

RETAIL

FLAME

Ten an hour, selling ten an inch
in Haute Couture and feeling the pinch
of achy feet and The Servile Blues
checking out pedicures, Jimmy Choos
New fannies, face lifts, boobage and beaks
cash throwing dilettantes, gossip leaks.
She homes to four roommates
A Pizza arrives
Disparity Gulch
Between her and those lives

REAL LIFE IN A PROM BOUTIQUE, THE RETAIL WARS.

FLAME

I brought her 40 dresses
“Hate em all she whined
Her lovely, long dark tresses
Went down to her behind
Her mother was exhausted
Slumped sideways in a chair
We both almost just lost it
When she wanted that one there
She pointed to the ceiling
It went up 30 feet
I climbed a ladder, reeling
Grabbed a ball gown by it's feet
She tried it on an scorned it
Then left it on the floor
And that is when I threw a fit
And kicked her out the door

JUSTICE IS NOT BLIND

DANE CERVINE

The proud girl from Oakland
sits on-stage at the conference,
describes her normal day—
boyfriends shot at, one killed,
purse stolen, cell phone stomped,
avoiding drugs at the party. It is
the only life she has known.
It is why all the therapists are here.
Her life, a light flickering
across the bay, a golden gate, a bridge
America must cross to find
its blind heart.

THE CHAPEL IN THE HEART'S BUREAUCRACY

DANE CERVINE

At Asilomar, sand-swept Monterey pine retreat,
I enter the conference hall as I've done the past two mornings,
sit in my chair to hear a judge, or state official, or professor
discuss the despair of families, the toll of poverty,
the statistics of decay. By the second sip of coffee, I notice
that I recognize no-one around me, that the speaker is dressed
in robes with a purple sash, a black preacher
just warming up his sermon—the power of love, the way of sin—
and I sheepishly look at my program to locate
my own plenary. But really, I don't want to leave,
don't want to hear legislative analysts discuss
the latest school funding crisis, or suicide's stain,
or how prison's gobble up disaffected youth
as the only university we afford them.
I want to feel the word sin seep across every budget cut,
the word love lilt its way into the vocabulary
of every director, every politician, each voting citizen.
So when at last I find my own conference
in Asilomar's original chapel, hear a state director
say his own son was denied health insurance
because of depression, I wonder about the heart
of this country, if it is the wrong liturgy we chant—
one of policy and politics rather than love's bare sound.
Hear the bell ringing twelve tones in the chapel's steeple
as it ushers us out as secret missionaries
to a world weary of love's absence,
of sin's bureaucracy, a world waiting
as a lover once abandoned listens
for the door to open.

JULEEN JOHNSON

