

Clemens Starck

## Taking Leave of Bei Dao on the Sidewalk next to the Parking Lot of the Old Church in Downtown Portland

On Friday you fly back to Sacramento,  
where you reside for now. A rare bird, a stray from Asia,  
you've flown  
all over the world—Beijing  
to Oslo, to Ramallah...

Forty years ago,  
banished to the countryside,  
you worked with concrete on construction sites, and later  
became a blacksmith.  
(I worked construction, too.)

Tonight, after our public reading—you  
reading your poems in Chinese, and I the English translations—  
we go to a neighborhood bar  
to celebrate,  
with Li Jiguang and your old friend Li Tie.

Whether you and I will meet again  
is uncertain,  
but in parting, you propose we build a house together—  
you'll do the concrete work,  
I'll do the carpentry.

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## Royal Express

“Royal Express,” a blue and gold Peterbilt  
out of Fresno, accelerates  
and pulls out to pass  
another eighteen-wheeler. All along Interstate 84  
the wheels of commerce are rolling.

The truck drivers  
emerging at irregular intervals from the men’s toilet  
in a freeway rest area west of Pendleton  
are not unlike  
the wood-choppers of Nishiyama  
crossing the river on their way to work,  
in the ancient Japanese poem.

Bearded, clean-shaven, big-bellied and skinny, the truckers  
climb into their rigs.  
Stacked up like logs in a mill pond—  
Peterbilts, Kenworths, and Freightliners.  
Volvos and Macks.

It’s commerce. It’s commercial,  
the transport of goods in North America  
and the deforestation  
of Japan.