

The 2003 Editors' Prize Contest Winners

THE
SPOON
RIVER Poetry Review

*Bernard Gershenson
Honorable Mention*

Salgado's Photos

1

You want to tell the man in the picture Don't drink
you'll go blind, your gut will wither, you'll die
and you know somehow that he must be dead by now
and probably something
besides the river
killed him

But maybe if he'd heeded your warning, maybe if you'd
had tablets to purify his life, he'd be here sharing
his inhuman tale, the horror show that no one
goes to the movies to see
maybe if they'd allowed you to take
more than a camera

Of course,
if he hadn't drunk
he'd have died of thirst

2

As kids we played Capture the Flag
defending our turf, chasing the enemy away,
capturing some, getting captured ourselves,
invading, a chance to run free,
a difficult game to win,
sometimes there were no winners
before we went swimming or ate lunch

How could we know
we mocked this man running the dirt road
east of San Isidro, running for the
fence which he'll vault back to the safety
of his poverty, the border patrol jeep
kicking up dust, just as happy to let him
get away, the thrill of the chase

He's a small figure in fading light
but the jeep sees him, and the jeep is ahead of us by a
grade or two, taller, faster; it doesn't occur
to us that if we're patient we'll grow faster,
smarter, that we'll play the game
as if it were a drug

3

At first you see the smile because it is there for you,
the beautiful woman in her thirties,
the beautiful woman at the height of her power,
the dark glow of her skin
a heart-shaped locket around her neck,
a multicolored blouse, sharp, costly,
carefully fitted over a black skirt

And you wonder why she's smiling
leaning on her crutch, one leg missing;
what power does she have, this
expansive pride that makes you almost
miss the woman to her left, standing in
profile, bent a little, her eyes deer wide
but lifeless somehow, like you
would look if a mine had stolen your leg
you almost missed her in the shadow of the smile

You wonder how the woman facing the camera
dares to be beautiful

4

These children know more about guns than you do,
which ones jam, which are easy to carry
and here these boys are laughing, you've caught them
looking like children but you have no idea why
and right now you're having trouble remembering
what made you happy when you were ten
maybe you made your parents proud