

ON THE SHAPE OF MY HEAD

one time when I had washed my hair
you became so enamored of the shape
of my head (like a sculpture, you said)
that you had me sit for your camera
my sudsy hair patted down to my skull
while you took pictures of me
at different angles

— Joyce Odam

Sacramento CA

BOB METROPOLOUS, SAFEWAY MANAGER

What saves this city from being everywhere else
is that it's ten minutes from the sea —
sailboats, mists and sunsets, gulls and shells;
summers we rent a house at Newport Beach
and I can forget I have to manage Safeway
eleven months of the year. I'm someone else,
a jogger by the morning swell and spray,
a green man in the swaying deep who snorkels.
Rising prices — strikes — can go to hell;
that worried guy you see in his glass cage
is swimming free and breathing through a gill
or almost naked running off his rage
at customers and clerks, and bringing home
nacre from where Homeric breakers comb.

THE FACT

Both of them had arthritis,
then doctors diagnosed
in her, lymphatic cancer
with only cobalt hope —

those years to earn this house
secret among the trees,
stereo, pool, their poodles,
several color TVs

and he so stocked and bonded
next year he could retire —
everything they'd wanted —
who could but admire

two begun with nothing
working up to this?
America, America,
God had shed his grace.

Naked in the cabana
to put them in the mood
they drank vodka stingers
and made what love they could

then reeled into the hot tub,
too numb to feel regret,
and almost joyfully
boiled themselves to death.

— Harold Witt

Orinda CA

SOMETIMES A SUDDEN MADNESS

Many have gotten the thing to work,
including Van Gogh
who got it to work more beautifully than most,
although the irony
of his all too human life
was that he doubted he had
when he walked into Dr. Gachet's garden
& blew the sun out of his head;
sometimes doubt flares up
like the sudden madness
of a blustering crow in the noonday glare,
then it's good to remember
the placid heron
that wades the beach just before dusk,
its legs glowing like two radioactive rods
as it stalks its dinner.

DEJA VU

We haven't met before,
so I suggest we continue the barroom talk
with a getting-to-know-you literary game:

It goes like this, I say. For instance,
what story would you read on a stormy night?

I get it, she says. I like to read W. W. Jacobs'
The Monkey's Paw on stormy nights.