

TOULON 1971

by Karen Corrine Golden

Miguel, Amor,
I see you older now,
a family man,
the lawyer you had said you would become,
defending criminals in Madrid,
a place where I have never been, where I imagine a russet
sunset
reflecting off wine-colored brick houses
as you walk home in the evening.
When I think of Spain
it is black and red:
The bull and the teaser
inviting one another.

Miguel, Amor,
I never wanted to become a woman
in young America,
in borrowed cars of unsuspecting fathers,
in a place so close to home.
It's like a mission, you see,
where a stranger is welcome and fed,
but you never really get to know him.
Do you remember:

*There was no wind in Toulon in August.
The road was long from the stone beach
and Mediterranean blue
to the motel of slanting rooms
each with lights like votive candles,
an oasis where no one really lives,
a stopping point*

*where days are long
like the tanned, moist limbs
of languishing nudes.
In the white glare of an afternoon
I watched you stroll up the dirt road
while, straw hat in hand, I fanned the heavy air,
the grass yellow and dry cracking like wheat
between my toes, and
we walked on the beach at dusk,
the sand becoming dark and musky,
breath, dust and salt air drifting together.
I felt you like a sacrifice,
a frail membrane struggling
on the mild sea air.*

Miguel, Amor,
at twenty you were a man,
or so it seemed to me,
walking back down the road,
waving promises I did not want you to keep.
And that letter you sent
was really a subtle gratitude,
unnecessary: the crime as hot,
as innocent
as feeling.