Dream World

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College of DuPage

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The dream I had was someone else’s dream not mine.
I merely intercepted it.

Confusion was all about
the gigantic train station
And the tall art deco pillars
capped with contemptuous faces
stared down on the figures below.
Cavernous separations disappeared
into vacant holes and smokey trails
of diesel fuel left pungent
reminders of many departures.
A black man in worn winter garb
like mine chose me.
He shook his ticket in my face
demanding me to see that he got
on the right train.
I agreed, not wanting to let him know
of my own confusion.

Suddenly, with a rush
a train roared into the station
And the old man shouted at me
“Get my ticket punched.
Get it punched.”

I couldn’t move through the crush
of brown-skinned people brought
about by this feverish scramble.
I could see the old man’s face
twisted with the intensity of the moment.

“Hurry, hurry or the train will leave.”
His voice, shrill at first,
ended in a whine.
Great numbers pushed and shoved,
trying to get around
to the platform side.
Startled when the engine
lurched forward and began to move,
some called out a warning.
Only inches at first, then
gaining ground, it thrust into the crowd
that stood in its way.
The conductor shouted for me
to run for the train, but I stood
frozen and numb.
The old man cried,
“We’re missing it. It’s leaving.”
The Northern Limited penetrated the crowd
who felt the hard steel pushing them aside
as easily as a ship cleaves the water.
The black man watched the train
as it gained speed
fixed glass windows transformed
into a blur of motion.
I felt a hurtfulness for the two of us.
I had betrayed the old man.

He wailed aloud and tears
pinched out of crinkled eyes.
“You know how long we’ll have
to wait for the next one?”
Answering in the next breath...
“A long, long time.”

He looked at me,
as if I were to blame.
“Never mind,” he said.
“I seed who was driving that train.
It was a white man,” he said.
“A white man.”

This dream was like telephone lines
that sometimes get crossed.
It was meant for someone else.
Not me.

— Robert L. Gockman