

LEAVING HOME

A man with a guitar sits in a swaying boat
strumming "Moon River" and it's a hard song
to hear as the wet fact inches higher.

It rose in the night like a rheumy moon
despite here-and-there dark patches
the morning defined as dams and dikes.
It overcame them easy as clouds shimmering
across sight, surface shiny as the moon
but nothing like the celebrated satellite
you could gaze up at, it was water! Miles
of it loose as moonwash
spreading daylight truth on the earthscape.

Water and moon: Some ancient arcane bond
still strong, far from ocean tides,
beyond old midwives' tales. Amniotic fluid
flowing without a birthing,
a week's travail and nothing to show
for it but a slimy signature-- a receipt
for all your labor and maybe all you own.

Moon-filled water, stink-filled sandbags,
ribbons of rotting crops bandaging the levees,
mud-caked metaphors and your life's artifacts
--a sorrowscape no melody can carry,
no lyrics can lift.

The last motorboat loads, leaving a brown wake
like a fresh-plowed furrow in your best land.
The guitarist, drifting, peels off a few more
chords like soaked plywood and floats them
after the barn gone downcurrent two days ago.
Slowly he resumes rowing into an oak woodland
greenly ghosted beneath him, its moss floor
coming loose like pieces of lawn carpet,
rising, bobbing around his oars,
one rafting a Barbie doll dressed in gold lame.

And you declare nature the master ironist.
And you quit thinking of when the fabled moon
and river made their appointed rounds and knew
their place and you could recognize yours.

SOUTH COAST POETRY JOURNAL, 1995