

*Train*

*Country*

*Emigrant*



Train: 1929

I hold my breath steady  
like everyone else  
I want to stop rocking  
back and forth.  
We are all caught in this rhythm  
boxed in like cattle.  
I want to jump out and push.  
The train is slow.

Slow.  
As though there's time to stroll  
once more along the rows of pear trees  
heavy with fruit.  
There's plenty of time  
for one more game of lawn croquet  
and afterwards a cup of tea  
before bed.

Before the doors are forced  
open, knives dance in the dark  
riders fill the village street  
with death, flames pounding  
in my brain, my mother's screams

split the long summer evening  
spun like a dream across gold decades  
fragile as dust.

Who would have thought  
that we'd be rocking  
scared, helpless as sheep  
watching for the gate  
for the star that must appear  
and disappear

except from old photos  
hailed half around the world.  
I will lift them out  
gently (if anyone should ask)  
on long winter evenings  
when the train is a black dot  
in the distance. Frost  
has shrivelled our pear trees.

“Train:1929” first appeared in Sarah Klassen (1988), *Journey to Yalta* (Turnstone Press).

Country

The woman crouched at my feet has come  
from a far country. She has left behind moist valleys,  
narrow lanes crowded with vendors.  
Voices she grew up with echo hauntingly.  
How tenderly she takes my feet in her small gloved hands,  
bows her gleaming head as if in sorrow.  
Her slender fingers touch my toes, ankles, calves.  
With amazing vigor she scrubs, kneads, slaps my legs  
with her open hands. She offers me  
a multitude of colours: burnt orange of sunset,  
her country or mine; coral like her lips, pink-beige  
like the palm of her hand, black like her hair.  
I want her to show me the precise shade for happiness.  
I want her to tell me she has found it  
in my country.



Emigrant

Grandfather refused to believe  
the revolution. It can't last  
he said citing God  
who divides the year  
into neat seasons  
day into darkness and light.  
Who in the end will separate  
sheep from goats.

Order will overcome chaos  
he assured the fugitives  
shivering in damp corners of the cold  
cellar, scarcely daring to breathe  
until the gunfire died  
the hoofbeats faded from the village street.

Eyes shining he reminded them, the righteous  
will inherit the land  
their enemies vanish like wind-blown smoke.

Grandfather may have forgotten  
for the moment old Lazarus  
who was meek and just and  
never gained an acre of this rich earth.

Crossing the Atlantic to Canada  
hands idle for once  
Grandfather, a gentle man  
refused rage and vain thinking  
about the dead. About all those  
who vanished like mist into stone-white nothingness.

Each day he observed the turbulent breakers  
the unbridled shifting of black clouds  
covering sun, moon and stars.  
There was no way to escape  
the enraged outcry of the wind.

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