

## **Ella Fitzgerald, Entering Chicago by Train, Remembers Her Mother's Voice**

Mother kept church  
Songs tucked inside her  
Brassiere, warmed  
By the bursting fullness  
Of her bosom, and  
Like candied wishes  
She popped them, one  
After another, in her mouth  
And, despite the shyness  
We shared like blood  
And the forgotten history  
Of our ancestors, she  
Sang open the too-small  
August mornings  
Of Yonkers while doing  
The laundry of olive-  
Skinned strangers whose  
Worn undergarments,  
Ferried here from  
Unremembered Italian  
Villages, held the grime  
And loss of a new life  
Not much better

Than ours. But her voice,  
Honeyed by the sweet  
Black Southern earth,  
Which she'd forsaken  
For new love and another  
New beginning, held  
Within it a divine  
Light so impossibly rich  
It rendered my music-  
Wild daydreams delicious,  
Pure enough to pursue  
Like God Himself  
In the dreadful crush of days  
After the crashing  
Suddenness of her death.

Now, after eons of  
Starlit darkness west  
Of New York, as we bend  
Up along the sweep of  
This city's golden coast,  
Feeling in the sway  
Of this steel body  
The winds shoving across  
Lake Michigan, I feel  
A warm cleansing

Trepidation of the new,  
Just as Mother must have  
Felt coming North  
To see with a child's  
Eyes the perfect beauty  
Of her Blackness  
As it unfolded against  
A freshly painted sky.  
Longingly I see her now-  
Holy radiance glowing  
Above the big-shouldered  
Metropolis where,  
Tomorrow night against  
The shimmering rush  
Of Rush Street, I will sing  
her back to life, and,  
In the crystalline  
Stillness of Mister Kelly's,  
Climb up to her in heaven  
On the silver rungs  
Of her favorites songs.