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Passing the Night

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PASSING THE NIGHT

The second world war is also remembered for
the families of the sailors passing
the night in the Northwestern Station,
holding hands and chattering like children
home from school and hardly aware
of the seamen's bags left on the floor
in the lobby.

 Their voices stop
whenever someone hears the hiss
of an engine or the initial slip
of the enormous wheels.

 Winter forces
the parents to plunge their hands
deep in their pockets as they leave
the passenger gates and grow
interested in the terminal—
the coffee counter or commuter bar
and the all-night news stands.
Hundreds wander under the wall clock
and browse beside the empty benches
wasting time and not wanting
to watch the brown cars slide away,
leaving the long shed and slowly
crawling over the country in the snow.