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## Leaving Emelia

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## LEAVING EMELIA

Two sons, her husband gone,  
she shakes the seam of her dress  
and lies down with the Bible, the comb,  
the glass of water beside her.  
If she searches the bed for hairpins,  
for the lean man who braided her hair  
in the dark, and the hands  
that were both sides of her head,  
both razor and soap at once, she holds  
the burnt edge of her breath  
and asks, where is he.

In the next room  
you wake from the ten fingers of sleep  
to the sound of a train  
rocking through badlands, the sky,  
an absence of cinders  
already baked and eaten, a landscape  
of stars and horses locked in your fist.  
Remember the night in Chicago  
she took you into her bed, crooning  
the world like a bad map of your face?  
You think there are hands  
you have not praised enough,  
behind you, distance you never touch.

Morning, the hoarse cry of quail,  
an old dog's death nailing itself to the house.  
Emelia brushes the hair from her neck  
and calls for bread, pears,  
for Joyce, for Lydia, for nothing of darkness  
in the yard hammered with light,  
for Joseph and the sons in Albany  
who bow their heads, forgiving themselves  
again and again.

This leaving, a denial  
fixed in the heart's soft beat  
and the blue flame of the stove, in her name,  
Emelia Sophia, inventing a home  
and the fear that was never a home.  
Even now it passes between you  
like salt shaken from hand to hand,  
once for the sons and daughters  
silent as guests, once for the odd bones  
of your face, and the moon,  
creeling with light,  
counting itself among them.