

# Brides of the Afternoon

*Paul Swenson*

White brides, dark grooms  
lustrous silks on  
an orange afternoon,  
scuffing through dry leaves  
crackling in flower beds.  
Rice-paper moon far  
away over the Oquirrh  
Yards of satin spilling  
out of those gray, gothic towers,  
stopping rush hour traffic  
at Main and North Temple.  
These brides of the afternoon  
trail long trains of white  
held aloft by little girls  
drafted for the occasion.  
Were these dresses of disallowed  
desire crafted by my friend  
Jeanette, who smokes a cloud, but  
fits these females with the emblems  
of their purity? Photographers  
trot along in their wake.  
For heaven's sake, how can it  
start like this? The grooms  
see nothing of the loveliness.  
They stare across the intersection  
at the Don't Walk sign where  
electric orange hands prevent  
their progress.

The first bride's hair  
is like a bonfire.  
She wears puff satin  
sleeves as big as oars.  
What is in store for her?  
Hands at her thighs gather  
her gown, expose black  
shoes, white stockinged ankles.  
Something burns in her green eyes.  
What is it rankles her? Or is it  
some banked passion, out of style,  
incongruous, displayed in public.  
The town receives its brides  
abstractedly—they're like a  
filigree on commerce and cement.  
As they drift by, men in orange  
hardhats drill the streets,  
prepare a place for Brigham, who's  
been plucked from his pedestal  
and placed in storage.

Black is the color  
of the next bride's hair.  
Her lips are creamy, wondrous.  
Skin is ebony, dress is delicate.  
The groom's in black  
but white as stone—  
carved from the canyons  
of God's astonished mind.  
Now the rabble are not blind to her.  
They stare, aghast at contrast.  
She smiles at them.  
Pedestrians pile up.  
The wedding party troops  
across the street.

Sometimes a groom picks  
up his bride and wades  
against the grain  
of traffic,  
headed for  
the fountained  
photographic gardens  
on the other side,  
There, beneath  
a phallic tower,  
they'll squint into  
the glowering sun,  
Are they having  
fun yet?

Behind the iron  
gates, between the  
pillars, forever  
families pose.  
Here on the granite  
steps, before the  
big bronze doors,  
they pack it in.  
Among the voyeurs  
in the street  
I watch the brides.  
In blazing white  
they'll soon emerge  
into an orange afternoon.