

Words for Late Summer

Dixie Partridge

Cornmeal, dusted over these loaves
like pollen. And I wish again
for the old unwritten recipes: brown breads,
chicken baked in a wrap of cornmeal,
family reunion picnics I can't match
with my own.

The french bread I carry instead
to the park, we layer into sandwiches,
watch river trees and sky
dissolving into dusk.
We are alone above the bank,
transplanted to this plateau from mountains
years back.
Geese along the island
grow raucous, but their cries turn liquid
as they reach us, part
of the river's molten giving-back
moments before we lose the sun.

We stay too long . . .
one daughter waits darkly in the car
to be returned to her telephone.
The other children have disappeared
with a crackle of reeds down the bank,
investigating a new dark
rising from roots and rocks.

The poetry of DIXIE PARTRIDGE, Richland, Washington, has recently appeared in many national and regional journals and in several anthologies. Her first book of poems, Deer in the Haystacks, was published by Ahsahtia Press (1984). Watermark, her second book of poetry, received the 1990 Eileen W. Barnes Award and is forthcoming from Saturday Press.

In the last traces of daylight,
the sky turns the color
of bruised skin. The voices

I hear my own, my sisters'—
late summer madrigal
of *no bears out tonight* and
mother may I,
when time was present tense and felt
through every bone-ache and tendon,
moments fixed in the certainty
that smells of baking from wood-stoked ovens
meant the clarity of dawn,
that any bruised waking
could be salvaged.