

Susan, In Tucson

Dr. Ron came by today (it's been years}
with stories of Nicaragua, *las contras* in Alabama,
refugee camps in Georgia, the whole southeast scene:
Selma twenty years later, subliminal TV ads
for Christ and Big Brother, the brainwash battalions,
the hard sell, God's death squads; and meanwhile,
after the psych ward with the ex-army surgeons
making electroneurological inquiries into
post-meridian treatment for lost causes,
cross-country travel with his braindamaged buddy.

Then Dr. John came by with theories of polar skies,
apocalypse imminent, the dialectical pair
stretched almost to the breaking point: and then what?
the birth of a third? a squaring of the vicious circle?
(three will get you four and four will get you seven
climbing the Holy Tetractys of Pythagoras)
or will it just be more of the same disintegration,
randomness, a scrambled egg on the face of laughter?

Questions, questions, the same old stories with a few
new twists pretending to be answers. These are the facts:
Susan. In Tucson. Lastnight. Cancer. Still in her forties.
The clouds this morning at dawn, gold, then crimson, then gray.
The air all day making the edges of things stand out
the way they do through a lens — NASA, Palomar,
microscopes and telescopes, the weather on Mars,
space music inside her Dragonfly Glassworks
played on the shards of a brilliant career
declassified by the Pentagon.

This afternoon at the Queen it's kind of dead, and dead
at the Brewery, dead at Elmo's. Up at Shearer and Howell
and later tonight back at Elmo's it's Windsong and Dave,
a little country rock, some old timey banjo,
Puglio and Sierra kicking up their heels
while outside on the Gulch a woman in her twenties
sits down in her beer and broken bottle and shakes her head
when her friend, swaying under his own load
tries to pull her up, to make her understand
how very far they have to go before they get home.

FOR SUSAN ARMSTRONG