From the Jersey Station

Thomas McGrath
Now in the east the dark, like many waters,
Moves, and up-town, in the high hotels, those few
Late guests move through their remembered places
But their steps are curiously uncertain, like a sick man’s or a sleep-walker’s.
Down the beach, in rooms designed for their masters
The young men move and talk in the early blackout.
Their voices nameless but clear and full of courage
Ring like calm bells through their terrible electric idyll.

They are the nameless poor who have been marching
Out of the dark, to that exact moment when history
Crosses the tracks of our time. They do not see it approaching,
But their faces are strange with a wild and unnoticed mystery.
And now at the Casino the dancing is nice and no one
Notices the hunchback weeping among the bankers,
Or sees, like the eye of an angel, offshore, the burning tanker,
As the night patrol of bombers climbs through the rain and is gone.

FROM THE JERSEY STATION

Where in the early hills lie lakes like captured light,
And the meadows are a Victorian swoon in the summer wind,
Day was the bronze legend of some.

Others, where night
Swallowed its modifiers, and the late express
Leaps like a cat on its burning rails, caged in thunder,
Under Broadway’s inconstant stars, the street meeting, Times-Square press,
Were night’s familiars.

But were unfamiliar with their furious day,
That polar attraction which had brought them here:
Terminus of a hungry decade where
The rails begin and the pulse learns other cadence.

For they were innocent, pacing their classic myth,
(what lips they kissed, whose arms in the violent moonlight)
They wore enchantment as an emblem of conduct,
And now their eyes are strange, like one woken from sleep, like a dreamer’s.
Blond by black the heads go by. They carry
The summer with them. And the past. And their obscure future.
To the watching civilians their faces are new and haunted.
Their bodies fuse in a million gesture of khaki.

Meanwhile we go into the waiting trains and wonder
Over our destination. Civilian faces
Are those of strangers. Among these foreign features
A hunchback smiles, his face like a crazy saint.

And crowns the mystery of our departure.

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THOMAS MCGRATH

ELEGY FOR MY MOTHER

The space is blank. But only for a moment in this
Nervous quantity that is God’s wink:
She returns like an hour on the clock, maturing
As time matures, without ceasing
Even in the blackest night
Or the whitest day,
From either of which the startled eye must shrink.

As the phenomenon of joy, that blossoms evenly
On whatever bush or pile one pick,
However unseen till now, at once full-blown
And young, all in one dress, and brilliant:
Her being obtrudes and
And pulsates
As everything else that is quick: . . .

So quick that, like a comet falling in my forehead,
She in her girlhood flames and burns out,
Despite the languages and the questions, the delirious
Dances, the slow swim of society through all
Her blue veins; the courtship; the
Marriage, and finally,
Like a serpent poised on her mound of beauty and pride: Doubt.