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Big Blue Train

Paul Zimmer

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Big Blue Train · *Paul Zimmer*

The big blue train coughs,
coughs again and is silent,
then resolves itself and slams
its pistons down once more.

They stroke three times, sighing
and blowing, then stagger cold.
Next time they bluster once,
hold the cycle and gather fire.

Fire on fire, and the engine
heats up glowing on the tracks.
It hisses, tensing its wheel rods,
impatient to connect its gears.

Clouds of steam and black smoke
billow up to the station canopy,
slip along the filthy girders
to curtain out to the sky.

Zimmer pulls the whistle chord
and cleaves the chill air in two.
Doors are slamming, signals flash,
people kiss on the concourse.

He taps the gritty meters,
eases slowly up on the brake
and brings the throttle down—
the engine knocks and heaves.

A long, echoing chain of thunder,
then the big blue train inches
forward out of the station,
creaking and swinging its lanterns,

slides into the early dawn,
through lighted grids of the city,
faces in its windows growing
vague in the rising light.