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Warriors, Shades, and Nymph

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Warriors, Shades, and Nymph

Mary Dengler

An hour's drive has brought me
To a public library
Not filled with silent, staring, sleeping men
From Las Vegas streets, like
The one on North Las Vegas Boulevard.

Those men—I saw one woman there—had washed up
From their dreams in straggly beards, sweat-stained
Headbands, bill caps holding back their greying
Tangled locks, their gaunt or bulging flesh exposed
By greying t-shirts, rusted drooping jeans and curling boots,
Mere relics of their glory days, when
Youthful rage and hope pointed
Their bikes toward coastal paradise
But left them floundered on this desert reef
A mockery of siren songs.

With no “back home” behind,
their government checks reserved
For street-sold drugs and Walgreen's wine,
They'd sanctuaried here, among the cooling
Stacks of books. I'd sat among them
For an hour, then felt the tension rise
As gentle guardians hourly circled through
to threaten exile if their lodgers slept or snored,
A threat ignored, their inmates nodding prayerfully
Behind their books.

Departing from a gentler underworld than Dante's hell or Milton's,
Out I walked through Shades, huddled
Near the tree-lined outer walls,
Then drove to this, an hour away,
On West Charleston Boulevard.
Here I found great wracks of DVD's and games,
Surrounded by high stacks of books, like relics
Of an ancient race, among which glided
Tanned and booted youth, oblivious
Of history's Narratives waiting in the ruins.

But, one small nymph, dark-limbed,
With long black hair and ragged new-bought jeans,
Is roaming through a book, transfixed.
Her sleeping text, like sleeping drunks in previous rooms,
Will wake to tell a tragic/comic tale
That never ends.