

A Date in the Wilderness

Eugen J. Pentiu

I thought I'd hate the desert, with its vacant burning face,
Its scholars selling pamphlets about hunger dressed as grace,
Its little theologians, with their footnotes on the sand,
Explaining how the body was a prison of the land.

I bought a ticket westward to the wilderness by train,
With a television singing and a radio full of rain.
I set them by the tent flap like banners of my pride,
So the world would know I had not left the living world outside.

I said I'd stay connected to the market and the street,
To the wars and morning headlines, to the traffic and the heat.
But the desert watched me gently, like a mother watches flame,
And before I knew I missed it, it had called me by my name.

It courted me with silence, it spoiled me with the stars,
It healed my noisy spirit, it unlatched my prison bars.
It spoke without a language in the chamber of the heart,
Where every first love whispers, Child, begin again, restart.

And there I met the Father when I thought I was alone,
Not in marble halls of learning, not in thunder split from stone,
But in sand and simple hunger, far from all the merchants' cries,
Where the soul takes off its sandals and the old self slowly dies.

Now I look back with longing on that tent beneath the moon,
On the evening bread, the quiet, and the dawn arriving soon.
Thank You for the desert, Lord, for the betrothal there,
For the self I lost and found again in the chapel of the air.