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POETRY OF BARBARA F. LEFCOWITZ

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Jazz Age

They danced the Charleston
naked in the snow
on the rooftop of London's Palladium;
a man swayed on a rope
between the McAlpine Hotel's highest windows,
NYC, 1923. Death-defying rays filled the air,
the devil's cure for disorders of spirit and mind.

In Vienna Freud excavated, Hitler painted.
Artur Rubinstein played the piano
in the da-da cabarets of Paris
where Tzara and company hailed
the nothing that was everything

On the Left Bank
they shouted Burn Down the Louvre!
On the Right Bank
they feasted on napoleons and sex
In America flappers exposed their legs
a coy garter around a stocking
rolled just below the knee

Like my young not-yet mother wore
in a crinkled snapshot.
She has just met my father,
but it would be a decade
before my birth
so in a sense none of these things really happened
any more than the events
that will follow my death

The Bag

Neither shabby nor chic
a black canvas backpack

leaned against a light pole
outside Penn Station

Nobody on the taxi line
dared touch it
in fact, few noticed
nor did the 8th Avenue

rush hour crowd take note
not even a potential thief
Though curious about
what might be a name tag

I, too, refrained
stood far back as I could
When a lady on line, clearly
an out-of-towner, told the

Amtrak police to take it
to the Lost and Found
one of them scoffed
blew his whistle, turned away

For all I know
the bag's still there
leaning against a light pole
in the frigid air

the caricature of a drunk
unkicked
unclaimed
zipper intact

In Pakistan, according to the Times,
Al Qaeda is regaining power.
I barely scan the article below:
another bomb explodes in Baghdad.

Fire Coral

One bitter cold night I took a match
to my litter of impossible wishes,
salvaging a few memories and names
that would have to suffice thereafter
to candy the harsh taste
of my many regrets
so only the lovely sound
of fire coral remains to make up for
my failure to dive
down to its flame-shaped rays

like the memory of that colossal roar
when I heard a glacier calve
in Alaska's inner passage
sole compensation
for my desire to enter its ice-blue heart

or a fleeting sense of that time
I pitied a man
whose face I glanced
from my downtown express
into the window of his uptown train
for not having a chance
to dance with me
his own litter of impossible wishes

to remain forever unknown

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Barbara F. Lefcowitz has published nine poetry collections. Her latest collection, *The Blue Train to America*, appeared in January 2007. Her fiction, poetry, and essays have been published in over 500 journals and she has won writing fellowships and prizes from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Rockefeller Foundation, and several individual journals.