

Karen Kipp

Air

— for *Lynda Schrausnagel*

A lean young bitch, lanky-gaited and brash, on the most exquisite day
 of her entire eleven months
 stops to snuffle the desiccated carcass of a dead skate at surf's edge
 She's a German Short-haired Pointer, and the stub of her tail makes
 small, frantic trajectories
 like hub-flights between Boston and Hyannis in midsummer
 God she's happy; with her fine deep nose stuck in the very rib-cage of
 death
 Her long, liver-brown ears, pulse with each gust of wind, as she turns
 her nose into it
 like heaven
 Then she's running, leaving a woman standing in deep sand calling her
 name
 through the wall the wind has become . . . Ethyl . . . ethyl . . . but she
 is on the other side and going
 I walk up to examine the creature the dog has abandoned. Its edges
 curl like a dried flower
 and I remember those skates, leaping out of the deep swells off Cape
 Hatteras — the dark
 spade-shaped plates of muscle, slinging out of the water, and spinning
 against the blue sky
 then slowly falling back, without grace, as they slashed their mean
 tails against the firmament
 Devil-fish
 What made them crash the delicate membrane of their tranquil world
 to challenge our scorched atmosphere like crazed astronauts
 The heart of Icarus is slamming in the rib-cage somewhere near
 where the wings attach

And I remember reading in the morning paper, that Angel Walenda is
still fighting lung cancer
for that extra month on the high-wire; just her, a gentle breeze, and
silence
as she concentrates, edges forward, keeping balance by slugging it into
her center like a fist
and nothing
Nothing but air to hold her