

GHOST TRUCK

for RHC

Now I lay me down by the freeway,
In a duplex in Cedar City, Utah;
And twenty yards west of these bricks
Rides the asphalt, as high as my roof,
Where the line-haul drivers play tag
All night in their big sets of doubles.
I slide back the window and listen
For morning on my grandfather's freight dock:
Hand-trucks thumping past my head;
Unloading those box cars of Sno-jel;
Grandpa cussing around the vans;
My father hunched over the bill-writer;
Racer, and Herb, and Conley —
The hay truck that burned on the Grapevine;
Smoking bales scattered, tires busting,
And the semi that came honking down the grade
With brakes lit like torches, dodging
The bales on both sides of the road.
Sometimes, when it's snowing, I wake
In the darkness of morning and listen
So far into the fall of a snowflake
That the plows have given up for the night,

And the lanes are as quiet as trails
Under snow that will never go home.
I put down my ear to the white line
And listen all the way to California,
As the quilts pile high on my bed;
I listen, in everlasting snow,
For the ghost truck driven by my father,
As he double-clutches up the Black Ridge,
Climbing the white grade into Cedar
Over wagon ruts carved upon sagebrush.
The dash-lights flicker in the cab;
I can see, through the sleep in his eyes,
The young hands, a green pack of Luckies,
These towns that he doesn't understand:
Kanarraville, Hamilton Fort —
He thinks of polygamy, and chuckles.
The old International looms closer;
It stops on the shoulder above me.
The lights on the trailer start flashing;
He gets out, kicks the tires all around,
Vaults the guard-rail, comes down to the fence,
And listens for the sound of my breathing.

His fingers hooked into the chain-links;
In the cold his sighs are like plumes.

Dry flakes dusting his hair;
I hold my chest tighter, and listen.

"I remember the war," he begins.
"I'm sorry I wasn't a soldier."

"I remember it some," I answer.
"I carried a candle in the blackout,

"When the Japs didn't bomb L. A."
"I've got a bad ear," he continues,

"And my right eye never sat straight;
So all I remember is driving,

"Coffeeshops, unloading in Frisco —
I drove Hitler into the ground."

"My image of you," I reply,
"Is two headlights bobbing the darkness,

"While I'm waiting on somebody's porch
For an hour, after Cub Scout meeting.

"I remember one morning," I say.
"Mom standing at a sun-struck window,

"Crying, with the phone in her hand.
"The war is over," she said."