

# Pah Tempe

*Paiute for water from the rock*

*Sally Stratford*

After another day hiking the desert,  
I lock the door of my car,  
and turn toward the hot springs  
in the cool night.  
On the gravel trail  
I'm wrapped by stars,  
rehearsing the legend of  
the woman kept from cancer  
by the water.  
Hard to believe  
that the Virgin River  
shaped this jagged canyon.

Terraced pools seep down  
to the river, I slide in  
and the sulfur water  
holds my body, hot, sandy.  
I see Pete, the naked regular  
through the rising stream.  
My first time  
he asked, "Why are you here?"  
He comes after a day of drinking  
then returns to his flickering trailer  
Healed.

I want to soak naked  
the whole time too,  
not just alone in the cold river,  
to wash sand out of my bathing suit,  
but I'm not a regular yet.  
Under the waterfall  
I rinse caked mud from my hair  
and off my white arms.

I return to the pool and find Pete  
leaning against the rock, asleep  
like a little boy exhausted  
from crying in the dark.