

Between the Wars (Charleston 1937)

Mary Chapin Carpenter

Take the train down Friday next,
In summer hat and linen dress
Hail a taxi at the station
There will be artichokes and cabbages,
Sweet honeycombs and radishes
To feed your grateful nation

Bring paper, easel, pen and ink
To set up on the lawn
Where summer mornings brim with light
And evenings fill with birdsong
Between the wars

Ginger cakes are served with tea
Your lovers orbit endlessly
And your children march like soldiers
Their nets for catching butterflies
Fill up with wind and sit up high
Like rifles at their shoulders

But this is where you fled the world
This is where you gather
Take up take up your skirts and twirl
Like angels through the asters
Between the wars
A telegram arrives from Spain
The earth falls off its axis
Grief hands down a kind of pain
You can't prepare or practice

You paint the tables, paint the walls
The mantles, mirrors, lamps and halls
Paint every single surface
No corner here will go untouched
By loss and love and by your brush
Such emptiness is worthless

There are no ghosts except the ones
Leaving us behind
We wave and shout come back come back
Frozen now in time
Between the wars