

"...two solitary strollers did not for a moment think on coincidence, that unswum stream which lingers at a man's elbow with every crowd in every town." --The Picasso Summer, Ray Bradbury

#### THE BEHOLDER'S EYE

For thirty-five years he starred her  
on imagination's lavish stage, the heroine  
of levitating scenes, eye level  
against a gray highway, flitting across  
a newspaper, a diorama under the shower spray.  
Producer, director, still wanting to co-star.

He didn't question that she still looked twenty,  
or other anomalies, never updated the script.  
After each performance he felt somehow closer  
to the pastel denouement of boy gets girl.

Vacationing in the mountains, his wife  
antiquing down the road, he Sunday afternooned  
at a small art museum, pausing to revile cubists  
for being blind to beauty. His eyes tripped over  
a painter's signature. The love of his life  
had married some guy with that common name.  
This one was the show's featured artist; his  
collection of nudes defaced the east wall.

The visitor moved toward them. Clumsy lines grated  
against each other, crashing colors tightened  
his jaws. A framed newsclip hanging nearby likened  
the artist's style to Picasso's, applauded  
the interpretations of his wife. The words  
surrounded a black and white photo of the couple.

The visitor shook his head. Ugly old woman,  
no wonder he painted her that way.  
Worst kind of escapism. Alteration of truth  
and pretense of alternative glory.

The artist, early for the wine and cheese reception  
at 5, sidled up to the frown in front of his work.  
"Tell me what you think of it," he said.

The visitor did. They conversed. Other guests  
drifted by. To keep it polite, the two men enacted  
the card swapping ritual. Outside, the first man  
saw he'd been talking to the painter himself,  
shrugged and flicked the card in a bin. Inside,  
the artist stared at the card in his hand.  
Can't be but one name like that, he thought.  
No wonder she didn't marry him.

39 lines