

CutBank

Volume 1
Issue 13 *CutBank* 13

Article 33

Fall 1979

San Diego Depot

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Recommended Citation

Shapiro, Daniel E. (1979) "San Diego Depot," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 13 , Article 33.

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SAN DIEGO DEPOT

The window streaked, I wave. You turn your head,
shuffle off through the high white arch, then gone.
Bring back your Russian face my hands forgot
to touch, heavy lids and jowls; rails pulling
this train through steam toward northern country.
The shade drawn, pistons clop to another place,

a Brooklyn house, smack of boots over tile,
three knocks—*Wake up! Yom Kippur Day!* How I hated
fasting, eyes on a burning oil lamp, the hard
pine chairs. If the maples swayed outside,
it was only to shake their leaves, red, dancing—
come out, you're more like us in the bright still air.

Father, where was home? The shul, your Pullman car,
sighing hymns for a dead wife Queens to Bloomington?
Where was I when you opened your case of bottled scents?
Only back for the holidays, with your dreidels,
clocks and chocolate. Going broke, we flew west,
miles to empty fields below. You grabbed my wrist

but I pulled away. How did I know strength meant
fear of the open hand, or the closed hand
bearing sorrow in the black folds of a prayer shawl?
How a man named Spitler rabbled in your ear—
can't blame pogroms and sweatshops and you fought him,
twenty years your milky eye, the world turning dark.

Russia's dead. The East Side dead. Now you burn
on the southern tip of California, palm trees,
salt and wind gusting up their chants. The land
won't shrink. Already trees run past my window.
Ochre hills fly past the window and you blur:
a black fedora, shoes, a wrinkled sportscoat.

And when I see old men curled up in the blue
felt seats, or rehearsing their lips for hours,
I'm afraid of all that gray between two points,
of letting go, sweet thunder of iron rails,
the window dark and final. Will I wake
to tall white pillars in a town embracing me,

a bright green room with flowers, pretending
I'm safe? Or return to my dream, how we robbed
an eastbound train, silver jangling our pockets
and the long leap into marshgrass, the rushing jarred
to stillness. You pointed over ropes of windblown fog
toward an open field, a pair of cypress twining.