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Over Vitebsk, Chagall, 1914

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OVER VITEBSK, CHAGALL, 1914

Rumbling by with open doors
a box car emptied of everything
moves out of the country, and with it
we head oh, east of early memory
to a green snow time of warming hallways
and confident roads. There
an old man with a cane and a bundle
fills half the winter sky, no more a slave
to gravity, and relieved.
Relieved the way a corpse is relieved
by the cool weight of coins from seeing
this quiet slush of evening,
church walls and shed roofs
in March. Nearly nothing
can meet the eye while plenty
goes on behind doors and closed shutters:
smell of fresh bread leaking out
to the street, child in a yellow kitchen
far from a gray-green sky
swinging her legs in a yellow high chair
and yelling in pure
relief at the gaping oven door,
smell and heat hurling out in a headlong leaving.