

by MARY MACKEY

First Grade

Miss Logston
said we should
make our
O's
like balloons
she took our
hands in hers
and crushed
our knuckles
like nuts
she made us
draw circles
for hours
round & round
like vultures
circling a
dead donkey

Miss Logston
smelled of
violets
she stuffed
our mouths
with tissue
taped them shut
grabbed us
by the hair
and shook us

senseless

she said
if we talked
out in class
or chewed
gum
or wet our
pants
we would go
to a dark place
where flies
without wings
would crawl over
our open eyes
forever

she
said
we were her
best class
in ten years

she said we
showed
promise

L. Tells All

I wanted a man
but they were in

short supply
so when this big white
swan followed me home
and announced
"I Am Zeus, Lord of All Creation,"
I crooked my finger at him
and said
"come here, Bird Boy,
let's give it a try."

at first
I have to admit
it was fun
his soft breast
the excited squawk
the way he beat his wings
frantically
like an umpire gone bad
but basically
it was an act of
desperation

we had nothing in common
his feathers made me sneeze
I was afraid to fly
he was married
(of course
they all are)
and we even had religious differences

what can I say?

and then there were his other
women
Io, Europa, Semele
(not to mention the
sluttish little pens he picked up
in the park)

we started to have
terrible fights
I called him an overstuffed
pillow and threw seed
in his face
he threatened to migrate
the usual stuff

by spring
we'd both had enough

one night
while we were sitting
in a Greek restaurant
I told the old cob I'd always
be his friend
but I just couldn't handle
interspecies love

(I lied, of course
the truth was
I'd already started to see
a duck
on the side)

Atlas

this country
is
divided
into 4
provinces

to the north
stretch
forests composed
of human
hair

to the south
deserts sanded
with dreams

imports are few
exports unknown

the capital
city appears and
disappears
at random
like a green
snake sliding
through
tall grass

Peninsula de Osa

just before
dawn
I woke
and turned
to look at you

the light was
underwater
glass green
trembling with
suppressed
sun

your chest was level
your arms limp as
lianas
an ant was making its way
slowly across
your forehead
carrying a scrap of leaf
your face was blue

I thought you had
died

I hoped you had died

The Photographer Longs For Something She Can't Define

her walls are hung
with cross-sections of eternity:

a line of Indian women
staggering under baskets of coal
a Nigerian mother holding a child
frail as a paper kite
two young girls from the dry lands
of northeast Brazil
dressed in white silk and angel wings
a Tarascan wedding
showing the groom's mother-in-law
dancing in the bloody skin of a flayed goat

as the photographer
inspects her work
a rustling sound
fills her ears
she taps her fingers on the glass
longing to enter each frame

they wanted love
she gave them light
they wanted bread
she gave them beauty

she decides to take
a new series of photographs:
closed doors
crumbling walls
broken windows
ladders that go nowhere