In the Silence Following

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After a freight train lumbers by, hissing steam and grumbling curses, metal screeching against metal, it passes into the night (which is the empty shadow of the earth), becoming soft clinking spurs, a breathy whistle, low bells clanking like tangled chains, disappearing as if on lambskin wheels.

Something lingers then in the silence, a reality I can’t name. It remains as near to a ghost as the thought of a ghost can be, hovering like a dry leaf spirit motionless in a hardwood forest absent of wind, inexplicably heraldic. It is closest to the cry of a word I should know by never having heard it.

What hesitates in that silence possesses the same shape as the moment coming just after the lamp is extinguished but before the patterned moonlight on the rug and the window-squares of moonlight on the wall opposite become evident. That shift of light and apprehension is a form I should know by having so readily recognized it.

After the yelping dog is chastened and a door slams shut on the winter evening filled with snow and its illuminations, someone standing outside in the silence following might sense not an echo
or a reflection but the single defining feature of that disappearance permeating the frigid air.

When all the strings of the chord are stilled and soundless, the hands just beginning to lift from the keys, when the last declaration of the last crow swinging down into the broken stalks of the cornfield ceases, when the river, roaring and bucking and battering in its charge across the land, calms its frothy madness back to bed at last, then suspended in the space of silence afterward may be a promise, may be a ruse.