

## On Graduation

So you're an Engineer now  
he snaps  
Ok, you run

the invitation rarely given  
thrown like a gauntlet  
on the floor  
I pick it up  
sit on the right side  
of the cab  
frantically search  
dim memory  
for stations seen  
just once or twice

he knows where they are  
locations etched into  
memory  
by thirty years  
of stop and start  
knows the place  
to set the air  
so cars slide perfectly  
to rest by eager platforms  
but he's not telling

I push the throttle forward  
gently taking up the slack  
this no freight train  
to amble along  
with sugar beets  
or garlic from Gilroy

but double decker cars  
San Francisco's teeming  
tired  
heading for the suburbs  
Mom and Dad  
are back there  
munching candy bars  
reading mysteries and  
magazines

unaware  
as we ease out  
on the main line  
of the tension in my touch

no slack here either  
no time to think  
of trains ahead behind  
three minutes apart  
no time for mistakes  
the commute fleet is flying  
and I'm the pilot

Bayshore  
San Bruno  
Millbrae

he sits across the cab  
a small smile  
escaping only from his eyes  
watching  
waiting for the story  
he can recount with laughter  
to the old heads  
back in the change room

Burlingame  
San Mateo  
San Carlos

I appear calm  
unwilling to holler uncle  
I whistle at street crossings  
glance at my schedule  
and pretend to know exactly  
where I am  
straining each sense  
searching for the upcoming  
station

Redwood City  
Menlo Park  
Palo Alto

it's Milpitas that gets me

comes up too fast  
around a curve  
I set the air late  
sail past the station  
two car lengths  
they have to walk back

I pull ahead  
suddenly tired  
and glance at him  
the smile has gone  
something else there now  
as he leans towards me

See the tree on the right  
up ahead  
he says  
it's the spot for Santa Clara  
if you have three cars

we have three cars  
at the tree  
I give it some air  
we glide to a stop  
right in front  
passengers spill out  
heading for the parking lot  
end of the line

I look across the cab  
thanks  
I say  
he grins  
want to run back?

*Prashant Ziskind*