

Christopher Buckley

Kees At 70

*"A refuge, permanent, with trees that shade
When all the other cities die and fade."*

I grew tired
finally, even of clouds,
the last things
we could ever affect—
then something
about the bay,
the wordless clouds there
rolling off, and off,
suggesting that
perhaps there is
some quiet city in the mind
beyond jazz and summer beaches.

And for all appearances,
at the end of my modern rope,
I let go into those waves . . .
Here, the amusements
are shade-colored lizards
commanding their thin hearts
among the undersides of rock—
they blink into the sun
and never dream . . .

There were the years
of Alma, her white blouses
and direct, dark eyes,
who brought oranges
and Lucky Strikes from Oaxaca
and who had no idea . . .
There was the writing
in another name,
for money, for magazines
flourishing in barbershops,
Omaha to Iowa City . . .

Now,
there's only the saguaro
blossom and Spanish bayonet
to take the eye above
this earth's acquiescence
to the winds . . .

And yes,
I had daughters,
named for exotic flowers,
who went into the world
surrendering their light
like all precious things—
involved with a Manhattan parvenu,
the art scene on Nob Hill,
there was nothing,
no reservoir of will,
to keep them
from the stark advances
of the age, the atomic despair . . .

I am an emblem of my time—
the blank and unmarked page,
the man who isn't there,
now more prepared than most
to shade my mind
amid the long blue heat
and burning air . . .