

Richard Lyons

The Umbrella

Seeing an umbrella making its way down the rainy street,

the terrible need to sleep and stop seeing people
seems to want to draw near.

In the dream totally myself as though someone else were dreaming
I had to change.

I couldn't even catch my breath in the railway station,
the loudspeaker calling out names of towns
in the southern mountains, Freilassing, Berchtesgaden . . .

as I heaved my pack from the moving train, the wet snow
brightening the streetlights, the station lights
just when I wished to creep away unnoticed.

These moments my wife and I are nothing, separate.
Nothing matters but her flank lathering and painful like a horse's:
the light on it
taking it away and glistening.

In my lifetime America will sing
the song of the dog's bone, the soldier
with the lazy trigger finger perched in the limbs
of the chinaberry tree.
Some nights he's bored with the haze of the moon,
the dust of the road rising to meet it, his breath
—and he sings to my wife by the front porch.
All is old before his eyes and vast.

On my side of the world I feel sometimes as though
I were never born and then a chain rings on the pavement
as a truck roars past on its "back and forth" journey to the quarry
where I go at night because the drainage
is metallic blue and the iridescence
of the grackles gliding across the moonlit surface
says accepting life is incredible.

Or maybe I'm making up the details of my life as I go along,
as it goes along, mistaken perceptions.
I'm stepping down into apples of smoke
right on schedule. Punctual German trains!
I'm rushing forward . . . wasting precious hours
sitting in a Japanese garden where the rock walls
swirl in an aerial mosaic, and I diminish in a yellow light,
how terrible to be the crest of a hill, an animal
discovering its face.