

Poetry Porch: Poetry

Going to Reno (1963)

By Jay Wickersham

Shipshape in our sleeping cabin
we rattled alongside the Hudson.
My mother leafed through a magazine;
in my book I read how Tarzan,

orphaned jungle boy,
made a home in the branches,
learned the language of lions,
rode friendly elephants.

Between trains in Chicago
we went to the science museum:
a coal mine, a U-boat, and a train set
that filled one big room.

I looked down from the balcony
on a country webbed with tracks:
glued-down wheatfields, painted deserts,
plastic trees and real rocks.

Another train carried us
deeper into the map,
that jigsaw of squared-off states
whose names I always mixed up.

Tarzan found a lost Roman city
at the headwaters of the Nile,
and wooed the Queen
of Opar for her jewels.

In the dining car we met another lady
going to Reno. "My third divorce," she said.
My open-faced tunafish sandwich
was dusted with paprika, canyon red.

A blue sawtooth of mountains
fenced the far side of a plain
where tumbleweeds rolled and rolled,
keeping pace with the train.