eighteen wheeler full of Things.  
Sunshine's sputtering VW bus trailed them,  
its ancient Movement stickers plastered over  
with Support Your Local Montessori School.  
Ignorant followed her in his battered Trans-Am,  
revving his thirsty motor impatiently.  
Liberal, laid out in a Cadillac hearse,  
turned next, followed by his wife Forgetful  
and their numb sons Compliant and Indifferent

driving Honda Civics with their lights on  
 though night had not quite fallen. Motels, too,  
 had prematurely lit their Vacant signs  
 to lure the Weary. Budget Luxury's  
 neon YES called to me like a siren;  
 EAT, said Big Boy's twirling double burger.  
 But I'd driven only 200,000 miles  
 since the rainy dawning of my journey,  
 and with no notion how much farther Home  
 receded with this major route disruption,  
 I decided that I'd better drive all night.  
 But which way should I turn, I wondered, inching  
 forward as the Zion Bible Bus,  
 its passengers all singing "*I'm Bound for Glory*,"  
 followed Liberal's funeral. Behind them  
 turned Middle Class's Volvo station wagon,  
 followed by Worker's battered pick-up truck.  
 Finally, I reached the Warning sign  
 pointing Left from the ROAD CLOSED barrier:  
 NO SERVICES BEFORE ETERNITY.  
 I glanced Right at the turning traffic stalled  
 on the on-ramp of the Golden Circle Beltway,  
 then down at the sinking needle of my gas gauge.  
 Could half a tank transport me through the night?  
 I wished I had refueled in Constant City  
 a few miles back, though gas there cost a dime  
 a gallon more than Youngstown where I started,  
 but the road to Perdition's paved with such regrets,  
 and the U-Haul on my tail was creeping up,  
 its driver's face in my rear view mirror crazed  
 with impatience to find a new house for his Stuff.  
 Righteous flailed his arms at me and shouted,  
 but with my windows up to keep out dust  
 I couldn't hear. Agonized by choice,  
 I almost envied Fear and Rage and Hopeful  
 who swung their hammers in his sweating crew —  
 (their names were stenciled on their prison shirts) —  
 but I couldn't stand to work for such a boss,  
 even though the pay's Eternal Life.

Yet worse, I knew, would be to follow U-Haul,  
who'd desperately swung around me on the shoulder  
to merge with traffic crawling towards Self-Fulfillment.  
So I jammed my wheel hard left and stomped my pedal,  
speeding down Compassion's empty road  
with fuel enough to get, alone, to Nowhere.