

## RICHARD BANK

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### Salt Line

The estuary called the Pennypack rises and falls as the moon  
commands,  
fills with the Delaware as incoming ocean pushes back the salt  
line,  
sends sweet water fleeing up the creek.

The access road that parallels the river past both  
the House Of Correction and the Men's Detention Center  
services this "module three" where the women now are kept.

After the last gate in the razor wire fence, past the broken  
stump  
at this remotest of parking lots; nature intrudes with its own  
drama, playing out  
between the yellow lines where the sliding doors of the  
corrections vans  
open to disgorge their cargos of returning penitents.

Two seagulls are fighting earnestly over a patch of vomit  
glistening on the faded asphalt for any who care to notice on this  
hot hot August day.  
They face off arch winged, strutting; too elegant for this  
regurgitated prize,  
puffing their fragile breasts in ritual dance  
only comprehensible as a threat to others of their kind.

The story told on the blacktop does not intrude on their  
perception,  
is not part of their being; excluded from their consciousness.  
Repentance, memory, remorse, even the ken of death  
all beneath them in this purest of states.  
They seek no forgiveness, who cannot sin.

Inside the cold steel doors, inmates do their time; what's done is done.

There is no meaning to the past, only now and what's to come.  
Across the barren mud flat, away from the barred doors,  
the sun on the Delaware is a brilliant morning gold; burning and relentless.

The salt line pushes, releases by its own magic, its own will,  
they wait without season or will, for the magic of release.

## Two Sonnets

I.

There, at the eastern portal,  
Our lady of the traffic island  
Rants her message in messianic tones.  
They wait for me, together but alone.

Shackeled like gally slaves,  
A daisy chain of steel,  
The accused march to judgement;  
A funerary shuffling to the cells,

A few in suits, new and precious,  
A talisman to fool Dame fate;  
Mixed with street clothes, prison blues  
And the telltale salmon of the state.

Each is here to pay the piper  
Whether or not he called the tune.

II.

The peeling guilt, faded and forlorn  
Frames us in the courtroom's turgid air.  
He is youth flushed; his mother lifeworn,  
Penitent, wraithlike in an ancient wooden chair.

The colloquy incants unto its' end.  
I signal and he anxiously agrees,  
Comforted that ritual is satisfied  
By the dark and mystic ceremonies.

We intone sufficiency, argue doubt,  
He strains to see where the runes will fall  
Submits tho the gleaming cuffs, taken out  
And hoping to return on an early haul.

Together toward the cell room they walk, quiet and intense;  
Share confusion, then depart to parse the day's events.

## Remembering Bill

—a memo

Do you remember Bill Kunstler  
at the ACLU. We went with him  
to a bar. You were splendid  
in a short black dress and perm.  
Your ass was an inverted heart.  
I was an oaf. So much time

has passed between us since.  
Like a creek, placid and inviting,  
then swollen from unexpected rains,  
we were a torrent; carried our  
lives along like flora swept away.

The creek empties into the river.  
The river flows into estuaries  
pushing back the salt line now  
and then and back at last.

Today, we pass in the courthouse  
or reading law. We say  
what mere friends say.

Attached is an article  
from the *NY Times*

concerning his estate.