

marlene pearson

(Selections from Orange Bags On The Freeway)

1. Silly to question/Someone must be steering this car

swollen orange bags lay in weeds
at the side/ I wonder what is inside

if I open one will my own eyes
look up at me? I keep driving

I will turn off at the mall
buy the tangerine sundress
paint my nails
and wonder about finding my self

later/ there are perspiration beads
on my arm/ enough evidence for today

3. There was one

Orange bag crept
toward steel pole

then leaned there
out of breath

no hand to close
the ripped plastic

triangle like a rust
colored heart

bleeding leaves

4. Speeding

a policeman behind me
turns on his lights
orange-red lights

why is he following me?
why an orange light? what does he know
of my bags?

5. Melodrama of Oranges at 7 am

Someone spilled a bag of oranges
on the Ventura freeway west

every morning for the past week I've seen them
cling to the edge

yesterday I slowed down
and heard them speak

I want to grow up to be like that
orange bag said the hopeful one
pointing his small navel

the realist gave him truth
you wont be one
youll be in one

then a truck swerved to miss
a car and caught two oranges on its tire

we all watched the orange stain
disappear by the time the truck
skid through sand to halt

the door opened
out stepped 2 men
with orange bags and pointed sticks

7. January 28, 1986, the accident

The newscaster interrupted the song on the radio
he said the shuttle crashed
no one knew if anyone

survived. he kept talking. that's when I saw orange bags
7 of them full and tied
leaning in weeds. I knew

if I could just get over 3 lanes
stop and untie the bags, from each one

an astronaut would step out

I'd put them all in my Rabbit
take the Sepulveda turnoff
to the store with a phone

I'd call NASA. tell them they're ok
I'd hand the phone to Christa
let her talk

I flicked on my blinker
looked over my shoulder for a chance
I shouted slow down you fools
but no one would let me over

even if there'd been only leaves
in those bags I could have
rescued them

9. Sticks reach out like arms/ There's fury in those bags

Orange bags stick out
their arms, legs at 55 mph and race
beside my car

beat spine fists on my window
I push on the gas. 60. 65.
lose all but one

her twig fingers cling
to my door. a branch arm moves
across my windshield
she is mouthing something

what do these bags want from me
this is January 4th
I turn up the radio and go faster

no time for rantings of old leaves
dead twigs, ripped pages
yellowed and torn
empty pepsi cans
stuffed in orange bags
tied shut and looking
like my sister

"Orange Bags on the Freeway" is the recipient of the Rachel Sherwood poetry prize for 19985/1986. "Orange Bags #9" is the recipient of the American Academy of Poets' prize.