

THE HOLY COOKS

BERNICE RENDRICK

Stirring flour into the batter
of butter, sugar and ground almonds
a halo swirls on a band of window light.
White powder sifts down
radiant as snow on this hot morning.

Is this what I'll be remembered for?
My best moments bent
over orange flames, peering
into the belly of fire. An expert
juggler of silver pans and sheets.

Old photographs of me will be
crumpled and burned one by one
as I destroyed the family faces,
saints that faded, too many to revere.
But I've kept their china cups
occasionally sipping from
the gold edge of the past.

I'll never part with their recipes,
the smudges seals of royalty,
fingerprints the touches of history.
I'll cherish each woman's handwriting
and laborious directions.

The knowledge that nourished
our spirits and bodies flows
like a sacred vein through my hands
as they stand beside me,
cheeks flushed, fingers singed,
cinnamon streaked on chins,
under a halo of flour.

KEVIN MILLER



SHOULDER CONSIDERS RETIREMENT

BERNICE RENDRICK

It seemed foolish recently,
I began putting shoulder to bed
with special attention
to the persistent pain.
Warm in flannel, I didn't mind,
tried left and right side, made promises.
No more shouldering firewood.
It could rest. No more babies hefted
to thin padding over bone. No more
kneading bread. Wax on floorboards
could wear thin, go bare.
I told shoulder to retire,
it didn't have to dig huge clumps
of lemon balm any more.
Sometimes walking it is sore
and I know without speaking --
Aha! So this is arthritis.
Shoulder is like a small animal
when I curl up and put it to sleep,
appreciative of the rest
and not really too concerned
about the projects elbow and hand
insist on. But what else
can shoulder do but say No!
It was all balanced here.
This sloping shoulder carried
love light as feathers,
sometimes heavy as stone.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

NEAL WHITMAN

I grew up in Watsonville.
After the winter rains
the whole family--
anyone who was able to walk and bend over--
spent one Saturday
outside
cleaning, tidying up
the farmyard.
Dad would not tolerate clutter.
"Get rid of all the junk," he drill sarged us.
No wire, wood, or tools,
No machinery parts or pieces.
No litter of any kind just lying around.
Then we raked
the ground, combed dirt
in long straight lines.
One day is all it took.
My father swore
you could tell the quality
of the farmer
by the appearance
of his property.
He was a damn good farmer.