

FEAR AND FASCINATION  
SECRETS OF THE ITALIAN BUS SYSTEM



ERICA ABBETT

VOCABBETT  
*BIG WORDS MADE SIMPLE.*

## **Fear and Fascination: Secrets of the Italian Bus System**

Copyright © 2020 by Erica Abbett LLC

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods without the prior written permission of the publisher or author, except in the case of brief quotations and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

For permission requests, contact the author at [contact@vocabbett.com](mailto:contact@vocabbett.com).

### **Disclaimer in Legalese:**

Individual results will vary. Vocabbett (“We”) cannot guarantee success or improvement merely upon access, purchase or completion of our products, services, courses, or other materials contained herein. Any results you see referenced here or elsewhere are not guaranteed or typical.

### **Disclaimer in plain English:**

I’m going to do the very best I can to help you, but ultimately, the only person who can improve your vocabulary (and SAT/ACT score) is you. Please don’t sue me.

A **perplexed** look **steals** across my face as I re-read my host sister's **enigmatic** text message. "You go towards down," she writes. "Cover the reduction and ask for the Sacratio."

I **contemplate** exactly where "down" is. *I've been advised to head toward Hades? My feet? How can this possibly get me closer to my **elusive** bus stop?*

It is an appropriate beginning to my relationship with the Italian bus system. On the bus, nothing is simple. Strategies must be **devised** for **obtaining** seats before glitter-sporting adolescents snatch them. **Deference** must be shown to grandmothers who can no longer drive. And if possible, one always wants a good view of the driver, who never fails to entertain.

\*\*\*

A month later, with my bus routine firmly established, I am more familiar with the ins and outs of legendary bus number nine. If one takes the 7:15 bus, which arrives at its destination at 7:50 having covered a **scarce** three miles, one should expect to be respectfully spooned for at least a quarter of the ride.

One can maintain a **semblance** of personal space until the **gaggle** of **boisterous** school-goers boards around 7:30. Ranging from 10-18 years old, they have no concept of volume, and do not realize that their backpacks are an extension of themselves. As a result, it's not unusual to be repeatedly smacked in the stomach (or the face, in my vertically-challenged case), depending on the age of the inattentive wearer.

---

**Perplexed** - Confused; baffled

**Steals** - Move somewhere quietly

**Enigmatic** - Confusing; mysterious

**Contemplate** - Think about; consider

**Elusive** - Difficult to find

**Devised** - Come up with; planned

**Obtaining** - Getting

**Deference** - Respect; priority

**Scarce** - A small amount

**Semblance** - The appearance of (esp. when the reality is different)

**Gaggle** - A flock of geese; a disorderly group of people

**Boisterous** - Noisy; energetic; rowdy

In an effort to avoid these **inadvertent** beatings, one subconsciously tries to occupy the least amount of space possible, but unfortunately most Italians only see your **void** as more space *they* can occupy.

Searching for a seat at this point would be **futile**, so one must find the least offensive-smelling person for the final **component** of the drive. If you've managed to avoid full-body contact thus far, it will be impossible to maintain once the whistling bus driver takes a speed bump at a casual 30 mph.

Yet we **plebs** are not the only ones with a lack of personal space. A crowd of **fawning** females **perpetually** encircles the emperor of the bus, though at first I do not understand why.

In America, the **taciturn** bus driver would sit on the other side of a bright red line. Riders would be warned with signs and fines not to cross, and few would care to in any case.

Yet here, I consistently see made-up and boot-wearing women falling over themselves in an effort to speak with the motorist. I decide to unearth the mystery behind the women's not-so-secret adoration, and the drivers' easy **affability**.

I begin my study with the drivers themselves, who alternate route-to-route and bus-to-bus, leaving me **ample** opportunity to sample their population. Age is quickly ruled out as a determining factor. The youngest is in his twenties; the oldest in his sixties, yet they all receive the same treatment. Hair color, state of teeth, and chubbiness factor all vary, as well.

---

**Inadvertent** - Accidental

**Void** - Empty space

**Futile** - Pointless

**Component** - Part of a larger whole

**Plebs** - Short for "plebeians," an ancient Latin word for "commoner"

**Fawning** - Displaying excessive flattery or attention

**Perpetually** - Constantly

**Taciturn** - Quiet; uncommunicative

**Affability** - The quality of being friendly or good-natured

**Ample** - Plenty (of)

The only theme that remains constant is a carefree approach to life and the road. Light hands turn the steering wheel as the bus comes within inches of nearby cars/ pedestrians/bikers. My own knuckles, by contrast, are often white around my pink iPod as I watch the **perils** of our daily route with a mixture of horror and fascination.

I eventually come to realize that Italians do follow traditional laws of the road. Rather, they put themselves in positions where, if the other car doesn't yield, an accident will **inevitably ensue**. I ALWAYS close my eyes at four way stops.

Yet the drivers remain calm and detached, taking risks as if they were driving the bus from a computer screen. I come to realize that this mix of humor and detachment, combined with the power to control such a monstrous vehicle, is the mysterious charm that **enthralls** bus-riding women.

The drivers are the heart and soul of the bus system. These men — who undoubtedly blow-dry their hair in the morning like all good Italians — take risks most sixteen-year-olds wouldn't dream of, and they do it with ease and skill. They transform the bus from a **mundane** event into a **spectacle**, where excitement mingles with fear and fascination. For bored middle-aged women, these men are like gods. I often sit in my **coveted** bus seat thanking God I was able to **decipher** Sabrina's **cryptic** text.

---

**Perils** - Dangers

**Inevitably** - Unavoidably

**Ensnue** - Happen; occur

**Enthralls** - Fascinates or captures the attention of

**Mundane** - Boring; lacking excitement

**Spectacle** - A performance or play

**Coveted** - Desired or envied

**Decipher** - Succeed in understanding or interpreting something

**Cryptic** - Mysterious or difficult to understand

ALSO BY ERICA ABBETT

*Ahead of Her Time: An SAT Vocabulary Novel*

*Death at the Villa Tarconti: An SAT Vocabulary Novelette*

*Hera and the Headmaster: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*

*The Ghosts of Google Earth: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*

*Shakespeare Never Existed: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*

*Casting Call: Author Seeking New Villain: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*

*The Untitled Boudicea Project: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*

*All Cows Go to Heaven: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*

*The "Pitch" Perfect Crime: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*

*The Time-Traveling Teacher: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*

*Karen and the Weed: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*

*Andreas: The Man in the Walls: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*

*Trapped in a Pyramid: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story*