

and melt them down to rather dull
molecules. with the vanishing
of the applause a single sitar introduces
the lament of the ten wise urchins for their

incense. by this time the audience has passed out.
i wake them with a mauve glissando victory
march. cheering follows. a movie screen
informs the audience that i am deaf.

Beer

-- for Ron Koertge

It takes a lot to get you there, but it won't kill
you either.

Kids like it. The foam makes a fine mustache. When
they go to sleep they dream of goofy pink dragons
and slippery little smiling fish.

To the adolescent it is the first taste of the earth's
bitterness. He has to pretend it gets him high.
He is afraid it will give him zits, and maybe it
will. He gives it to his girl and thinks it is
because of it she gives herself to him.

She doesn't like the taste of it and never will. She
doesn't have the thirst for it. She is afraid
it will give her a gut, and maybe it will.
Eventually she'll be a little insulted when it's
offered her. And probably should be.

But the best of friendships are formed over it. It
helps men to speak to each other, a difficult
thing these days. It lets men sing without
embarrassment of auld lang syne and of the sheep
that went astray somewhere along the line. It
goes excellently with pool and pickled eggs,
beef jerky and baseball games. Contrary to
popular opinion, it is good for the kidneys,
affords them exercise. It is good for all the
appetites.

We all go beyond it; we always come back to it. It
is the friend who eases us through our phylog-
enous ontogeny. It is the friend we talk to
about our women, the one who agrees with us
that they are not all that important. It

restores our courage in the face of cowardly
sobrieties. It laughs with us at our most
serious sonnets, weeps at our pratfalls. It
remembers us; it takes us back.

Finally, this blessed beer, it eases us towards
sleep.

A Traveller

He got off the freeway at the nearest ramp.
Fumbling in his pocket for change
he asked the porcelain attendant,
"How much you getting for a gallon these days?"
"A dollar-ten a pint," the other replied,
never once cracking a smile.
"My God!" the man exclaimed,
only then remembering that there
was no longer any God, or even,
for that matter, any California.
He drove wildly from the station,
the standard man still grinning horribly
in the rear-view mirror.
Back on the freeway he pressed it to the floor
and searched the billboards for a familiar sign.
Why had he failed to notice it before --
every single phosphorescent square read:
"You Are Already There!"
except the last which grinned "Ha Ha."

And why were there no other cars on the road?
How long had he been on the road?
Had he ever been to California?
Why was the gas gauge rising to full?

-- Gerald Locklin

Long Beach, California