

*A Sunday Morning in Humboldt
County, California, circa 1980*

Under Stalin's unwieldy hammer
Only literature
That expressed a certain
"Mild Optimism"
Was allowed.
Up here
On this black beach
Behind the Redwood Curtain,
Fog blubbers the shore.
I can barely see my bare feet
Skirting the tideline
Of humbled waves.
The ocean shushes,
But I can hear
Up ahead
In the blind air,
Someone playing a bassoon.
And there she is
In a black evening gown,
Seated, facing the sea,
In a black folding chair.
And why not?
The sand is the same black
As the bassoon.
From up on the highway overhead
The tires of an eighteen-wheeler
Loaded with redwood logs
Moan in harmony.
In town the church goners
Drone, too, but I can't hear them.
In fog like this the paddleboat enthusiasts
Stay home.
I miss them.

Maybe the bassoonist will see my tracks
When she rises to leave.
I can only hope.
What I share with her
In this fog,
Are the deep-keeled sound of the bassoon
Under oceanic shushing,
The log truck's whining,
The imagined prayers
Of the prayers,
And the mild optimism
Of the redwood trees left standing.