

# living in the flames

*by* Jerry Ratch

After it is over, I go out into the world, to the café. The flower sellers are setting up their booth outside the glass doors. Classical guitar over the speakers. A soft rain falling. Heads bowed, reading the news. Coffee, croissants, cappuccino. This gives me back the gift of myself, bit by bit.

Morning bun with cinnamon. A blonde girl with her hair tied back, bread and flowers in her arms. Trying to maintain a public face, while facing the internal abyss. Light and dark behind the eyes. (Maybe love shouldn't exist.)

With lust, there is the return of sanity. Yes, lust! For things, objects. People in their convertibles, straying from the heart. They go skiing in the mountains. They toboggan down hillsides near the highway. They are drinking wine, champagne to forget. Or even remember! And yes, I remember almost everything.

I remember seeing this Van Gogh painting of sunflowers, cut off, lying on the ground, as if the heads of the sunflowers were burning up. The petals like flames, yellow and orange lapping at the edges of the things as they lay there cut off, with pieces of their stalks still attached. While the earth around them also burns with touches of red. Though they still seem to be sensing a way to collect light, twisting on their thick stalks as if living in the upheaval of flames.

