BEFORE THE ICE IN THE TEA MELTS

Sometimes when she was mad at my father my mother fell in love with Van Heflin, Joseph Cotten and Perry Como and said how she'd be a much better wife to Van Heflin than Bette Davis was in that dump in "Beyond the Forest," and better than Marilyn Monroe was to Joseph Cotten in "Niagara" because she would never leave a good man for another man no matter how rich and handsome he was but she wasn't so sure that she, a Texas Baptist, would make a better wife for Perry Como, an Italian Catholic, and she wasn't so sure she'd like reeking of garlic, olive oil, and wine all the time or that Perry Como would like her fried chicken, mashed potatoes and cream gravy, biscuits, and iced tea all the time like my father did and when we heard my father's car door slam, and our dog whine at the front door, my mother always said, hurry up and mash the potatoes before the ice in the tea melts.

THE COOLEST CAR IN SCHOOL

Wearing a white chiffon waltz-length gown with seed pearls on the bodice and white gardenias on my wrist I went to my junior prom with Vic Shermer in the aquamarine leather tuck-and-roll back seat of Tinker Christensen's white '56 Olds, Tinker taking my girlfriend Jan in the front seat. Tinker's Olds, the coolest car in school, Tinker waxing, polishing, and hand-customizing it every night after his job at the supermarket, us cruising in it, actually cruising, listing like a yacht in tropical seas, tradewind-blown as a schooner in moon rivers, down Firestone Boulevard in that lowered.

white-glowing car, all of us glowing,
Jan in powder-blue taffeta, Tinker
in a powder-blue tux, Vic Shermer
in a white one, on our way to the prom,
and then the Moulin Rouge in Hollywood
where even the movie stars envied that car,
and then on the way home, gliding in our barge
along the Nile of the Hollywood Freeway,
the moon our wish lamp, the stars
our diamond dust, Vic Shermer,
without asking, surprised me by kissing
my naked back, smack in between
my bare shoulder blades.

Later, all grown up, I would ride
in Corvettes, Cadillacs and limos,
Rolls Royces, Benzs, Mustangs, Zees,
a Pantera, and an XKE, and men,
as handsome or more handsome
than Vic Shermer, would wine and dine me
and kiss my naked back,
but never again would it feel like that,
and never again
would the moon, pearls, or gardenias
glow as white,
or a '56 Olds shine in the night
as that night when our eyes
were as aquamarine and young
as Tinker's leather tuck-and-roll.

MUTE FORCE

When they dropped the A-bombs on Japan, I was too little to do anything about it and had to believe what the grown-ups said about them deserving it. us the good guys safe and sound in our living room watching the newsreel on my father's home movie projector, Tommy Dorsey's "Boogie Woogie" playing on the record player my father's irony, that '78 for background music, his sense of fair play as the mushroom clouds boomed silently shattering the eardrums, tongues, bones, and souls of all those invisible, deserving human beings as images of teen-aged jitterbuggers filled our minds

bombclouds and boogiers forever binding in mine