

on a long suburban plain

by Jerry Ratch

We were stuck sweating it out on a long suburban plain when you left. Or else we'd mob the one visible hill (in Palos Hills, or Hillside) and turn the televisions on, looking behind us nervously, hopelessly, until every evening became a Wednesday evening.

Here we could observe, like bored housewives, the dust in an undisturbed room hanging motionless before your face. Here the dormers never slid off the houses and hit the earth. Everything was pale, or had little blue lights, or got in the way.

I remember having a dream where I passed through a room full of nooses, and my hair was turning white. And a little girl I couldn't recognize was asking, "Momma, what is lace?" It was day, it was night.

But oh, look out for the hot walls in the suburbs of the imagination! Where their daughters flicker out over ponds in the middle of an empty field on hot summer nights, with ragweed leaning over the water, heat lightning in the dense air, or they are underwater with their thumbs in the backyard swimming pool. Or they are seeing a married farmer at a bar called the Peppermint Lounge out in Western, Illinois. In a small college town maybe, near the Mississippi River, where they never get carded, and behave exactly like their mother when she would "entertain" her sailors.

