

## VANDAL KILLS VINE SCULPTURE AT CAL STATE LONG BEACH

"No pleasure but meanness."

— Flannery O'Connor

Five quick snips with pruning shears  
and the Lavender Starflower vines  
that campus groundsworker Sarah Fish  
spent two years training into bushy  
green letters — C S U L B —  
on the brick wall facing Seventh Street,  
begin, like brains cut off from oxygen, to die.

Sarah cries, seeing the eighth-inch gaps  
across which life's spark doesn't fly.  
Who is to blame? A professor  
denied tenure? A dumped boyfriend?  
A working stiff whose father screamed  
"College my ass, you'll get a Goddamn job!" —  
whose face the letters slapped each time  
he passed them, bound for his dead end?

Or just someone out walking with the roar  
we all keep in our skulls these days,  
who saw a meanness — full leafed,  
purple-flowered — waiting to be done?

— Charles H. Webb

Los Angeles CA

## RIPARIAN BLUES

After Butch dumped her, Evelyn gave up her brief but  
intense flirtation with Jesus, attempted suicide, did  
not succeed, then resumed her old hobby of bar-trawling  
for unsavory men, much to the dismay of a concerned  
small circle of friends.

And then — this prediction had resurfaced with her  
regression to old ways — she disappeared, didn't come  
home from one of her night prowls, foul play suspected.

Two transients were picked up in her car in the Ralph's  
Super-Store parking lot. They had a story about finding  
the old bomb out on the rutted dirt path that looped  
behind the Riverside Drive-In complex out in the valley,  
keys in the ignition.

This information, true or not, set off a police search  
of a dense riparian woodland between the Santa Margarita



River and the theaters, and a couple of death-smelling dogs located four bodies in shallow graves in the sandy soil, planted here and there amidst the arundo grass and cottonwoods, none of them, apparently, Evelyn Lamuraglia's. All of them men — illegal aliens and down-and-outers, folks who could disappear without stirring up much of a fuss.

Transients were roused from hootches and shanties, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were unleashed early on a planned flood-control project, with their tree-chomping, brush-eating hydro-ax with its high-powered hyper-rotational blades that chewed up dense bushes and magnolias and wax-myrtles and shacks and abandoned cars and lost grocery carts. Then they brought in the big machinery, bulldozed the woodland down to bare sand, and rolled three more bodies from their narrow graves — one of them fresh to the point of near warmth, presumed to be — though a dental check was needed, the face having been smashed then worked on by things that crawl — that of Evelyn Lamuraglia.

#### EVELYN GETS A COUPE DE VILLE

The body they found down by the river turned out not to be that of Evelyn Lamuraglia. It was Pepper Sopko, sixty-four-year-old teacher's aide, grandmother of ten, who had been abducted from a grocery store parking lot to suffer a quick death — rock bashed on the back of her skull — after several hours of horrid degradations. As Pepper was being bashed, Evelyn Lamuraglia was on her way to Vegas with one Palmer Cheadle, who wrestled her car keys away from her (and dropped them in the parking lot) because, "Sweetheart, you're too damned drunk to drive," That he, Palmer C., was also too damned drunk to drive was a thought that apparently did not occur to the man. He dragged her across the parking lot, slapped her hard enough, as she writhed from his grasp, to knock her into an alcohol-enhanced slumber that allowed him to lay her out gently in the back seat of his Coupe de Ville.

He hit Highway 76, winding his way alongside the river, then blasted up onto Interstate 15, Vegas bound he would tell her, if she should wake up and start to squawk; but he really intended to hand her a fate similar to Pepper Sopko's, somewhere out in the empty desert north of Victorville, where her boney old body wouldn't be found for years, if ever.

"Wasa, wasa?" Evelyn rasped, her bird's nest hair-do popping into Palmer Cheadle's rear-view mirror. Three a.m., and the Coupe de Ville had just crested the Cajon