

HOWARD GOFREED

Testament

Found hiding in Paradise, Adam answered
Father, I cannot tell a lie. I'm ashamed
of myself, and would not be
but for woman. Eve, blushing
the first time in God's presence,
fingered the upright snake; and He,
just God of man, did not ask
the snake, who might have blamed the ant
or Adam and Eve, raising issues
of credibility. Thanks be to God,
who drove man and woman, snake, and all
innocent animals, lion and lamb,
scarab and worm, into our world
which waited in savage splendor.

Neighbors

The police found the white man
hunkered behind his pick-up, the black
likewise behind his beat-up Caddie
across the street. In twenty minutes
shooting at each other, they hit
nine houses (blasting the TV antenna
off one) and fifteen cars,
caused one hysterical mother to charge
and pull her enthralled four-year-old
from the battlefield, left thirteen
flat tires and enough broken glass
to create a suburban Kristalnacht, but
missed each other. Their arrests
made the papers. Their guilty pleas
and sentences did not. It's only just
both were convicted of the same crime
common law affray, a crime
so old, even the lawyers marvelled.

Apostrophe

O Goddess of Opportunity!
You called to me unexpectedly
years ago in a Maryland bank lobby.
My hand had the stairwell door
to return from an escrow deposit
when I heard "Howard" shouted
with female joy. Turned round
overwhelmed by the tousle of blond
California hair, warmth of tanned
California torso, invite of wide
California hips half-hidden inside
sunny shorts, amber arms and bold
California legs placed just so
one before the other, yellow cotton
halter blouse tied loosely between
California breasts above which
nestled a captivating come-
hither California smile. I
did not recognize you from high school.
You seemed to have emerged newborn
and dry from the Pacific, raising
unpeaceful passions in me. I,
dressed as a three-piece lawyer,
was not prepared, reacted
like a cartoon character: smoke
whistled from my nose and ears,
a fire alarm clanged in my head,
my tongue came out, grew
in amazement, as did my popped
eyes. I flashed through hot colors
to red, sizzled to ash before you.
Your smile broadened slightly
and nestled more deeply in your breasts.
I remember saying you looked great
and wanting to drop the deposit slip,
forget that old farmer upstairs,
my client, awestruck by shelves of
leather-bound law, wanting to run off
with you anywhere, somewhere,
nowhere, to a room without windows,
without a door, but alas!

the inertia of marriage and job. We
settled for histories: you back
visiting from California, me hiding
the left hand.

Now you return to me—
divorced from the wife
and the law, bifocaled, teeth
crowned, paunchy and balding—
in dream. O Goddess of Lost
Opportunity, we run off!
and I wake shaking, haunted
by where in my head
you have hidden so long.

(Wallace Stevens is not remembered)

Wallace Stevens is not remembered
for his insurance work, nor William
Carlos Williams for his doctoring.

It's the blackbird and the plums
baked in their pies

that are savored by gourmands, though
even these will change their tastes in time.
These poets knew their poems' fate, it's
the salt pinch always found
in the offerings.

