

## Portraits of the Northern California Coast

July 10, 2003

### I. Stonehouse

These hills so burnished by the piercing gold  
Rays that thread and sew the fog in patches,  
Are such that I've already reminisced  
And long for, tho' I've never really known them;  
Barren granite, honey-combed and angry,  
Salt-shorn rocky faces cleft by breezes,  
Quilted ice-plant bedding, swollen tongues  
Lapping at the surface of the sea foam,  
Raging at the sunlight on the highlands. At  
This place where sea and shore together weep  
I am inclined to pray, to search for respite  
Where all are battered by the moon together,  
And nothing but the stones pretend to sleep.

Bless the sea-foam churning. Bless the stones that take  
The lashing of the stinging waves, atoning  
For the hubris of the moon – in secret.  
While seals play and the hills glow golden,  
I will lament this place of fire, burning,  
Of salt that stings the skin and nostrils,  
Of surf that cleaves the heart and hillsides.  
Bless the windshorn wild, the foggy chill, the sands.  
Bless the weeping of the sun that warms my hands,  
The rays that thread and sew the fog in patches,  
The clutch of straw that feeds the flame, the bellows,  
And turns my heart to ashes at the strand.

A flock of pelicans, through fog ascended,  
Like a whisper overheard conspiring,  
Punctuates the silence of the daybreak.  
Our secrets spill upon an empty table  
In hushed and muted solitude. We bare them  
To an empty bottle, to a barren hearth,  
To each other in a silent house.  
The pains, unsilenced then, by word and timbre,  
Will merge into these hills, this howling landscape...

Will echo, fade away, leave us afraid,  
And in this house of stone, our selves unburdened,  
Inured, and captive to this loneliness –  
Will consume the very dust of which we're made.

Bless the wind's lamenting. Bless the waves that break  
And shape us into sorrow's suffering children.  
I watched the moon gaze at her face this morning  
In a tide-pool on the beach at 5 a.m. –  
Such vanity from nothing but a spirit,  
A hungry ghost who lives upon our sighing  
And swallows up the echo of our wailing days.  
Bless our pain, our secret faults, the smothering dark.  
Bless the arrows of the moon that pierce their mark.  
Like a whisper overheard conspiring,  
These withering hearts, like this great wilderness,  
Themselves have grown now plaintive, chill and stark.

## **II. Big Sur**

Soft, sunlit afternoon, our serpentine  
Negotiation of the coastal route  
Ascending past the lighthouse at Point Sur  
Toward Nepenthe's sweet intoxication,  
We drove with Mahler's Fifth, a celebration  
Of a sort – a palliative to our Carmel.  
Such sanguine calm, such extraordinary  
Warmth that radiated through the treetops  
With the blazing of that great concordant  
Movement, and the cellos softly climbing,  
Clamoring to give echo to the surf below.  
Immeasurably vast this depth and height –  
These tableaux, variations of our days  
And ways not quite imbued with memory  
Are yet, like light diffused and set adrift,  
Recollected rightly for our wonder.

Somewhere between *Sehr langsam's* soft and dreamy  
Tendrils and the Bixby Bridge's archway,  
Raising like a great Euclidian marvel  
Against the backdrop of a greater marvel still,

We spoke of Henry Miller and the Westons,  
Of the ocean mist still pressing on the brim,  
Some cloudy sealing wax, like on a letter  
"To my darling Henry..." from Anaïs Nin.  
So many angels – and so many ghosts –  
Still stood before me waiting by the roadside  
While many not so far behind me urging,  
Compelling me, seemed just beyond the time.  
The sun upon my face, this history...  
How frank, the revelation of our store –  
No memory, no hills, no symphony  
Can conquer this uncompromising shore.

© 2003, Karekin M Yarian