

Daneen Wardrop

Jam Night at Kraftbrau as a Train Goes By

When the thing arrives, so massive the sky must turn steel to support it--
its shrieking Eb chord—Eb diminished, I think--

it flanges. And if you cannot become the metal,
you can become the sluice of air between traincars, slice, slice, slice

of exact timing. Even though it's night and you can't see for the steel of it,
you can hear where you fit, the only places you fit,
Kalamazoo pub, ten feet off the tracks.

And you're singing "Gone Gone Gone" with the bluegrass musicians,
and it's in D—
what those bluegrass guys love to play--in D and fast—

and it doesn't matter because it comes and the lights shake,
the dobros and mandolins subsumed into Eb-diminished--

and the Cyclops headlight debuts,
lights the guitar pegs at 10:09 like every night,

and the autoharp player in her salty voice might have said a minute ago
(or was it an hour)

that time is something that was invented to keep everything from happening at once,

and you know a song keens in the long grasses behind the empty lot,

with these exact interstices,
these indelible rails--

Different Directions of Wakefulness

I wake roasted with sweat in the gnome hours,
cats at their stations on my bed
querying me, doting, slightly irritated looks—
Not morning yet,
they turn. I sear
with something to the left of guilt
though very, very like its tunnelings, and especially like its
very. What is manifest in youth, a pebble in a tunnel,
and still not guilt but a chancing, maybe something left over
that was neither opportunity nor regret but taken
as fire rolls black satin tearing
off the tip of a match-flame,

the party pulses
from the house next door. Swears itself
into being. Down the street a dog sounds a mystified bark.

The cats don't turn
for this revelry, the bass
tipping louder and louder later and later into the night,
while the melody recedes,

and gravel grows outside the bedroom window.

Goldenvoice Tea

You and I pour goldenvoice tea,
carried in my backpack from Guanzhou,
sit on the floor, lean against the coffee table.

Goldenvoice: maybe we'll be great whistlers,
gargle gold.

^^

I won't tell you that last night, in my pillow, my mother raised a hand against me.
held a hairbrush, I held her wrist.

Determined to die the way she wants to.

Words on slips of paper blow against me.
No umbrella against death.

^^

Is it best in a difficult time, to speak quietly?
You and I, a form of voice
pick up the shadows left on the floor.
The clean, clear pull of dolor
breathes our tea, our blossoming steam—

^^

In the dream my mother's and my arms braid, I would want you to know, tender,

but also stealthy and waiting for a chance—
Survival depends on seeming-tenderness and I will never

get that counter clean.