

Dawn Song

For my Mother

Caught,
bedazzled in bright dawn
by the sun's pale rays
in the shadows time spreads
around those days,
what is it that I praise?

The memory
in these middle years
of seasons shaped
by childhood's first tries,
of us together walking out
past white apartment blocks
to shop for some sweet prize.

It wasn't long
'til you stayed home and watched
while I went out
to the ice-cream store alone
for a nickel cone
of sherbet fresh and sweet.
I can taste it still,
in the sugar cones I relished
on melting summer days.

And this is the spirit song
inspired by those rays
the memory's reprise of all
I set against the tears shed
in darker times than those
of fears met by love and strength
by night-lights lit to shine against
the raging bears I saw
in nightmares when I slept;
and everything released itself
from serenity and shape.

I cried. You came.
with a quiet voice
to hold me in your certainty
that dawn would come

with sleep and time
to fix things in their place.

You built the frame of family
that I brace against these days;
Against the shock of towers dropped
into haunted deadly streets,
Against the nearing certainty
of that step into eternity
that looms beyond this praise.

We live our lives from day to day
though futures may look bleak
and memories, though dear,
may not be quite as right
as ice-cream cones to children are,
or dawns to those who wake.

But mother,
when the shades of night rampage
through graying palls of time
and certainty is lost,
The memory of your loving care
brings comfort as it shines.

Brushfires in Southern California

It's not unusual here;
it's a natural thing,
these swathes of smoke in blue.
The smell of burning brush
surrounds us in the valleys as
the hills go up in flames around
an Inland Empire ruled by heat,
by desiccated grass
and creosote brush,
by Santa Ana winds a-swirl
in canyons in the light.

Live flame
transforms the summer night
into epiphanies of fear for those
who've mortgaged lives
for million-dollar views.
As incandescent glory spreads
up the slopes, around
these neighborhoods of dreams,
we're driven from our homes--
become dependent on
our families or friends, or
on Red Cross volunteers
with cots and coffee.
We learn what it is to be
the victims in our lives,
cut loose from complacency
by raging heat and light.

Flames inchworm up
the mountainsides, arch,
like sun flares into space,
cross dusty fire-breaks
to breed new fear
among the cars strung
like prayer beads along
stopped freeways,
while fire fighters mark the flight
of embers through the night.
New prophets say the time is right--
that this is the consequence
of our success, the heat

of recent history,
a reminder of our arrogance
and thoughtlessness tonight.

Is this then an attack?
Or nature's balancing act,
another living process
that brings growth back
to arid slopes
and valleys in the night?
I do not know.
But caught amid
this jihad of flames and ash
My thoughts pass
from dust to ashes and back
as I watch for dawn
in the east from which
these flames have come to us.

Aquarian Days

Dawn's dusk,
obsession with wealth,
debt, what's left
of winter's wetness
drained from sidewalks dried
by the sun drilling in
to wake that singular sense
of doom descending,
crows ascending
into what was once
ahead of us,
fallen now behind,
the smog that's come
to surround
this house of cards
we've built
from possibilities lost
and losing us,
what we've come to,
what has come to pass,
the loss of lust
for all those things
we left 'til later
roads, schools, music, art
now passed beyond us
what we've tossed
with little thought
the sunlit synergy
that we don't trust
those possibilities
of youth, of hope
that dawned sundrenched
in a new-borne day
in us now become
days gone to rust,
lost.

Evanescence

Southwest
the Santa Anas ridge
green and brown beneath
the clouds' tectonic flow
into the blue western sky
enshrouding peaks
and sending skeins of
misty gray down canyons
up and out above the talus slopes
above the valley where
ten thousand homes and streets
evangelical churches,
schools and shopping malls
replace what once
were orange groves greening slopes.

Standing in the early morning sun
I'm pumping gas. I watch
as rainbows drift across
the mountains' face,
pale, evanescent, fading
then growing bright
as a million tiny raindrops
prism in the light.
They break it into bands
of red, orange and yellow
bright against the slopes as
this last mist of Spring turns
to vapor in the heights.

As I watch the rainbows come and go,
a mother and her little girl approach.
She sees the light as it begins to fade
grabs a hand and says,
"Look, Mom, look, a rainbow!"
Her mother, looking up,
says, "Hurry up, we're late,"
and bundles both
into their car and off.
I pay the price.
Then I too, am off,
ocean ward to work.

Stalking Egret

Still,
as a statue carved
from the best Carrera marble,
White, on legs like stilts
in the water running off
toward the blue Pacific,
with his neck stretched out
above the shallows where
He stands
in the Santa Ana River,
or every now and then
takes a slow step toward
where another fish might lie,
Indifferent
to the sun shining down,
or to the heady glare
of those eyes above him
looking down
Watching
for that first sign of life,
a fin's flicker,
A minnow
that he can stab and stop
against the sandy flat,
above the flying shadows
of ripples moving on
toward meaning,
toward that hint
of transcendence left
when wavelets die
Unnoticed on the shore
he stalks.