

when they found him
in an alley
the next morning.
Kit didn't ask why
the husband
of our daughter's babysitter
had a massive heart attack
when he was staking the tomatoes
in his backyard.
Kit didn't say so what
when a friend in Connecticut
told us he was operated on
for cancer of the lower jaw.
Kit never asks why
the big things happen.
She knows.

THE DISSATISFIED

My wife and I
seem to meet women
who want to leave
their husbands
everywhere we go.
Most of them
are in their late thirties
or early forties,
and you know
most of them will never go
anywhere.
The women who tell us
they're unhappy
are always strangers.
Maybe it's easy
to tell your troubles
to someone
you'll never see again.
Last week we met
two women who said,
"I'd like to go,"
and they both worked
in the mall.
One of them said something
about her four kids
and how tired she was;
she'd never imagined
her life would turn out
the way it had.
None of them
seemed to imagine
their lives would be
so drab. So sad.

As Kit and I walked
through the mall
I looked at the faces
of the men we passed
and they seemed to be
as bitter,
as petty,
as spiteful
as those of the women
And Kit wonders why
I don't like to shop in malls.

DOG TAGS

We had to wear dog tags
to elementary school
when I was a kid
in California
during World War II.
Most people on the coast
thought the Japs
were going to attack
any day,
bombing us to bits,
and the authorities
wanted to be able
to identify
our little bodies.

Each morning
we went off to school
in the California sunshine,
our dog tags
hanging from our necks
like medallions;
none of us thought about
what they meant,
about dying. Sometimes
we'd play cowboys and Indians
on our way to school,
shouting, "Bang, bang,
you're dead,"
holding our guts
as we fell to the sidewalk.
We died smiling, brave,
not at all like
the way most of us
would really die,
kicking and screaming.

-- Arthur Winfield Knight

California PA