

SARAH SLOAT  

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SUBWAY RIDER

I

We run on parallel lines.  
Trains waver and tug, elongated aquariums,  
mist windows.

They are bright passengers.  
We are bright passengers.  
I know them, all neck and shoulders, eyes  
fixed on nothing  
on purpose.

We ease up; they pull away,  
lit windows churning the cavity.

II

The slabs snap closed.  
I sit beside a Chinese man, crumpled in his coat.  
I do not let my purse disturb him.  
Characters tumble like rungs down a page.  
There I read his loneliness, how he treasures  
the heft of paper turning in his own empire.

III

We are crawling beneath your houses.  
Even at the quietest hour on earth  
the metallic shells hurl through.

We thought the world was soft  
    but it is not soft.  
We thought being swallowed  
would mean something liquid.  
    It is dank and smells of soil.

When the coming heat squeezes  
the surface of oxygen  
we might be breathing below.

#### IV

A straggler comes dragging  
a lame foot like a broom.  
The train draws away,  
emptying the tunnel.  
His clothes clasp him,  
flapping in the black rag wind.

Behind him, a woman grasps  
a map close to her face.  
With a finger, she scans  
the same lines of departure times,  
as if repeated reading  
would set the page on fire.

These windows will deliver us;  
in unison we move.

#### V

Long after wheat and grasses  
after lunches and sleep  
long after sunlight,

attention fastens to a rat  
traversing the tracks.

There is silt to learn, and gravel.

In the subway I dream  
of the subway, its plunge and plummet.

And what is the platform  
but a cliff to spring from,  
what is the train but velocity  
that speeds me clear to an end  
I have chosen.

## VI

Leave me alone in the earth;  
leave me worldless in hollows, chewing dirt.  
Confront me with nothing to read,  
no reception, strangers.

I've had enough of outside,  
enough talk and moonlight,  
enough air and getting in line.

I've brought it all with me underground.  
My eyes brim with old images,

lit windows churning the earth.

## GHAZAL OF THE BRIGHT BODY

Weary, the week unspools from its bobbin.  
In a corner, cobwebs are spun with it.

Wind flew on a blue bicycle of rain,  
took the streets, sidewalks and sun with it.

A book of Valentines lies near my bed.  
Some afternoons I warm my gun with it.

I want to fill my lungs with acorns, hay  
and apricots, then have done with it.

In the back garden there's an ailing elm.  
Through the window, I am one with it.

I dream joy's a cheetah on a highway.  
I pull off, ditch my keys and run with it.

## PURSUIT

Bird-wrought dawn, bed's edge  
let me leave with you  
my few aspirations.

Riot of rustle of sheets, rest sweet.  
First coffee, next cigarette,  
a toast to smoke, white mink  
cloaking my shoulders.

Subversive joy of a broken heart, salt wallow—  
here's to the suffering my father predicted.  
Ah if he only knew  
how beautiful

pain & ecstasy,  
as Christoph says, what a pair—

morning horoscope and comic strip,  
narco smell of gasoline  
at the Esso, iridescent  
fumes liquid blue.

Oh dumpy man whistling like happiness itself  
past my car window—  
keep it up, buddy  
I follow.