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## My Great Aunt, Who Did Not Speak Italian, Between Chores

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## **My Great Aunt, Who Did Not Speak Italian, Between Chores**

In shade, she cocks a hip and looks  
along the line of elms, the pond  
a thick flat green in August.  
That man from town, what did he say  
about waterfowl, fish and rain?  
Conservation. To conserve. To  
keep. She crosses her arms and thinks:  
Near Calcutta, a brittle band  
serenades the train bearing west  
into liquid sun (she is sure  
she left that picture there, that stack  
of journals in the bamboo rack  
near the kitchen pump) a train loud  
with beggars doling groveled coins  
for a trip to worship cattle  
and cobras. Imagine! The dead  
float out to sea on dark rivers  
while beasts roam the city like lords  
and deadly snakes cannot be killed.  
She drops an arm and the train stops.  
Another and the last coin sticks

to a more practical palm. She draws  
a deep breath and the dead dissolve  
into the sea, the band falters  
through a last horrible measure,  
leaving the sharp whir of locusts  
and frogs. Real cattle drop their heads  
to stagnant water at the base  
of the hill. Inside, a man calls,  
a man propped in bed doing paint-  
by-number parrots. In the house,  
a crippled piano. Breathless  
clarinet. Twenty china dogs.  
Phenobarbital. Artifacts.  
In there . . . paralysis and clocks.  
So cattle drink. The train plows on.  
Sun collides with a pyre of elms.  
She hears her name and tries to think.  
She hears her name and bites her lip  
and says, "*E molto distante?*"