

## Letting in the Light

*For Donald Newlands*

The #4 Car to Ottawa is neither an *airstream trailer*  
*of the rails*  
nor a Pullman carriage affording the 19<sup>th</sup> Century luxury  
of a lounge and meals on your lap. In today's world  
there is no place for the large suitcase under your seat,  
yet the first lurch and rhythmic sway out of the  
train shed feels just right.

There's a first time for rocking and for leaping down  
the dropped steps on ten year old legs into the welcome  
lantern light.

Once it took twelve hours from Union Station to  
Algonquin Park:  
the night wrapped in wet pines as adult hands reaching out  
of glistening slickers gathered ours;  
held at bay the folded forest, the lake's black lap  
at midnight.

And so we were transported.

As a matter of fact, no one said then,  
you'd feel thunder in your feet if you stood  
between the coupled cars, rolling over the ties,  
lickety-split-clickety-click.

A cinder in your eye if you hung over the side  
smoke burning the corners of your throat.

As the train eats track from Cobourg to Kingston,  
bare trees whistle up the lake's bald pate,  
the flash-by-do-nothing-houses idle like flatcars  
on a siding in serial disorder after the winter's blue yawn.

Diesel, this diesel, with its tin whistle and thin-as-a  
-rail look, has relinquished forever the  
*big time railroading of yesteryear.*

Even so, it comes as a thump in the gut:  
slam of air and iron shudder jolting my spine.

The westbound's solitary beam hurts my eyes  
as the oncoming freight topples  
telephone poles like a deck of cards in the turmoiled air.

Air, forcing the sky to make room  
before the curtain of iron kills the view.

Up close the boxcars whiz  
by the window. I want to touch them, reach beyond  
the frame, taste the deafening death zone of speed and  
pulse, ride until I tire on the saddle  
of the coal-black tanker  
fleeing like an African god in the sparking light.  
There are days when I long for the world  
to throw spikes in my eyes.

This way of letting the light in.

I lean back now embracing  
the illusion of the great escape.  
Take a train any day, anywhere will do.  
Click, clickety-clack.