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## Heaven for Railroad Men

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## HEAVEN FOR RAILROAD MEN

You're still a young man,  
he says, not to his son;  
it's his bitterness  
he's talking to  
and at the restaurant  
he orders a fourth round  
before dinner,  
with mother wiping her glasses  
at the table, still believing  
she's not going blind.

I help him from his chair  
to the john. He pees slowly,  
fingers like hams  
on his fly, a complex  
test of logic  
for a man this drunk.  
I'm splashing cold water in his face

and he tells me he's dying,  
don't say a thing to your  
mother and please, Dave,  
don't ever remember me like this.

I remember how you said you'd  
love to  
ride the baggage cars forever,  
passing prairie towns  
where silos squat like  
pepper shakers on dry earth.  
Father, I want to be six again  
and sway with you

down the sagging rails  
to Minot, Winnipeg and beyond,  
your mailsacks piled  
like foothills of the Rockies,  
you unloading your government Colt,  
unzipping your suitcase  
for Canadian inspectors.  
Father, when I touched you  
I was trembling.

The heaven  
of railroad men begins  
with a collapsed trestle.  
The engine goes steaming off  
into nothing.  
There are no rails to hold you,  
you're singing country western  
at the top of your lungs,  
you go flying forever,  
the door standing open,  
sacks of mail scattering  
like seed into space.