

Fate Playing

(by Ted Hughes from "Birthday Letters")

Because the message somehow met a goblin,
Because precedents tripped your expectations,
Because your London was still a kaleidoscope
Of names and places any jolt could scramble,
You waited mistaken. The bus from the North 5
Came in and emptied and I was not on it.
No matter how much you insisted
And begged the driver, probably with tears,
To produce me or to remember seeing me
Just miss getting on. I was not on it. 10
Eight in the evening and I was lost and at large
Somewhere in England. You restrained
Your confident inspiration
And did not dash out into the traffic
Milling around Victoria, utterly certain 15
Of bumping into me where I would have to be walking.
I was not walking anywhere. I was sitting
Unperturbed, in my seat on the train
Rocking towards Kings Cross. Somebody,
Calmer than you, had a suggestion. So, 20
When I got off the train, expecting to find you
Somewhere down at the root of the platform,
I saw that surge and agitation, a figure
Breasting the flow of released passengers,
Then your molten face, your molten eyes 25
And your exclamations, your flinging arms
Your scattering tears
As if I had come back from the dead
Against every possibility, against
Every negative but your own prayer 30
To your own Gods. There I knew what it was
To be a miracle. And behind you
Your jolly taxi-driver, laughing, like a small god,
To see an American girl being so American,
And to see your frenzied chariot-ride – 35
Sobbing and goading him, and pleading with him
To make happen what you needed to happen-
Succeed so completely, thanks to him.
Well, it was a wonder
That my train was not earlier, even much earlier, 40
That it pulled in, late, the very moment
You irrupted onto the platform. It was
Natural and miraculous and an omen
Confirming everything
You wanted confirmed. So your huge despair, 45
Your cross-London panic dash
And now your triumph, splashed over me,
Like love forty-nine times magnified,
Like the first thunder cloudburst engulfing
The drought in August 50
When the whole cracked earth seems to quake
And every leaf trembles
And everything holds up its arms weeping.

FATE PLAYING

- 1 Reader Response. As you listen and read, write down how you think and feel. It is not necessary to use complete sentences. Single words may be sufficient. You don't have to concentrate much. RELAX !
- 2 In groups, pool your thoughts and feelings. A spokesperson from each group can then share these with the whole class.
- 3 Describe the scene in the first 15 lines. What has happened ?
- 4 What do you think the "suggestion" in line 20 is ?
- 5 In lines 15-20, how is the writer feeling?
- 6 "To see an American girl being so American" – Explain this phrase.
- 7 What does: "somehow met a goblin" mean in line 1 ?

What do the following words, which refer to movement, mean?

JOLT – line 4
SCRAMBLE – line 4
DASH OUT- line 14
BUMPING INTO- line 16
MILLING AROUND – line 15
ROCKING – line 19
FLINGING ARMS – line 26
SCATTERING TEARS – line 27
CHARIOT-RIDE – line 35
DASH – line 46
ENGULFING – line 49
TREMBLE – line 52