

Songs from a Free Space*

Astrology Hype

Carole Ramer

While in prison six months
my horoscope predicted:
"Travel to exciting places.
New career opportunities.
Romance and adventure:"

So far—I've traveled from jail
to Manhattan Supreme Court.
My pay scale has increased from 10 to 25¢ per hour.
Numerous other inmates have made
overtly sexual advances to me
in vacant stairwells.

Honey,
that's not my idea of a rising sign.

Alone

Deborah Hiller

She who walks alone and dreams
will remain lonely.

She who sleeps with her pillow
only dreams of her pillow as partner.

But she who sits in her cell,
and writes
will master this world.

Ten Ways of Looking at Prison Lunch

35

Gloria Jensen

(With apologies to Wallace Stevens)

1. With both hands over your eyes, releasing one hand slowly to peep.
2. Through the eyes of a friend you have by the hand—who reads braille.
3. In the bing [solitary] where you can refuse to have the thing brought in at all and just lie there and sleep.
4. From across the steam line, where people marvel at your petite body (if only they knew it's not by *choice* you prefer to remain frail and cautious).
5. From a prison visitor's point of view—when suddenly, miraculously, all one sees is steak, greens and potatoes.
6. From your window late at night as you watch one man run with a rake, followed by another with a sack, followed by a corrections officer, followed by a ruckus you've not seen but heard—then all three returning, dragging a heavy sack.
7. Witnessing something come ashore in the bay and thinking: my, but it gave up a great fight.
8. Wondering why they have signs saying DO NOT PEE ON THE GRASS. Then seeing the kitchen girls go out, mow it down and bring it in.
9. "Good Friday"—when all the world's generous and the relief truck pulls up to the kitchen door to drop off loads of potatoes they couldn't unload anywhere else.
10. Seeing more clearly the lunch of steak, greens and potatoes—as you attack the steak first and realize the fight you witnessed (#6) is not yet over, for the beast is biting you now too.

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