

Midwest

by Paula Bonnell

My heart is like Chicago's Union Station.
Once it was full of a thunder of arrivals, departures.
In the gusty ostentation of its spaces blinked
tremulous Rebeccas, fresh as eggs from the farm,
and the pull of the trains boomed in its aortal vaults.
How the hicks hobnobbed, then shushed in the din, eyeing the moguls eye
those pigtailed wobbling in the holes in straw hats!
It was big, big enough to contain the city.

Now it is filled with commuter regularities –
the lisp of papers, the oblong rumbles, the routine comings & goings.
In the club cars, under tables of bridge games, bobble the briefcases
with their inbound sandwiches and their outbound stock quotes.
Cards coded with tiny symbols cover each other;
the queen falls to the ace.
Back in the station the benches are glossy with waiting.
The place is written up in the guidebooks, a must for the ruddy tourists.
It is part of Chicago, this pump, this station, this heart.

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On September 30, 1999 Garrison Keillor read “Midwest” on a broadcast of *The Writer's Almanac*. Jerome, the saint whose feast day was the day of the broadcast, would have been the name Paula Bonnell's parents would have given her had she been a boy.