

I HAVE NEVER MILKED A CAMEL

Myra Schneider

Wrapped in the rhythm of easygoing train,
in spools of monotone roof and road
that will unreel at last into light
lapping on long meadow grass,
I sit trying to knit words
into a poem but a woman who sounds used
to marching her voice across large rooms,
is trampling the fabric woven by the loom

of wheels, savours the tone in which
she announces: 'I regret the passing
of the English eccentric. My aunt was one -
travelled the globe though deaf as a post.
Among the armoury of her luggage
was a bulky, clattering bag we believed
contained golf clubs so of course
we were amazed to see the Worcester sauce

bottles.' I blocked the names' game
she played till she brandished her uncle
who'd built the stations in Singapore.
Then I saw grimy lavatory tiles
in British Rail waiting rooms
and plattering rain on perspex platform
roofs which was erased as luxuriant sun
crashed in with the twining green stun

of rubber plant leaves. I kept
at bay the airmen she taught in Norfolk
and her Sahara journey, told with a minor
accompaniment by her audience of one but when
she remarked: 'I have never milked
a camel,' I wished I'd listed her phenomenal
range, wondered if she was impelled by a need
to milk captive listeners, to feed

her self esteem. At East Grinstead
I glimpsed her tasteful floral suit,
saw the tracery of age on her face.
She was met by a man as polished as his car.
Wishing I had the panache to hold court
in trains and throw away comments
on camels, I followed the straggle down
windswept Railway Approach into the town.

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