

[1]

PEEL SLOWLY AND SEE

Fifteen going on twelve
marooned behind the tanlines
in oddball pallor and passivity
guess I'm lucky my hair is blonde
it being the official state color
keeping the brutes at bay
as they prowl for twigs to snap
and for souls to shit upon

I stand before depthless record bin
at the local drugstore
which is oddly apropos
this my usual hideout
from the cataclysms
of catechism class
with hot rod magazines
to speed through
and vanilla cones to French
and eerie LPs to finger
each square a realm verboten
scary and rarefied
hiding twelve inch manholes
into tilted worlds and tumult
where Sundays are now sinister
and bananas are not just bananas

so hold it close to closed heart
hold it tight in feminine arms
I am skewered and askew
I am fizzy and combustible
kneel on knobby knees
with mom's poodle by my side
how can I sense this dark
amid the shrapnel of sunlight bombs
how can I comprehend this drone
through bird chirp and twaddle

this is my only catharsis and cathedral
free from god and his atrocities
just a ring-a-rosy of leathered angels
with their death songs and plaints
that strangely blow life
into my bubblegum lungs

[2]

Everyone was scared

each dark bush
hiding psychotic cultist

each dusty shrub
shivering with menace

the path ahead looming
with the dark mirage
of early death

rocks crumble down hillsides
Into murky nothingness

our feet uneasy

we can falter
we can fall
we can be felled by ax

we are asking for it
in no uncertain terms

laughing like we do
at no laughing matter

[3]

SANTA BARBARA

The whole grove eucalyptus

orange clusters of monarchs
in the soft fog

the old folks lag behind
dragging their sneakers
through powdery dust
discussing last meals
and future meals
and meals of their youth

some impish towheads
minuscule in the bags of their togs
stomp on the butterflies
too knackered to fly

we are walking
where floods once walked
in water-carved paths
to the oil-flecked sea

the weather sags wearily
the sun is weak at the knees

headaches grip and ungrasp
necks crack and crane
the shoulders lose their wings

[4]

VERNON

We are shirtless
and slick as seals

our loads cumbersome
as they are futile

another cheap day disposed of
another duty toward art shirked

and we wonder aloud between
mouthfuls of candy and disdain

is there honey in those beehive hairdos
all cackle and tobacco
behind their whirring lathes

and can that forklift touch the firmament
as the pallets teeter and the presses hiss

the steamwhistle scatters the alleycats

it is too noisy to hear the arteries clog
too pungent to smell the lungs char
too busy to see the flesh fritter away

we crawl toward scant shade
slower than the company time clock

[5]

My body dismantles
in commiserating response
to the leveling of the neighborhood

the barbershop with its
collection of cuckoo clocks
and tiles kinky with hair
from all over the world

the Salvadorian restaurant
keeping the cheeseburger on the menu
just for me and my yankee palate
their flirty waitresses all dolled up
like faces from a kid's coloring book

and now the dog too
overweight by my thoughtful
but thoughtless scrap-sharing
her tiny legs splintering under the bulk

the old blue Ford oozing oil
stolen now but not worth recovering

(though I hope the thief stalls in some fast lane
fast food for speeding semis)

I am cursing more than ever
though cursing always came easy

as my old retreats are razed
my landmarks my necessities
destruction and construction everywhere

all for new schools they say

which I thought would make me mad
would make me shudder
inconsolable intolerant
cussing like a drunk with a box of wet matches

but I somehow relaxed
my posture saying what the hell
my fists unfolding in my pockets

nickels and dimes jingling like tambourines

I just couldn't comprehend this new me

what with my tenth grade education
that got me all the way into my nineties