
Descents

(for Gill)

TERRY GIFFORD

Always I stayed too long up there,
in too deep, out too far
on the highest places,
turning on those pinnacle points
towards snow, lakes, woods
and whole ranges of colour,
soft High Sierra skylines
of cloud shadowed strata –
red rounded Dana
or the white Minarets.

But the descents were yours
in more than just direction,
or my guilt, or sheer speed
flowing down the dust scree
off Mount Hoffman, then loping along
the last hidden meadow
before jogging round rocks
to May Lake and shouting
your name, echoing
across the still water.

And from Cathedral Peak
reading boulders like chessmen
across grooved glacial slabs
to pick up the trail, panting
but feeling antelope-fit
over the logs of Budd Creek
and sensing the Meadows road
getting closer and closer,
three hours late from my solo
but through darkening trees
calling your name again
and again . . .

You'd brought beer in the car
and wanted no nonsense
like 'The summits are mine
but the descents are yours.'
