

# BARROW STREET

SUMMER 2006



PRICE \$8.00

## The Coroner Reflects on the Body in the Grove

The wind dumped the oranges on the ground.  
The man's body, his bruises, dissolved into the oranges.

When he returned from the war he wanted to open a thermometer museum—  
Brass fixtures rescued from nineteenth-century schooners.  
Index fingers of mercury measuring up their centers.

But his father diverted him: "Don't do that!  
You won't go anywhere!"

Where is anywhere?—

I grew up with vastness.  
I grew up carving oceans into walking sticks  
and birds onto those oceans  
so I'd have a place to anchor myself to as I drifted.  
"That's where the hooded merganser rests."  
But even when etched into ash, birds fly away.

First lesson: Objects have the permanence of wishes.

Before the man came west, his father said:  
"So much space and brightness out there,  
what else can you do but screw up."

I love that,  
"screw up"—  
Even our mistakes have direction.

I grew up too quickly to study awe.  
As if there was "somewhere" to get to.

If I lay down with him,  
where would I go?

His skin, dissolving orange skin.  
His skin, bruised dusk.

## El Niño, El Viejo, El Viento

He left Wednesday to wander the southwest,  
 I arrived yesterday as the walkway began to cool.  
 I keep expecting the park service to call, tell me  
 They've found a man in deMaria's Field with a net

Waiting for nightfall to catch lightning.  
 They'll tell me he mutters for a Paula,  
 For a lost wife, and asks if we know  
 Degas copied Rembrandt's light.

The day's shadows stand up straight,  
 Begin to lean as if wanting to rest.  
 Ten pounds, or, roughly, one thousand  
 Five hundred screws. Ten gallons of deck stain.

My plan: Stain surfaces with linseed,  
 Hammer memory into a place and then,  
 When he returns, apologize,  
 And suggest he sell.

He'll say, "I'd rather flake away  
 With the paint on my brushes,  
 Rot with my depreciating decks,  
 Than move into the smog. painting, teaching,

I've had second and third lives since she passed,  
 Since you, your brother, moved on—  
 I've been fortunate."  
 And he has.

But the Santa Anas gather screws into the cracks  
 And with a nail you split open a wasp house  
 Creviced between the two-by-fours and the eggs,  
 Those little bits of xerophytic sap, are dried—



"Father, the Santa Anas blow through this canyon  
And erase people from the beach. Father,  
These Santa Anas are blowing through these canyons  
And erase every thing, from everything."