

## ROBERT SIMS REID

### *For Ned Graves*

Could he feel her skin butter-soft  
through a blouse tugged free of buttons  
and the water that choked her tame  
in the cool creek, silt sliding back,  
back to himself bowed over lunch  
outside the gym, 400 pounds  
of boy called genius. More lessons  
to learn than school and Ned hired on  
with the carnival. Something light  
jiggled in that flab when he sat  
his bench at the V.F.D. Fair.  
Kids would shout Let's go Ned, go fast  
and he'd yank more levers than one  
to stop his toys and let pretties  
off to vomit. Miracle Shows trailed  
south to winter. I watched one truck  
speed away, filled with brooding fat:  
*My love, my love, these padded walls  
are old friends. You lay light as bones  
dressed up. This tattoo's for water  
to sail a boat on, this here knife  
will keep us warm.* Once in a book  
I learned things I can never keep.  
Why love the rain? I almost know  
the way it smells, the way my hands  
cradle a rock from palm to palm.

Neither lover knew the other  
would die, one among the slim reeds  
pointing the way far to some moon  
that would not care. How could she know  
which arm was tender, which a club?  
After years of night I insist  
his wrong lay in that wet, bruised mud  
holding them closer like a kiss.