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The Train Problem

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The Train Problem · *Jim Gauer*

A.

The train problem begins
Almost immediately. Here's how it happens.
Or it begins soon after and this
Is how long it lasts. Suit yourself.
The train problem begins one morning and ends
Almost interminably. No one knows how.

B.

Here comes the train problem, but not
All at once. If a train hit
Your bird dog, that would be all
At once. No problem there.

C.

You can't imagine the train problem. It used to be called
Go find the body, or what happens to a canary
When you cover its cage. You can imagine
The canary, how it screeches while it happens, like
Brakes on a train.

D.

When you think about the train problem
What do you think? You sit there by the window
With your bird dog, thinking
Canary. Each time you think you notice
A few more feathers on the muzzle of the beast.
You don't think *boxcar* or *railroad*. You know your
capacity.
You sit in the tunnel of the afternoon hearing
A whistle, and thinking
Canary. It's only the canary.

E.

The train problem doesn't wait. It isn't hereafter.
It is not the kind of problem where you
Whistle when you're ready. By the time you think
I'm ready, there's no problem there.

F.

This must be almost night then in the land
Of the train problem. You begin to think
The last few canaries, but not all at once.
Or a small crowd in red caps waiting at a terminal
For the last load of cagecovers. Suit yourself.
All this and your pale dog, lying on its side there, like
A tunnel that has just
Swallowed a train.