**Coming Down the Mountain**

Gary Lark

A spiral arm reaches

toward awareness, in this quadrant

of Vishnu's dream.

We've been in the forest,

walking the lake shore,

fishing a pretty little stream,

where the road off the road off the road

was blocked so I went over the railroad tracks

and downstream where light

filtered through pine needles.

I followed an elk trail,

mint released by my boots

opening my senses,

and there, where the stream

zigs and zags at the whim of wonder

I conversed with Brook trout

about mosquitoes and shadows

of chance.

Trees change as we descend,

gnarly pine and spruce,

a corridor through giant fir

and cedar with vine maple

drinking dribbles of sun

on the forest floor.

River carving a path

through lava rock,

tumult though time,

everything is flow.

A few people buzzing

around a small resort,

Forest Service office,

and houses sprout in clusters,

signs from the last election

tilt on fences and a low grade

sadness begins.

That which I forgot in the trees

resurfaces: glorious helping

alongside egregious taking.

Violence built into birthday cakes.

The highway cuts through the hills,

nuance peeled away.

Latgawa walked this land

for thousands of years

listening to wind song and raven,

grizzly and rattlesnake.

They would meet Dagelma cousins

to dig camas, gather tarweed seeds,

share earth ovens,

collect acorns and gossip,

trade, play and quarrel

with Dakubetede and Shasta,

or ask about a daughter

taken last year by the Klamath.

And salmon. Always salmon,

the great bringer of life

from the mystery of sea.

To rise through the urge

and surge of tide

into fresh water swirl and current,

familiar scent, though new

to each being, each journey.

The first fish carefully cooked

and shared. The bones placed back

into the living water to return

to that place in the sea

where it grows a jacket of flesh.

The vision evaporates

among the gas stations,

houses and highways.

Where there were racks

of drying fish

an old lumber mill site morphs

into a mall that ages

into yesterday's desire

discarded and replaced

with the next.

Along the descent

avenues of greed

are punctuated by libraries

and schools.

Haphazard settlement

sprawls across former fields.

Acres of parking lot surround

shopping venues where people trade

faces and dance with their guns,

empty words wander the alleys

asphalt sweating in the sun.

On the freeway, off the freeway,

corridors channel us

through our neurotic game,

each with a chance to win.

There's a hillside vineyard,

red or white in fluted glass

to calm the nerves.

A haze of smoke ambers

the evening sun.

Stars will hide tonight.

We pick up four day's mail,

check email, collect papers.

The air conditioning is set.

I water the garden.

We've moved many times,

this is home now.