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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.