

## JOHN PERRAULT

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### Shoulders

The slope of a shoulder  
says loads about a man

what he's been lugging around  
and for how long

whether he's strong enough  
to lift one more sack of sand

and smart enough  
to leave it as it falls

when a seam splits  
spilling the truth for his effort.

The boss might call him in  
to have a chat

to see if what he saw  
will have its way with him

if he's walking off the job  
or if he's going to talk.

No matter his response  
it's the shoulders give away the fact

he's had enough of this—  
you can dock him if you want—

the shoulders and the back  
and the hands jammed down his pockets.

## **Palace of Justice**

Learned in the law  
he labeled each event  
of those days  
in accordance with tradition.  
The legislative will  
thus informed his speech  
the crunch of leather in the halls  
his conscience.  
Dismissing rumors of rooms  
below chambers  
slippery with blood  
he rose from the bench  
each afternoon at four  
drenched in his robes  
never once having looked into  
the eyes  
of those he condemned.  
On his way out  
the magnificent doors  
women lined in the streets  
hailed him  
the last hope  
for loved ones missing these months  
taken in the night  
and no word yet.