

LYRIC SUITE

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As A Narrative

For a year and a half, I lived on Beekman Street at the South Street Seaport in New York City. That was before the Fulton Fish Market moved uptown, and fish vendors still brought in the day's haul from the port at three in the morning. In the small hours, one heard the scrape of wheels on the cobblestone road, the incessant bleep of snowplows in the winter, and the intaglios of fishermen shoving *fuck you*s down each other's ears like rough endearments. Each night, a dump truck would screech to a halt outside the apartment in a lugubrious howl. And nightly, I would think to myself that if the sound were a word, it would be hunger.

At the sea port where I spent many mornings, the view was Brooklyn across the East river, marked by a watchtower telling Manhattan the time in giant red digits. Brooklyn always gave Manhattan the time of day, though the rule never applied the other way around. It was at the Seaport that I attended to Auden's imperative that poets memorize the names of ships. I write their names here: there was the W.O. Ambrose and the Peking - names that seem exotic in memory now though they were fairly commonplace then. I can still make out in my mind's eye the intricate rigging of wires that held up the masts in any weather, and the portholes on the Peking that I fancied made a giant aquarium of the world outside.

The only place to eat on Beekman Street was Carmine's, an old Italian restaurant where the mafia hung out though no one ever saw them. Daring myself once to scout the place for greasy-haired mafiosos, I entered the restaurant under the pretense of