

AN ALBUM

As if thrown back
into an age of heavy
snow on snow, I look
at pictures, one by
one, and mount them
in my mind. I see
my Indian grandmother,
so precisely grey,
and my tall Captain
grandfather, as white
as chalk. I mistake
myself, behind a wheel,
for my own brother,
in first place, smiling,
at a derby. Later on,
now beside me, he ties
a long tail to a kite.
I turn to highchairs
and cars with running
boards. I find myself,
I think, brought out
like a best man, my
father kneeling in his
morning coat and my
sister sleeping. Mother
is a bent shadow. I
turn pages. It is all
there: birthdays, dogs,
friends, a back door
at the farm, old wind
bells. I close the book,
remembering suddenly
how we burned negatives,
or held them to the sun,
at eclipse, squinting,
sometimes blinded.

AT THE CONTRACTORS' BALL

Somehow, I got smuggled in
between "floors" and "hardware."
I'm an old debt, that's all;
and the two-toothed garbage man
knows it. He pours my bourbon
as straight as a stick, gives

me the look, grinning, like he does on those days when I forget. He has his place and a white coat to prove it. Me, I'm as odd as opened letters on a banker's desk, or a copper plated roofing nail. What do I know about four-by-fours, traps, or prefabricated rafters. But here I am, washed up, like the rest, trying to find my name at a table. We finish off a steamship round of beef, fried chicken, potatoes, beans, salad. The garbage man, tending, drinks; a western band tunes; and a man, smoother than a Cadillac, says that the dance should begin. I feel the rustle of late evening shawls, threads shining like fishhooks. And the sound of the garbage truck, braking on hills, rings in my head, warm and familiar, like salt.

-- Joseph Garrison

Staunton VA

OLD WOMAN IN VENICE

like a willow
roots where you
can't see grasp
ing for water
bending weep
ing for her
self bent over
a parenthesis
bending but
not falling a
part tho her
life is

HIGH FLYING

with her big blue
walking on wires
looking down at
the black snow
blue angel
lying down in
her own snow
poems burning
all night
in her head
like pots in a
grove of oranges

POISON IVY MADONNA

starts with three
bumps you hardly
notice she oozes
makes you itch so
you have to scratch
then you're sorry