

saucer in earth's history
crash-lands below your panty-
line, seconds before my tongue.

BOB

Everyone laughed at the horse's name:
Bob. They laughed louder
to learn it was my turtle's name —
or possibly, to learn I have a turtle.
I laughed too, remembering April
days in Houston, finding turtles
in the woods as spring broke open
like a sweet red melon.

Rich
as Scrooge McDuck, I rode around,
bike basket full of turtles. I
built elevators to my treehouse for them,
ran up and down my backyard,
swooping turtles through the air
with wing-feet flailing, routing
Nazis to the Stars and Stripes
Forever.

Even in 1955,
I knew that there was something
fine, something primarily decent
about turtles: their slow walk
and patient eyes, the gentle
way they nipped their apple-cores
and lettuce, licking with their ancient
tongues.

The 50s changed to 60s,
70s, and 80s. Heroes changed
from strong and silent to flashy
and loud — Muhammad Ali, John McEnroe,
Prince. I quietly watched
the Apotheosis of the Asshole, and kept
turtles: tolerant, easy, fearless
enough to crawl off tables, tough
enough to hit the floor and walk away.

The starting gun blasted. Bob
stumbled from the gate, dead last.
halfway around the track, he was
still last. "A turtle," I moaned.
"I bet on a fucking turtle."
My friends were still laughing

as Bob pulled up on the second-
to-last horse, Obstinado, then
passed.

Down the home stretch,
the announcer droned as if it didn't
matter, "Coming up on the inside,
it's Bob." The crowd began
their swelling, oceanic roar,
and I roared with them as Bob
charged into the pack of tiny
Nazis

flogging their mounts
with the noisy, hard aggressiveness
I'd learned to loathe and envy.
Bob punched through them
like a hot needle through leather,
like light through black chain
mail, winner by three lengths,
going away.

I took my friends
to dinner on my winnings: two
dollars at twenty-three to one.
But I only pretended to cash
my ticket. And I watched
the replay twice, tears in my eyes.

A FATAL FREUDIAN SLIP

— for Gerry Locklin

If the braless blonde in the tank top
was really an old highschool friend
he was just driving to a bus-stop,
then why, his wife wanted to know,

did he first deny the blonde's existence,
then try to change the subject,
then go into a lengthy explanation
about how he'd bumped into her at the library
passing out Christian tracts,
and how Platonic their friendship had always been.

He gulped and said
"I didn't want you to get the right idea."