

## Under the Scrub Oak, a Red Shoe · *Dave Smith*

Wrapped in a twisted brown stocking, strangled in the rolled  
nylon of our grandmothers, it was wedged at the heart  
of what little cool shade ever accumulated there.  
You would have to walk out of your way, back  
along an arroyo twisting and empty as memory, back  
from the road out of town so far the sky itself  
signals another world. To find it you do that

though, in any case, you are simply walking and it appears,  
something red shining through the gray-green glaze  
of stunted limbs. If you are looking for a lost child,  
your steps deliberate and quick, you might see it.  
Otherwise you will go on. That is what we do.  
But it waits to reveal itself, like an eye  
in the darkness, and you may innocently look into that

moment, and may imagine why it lacks the slender heel which  
must, once, have nailed many boys against a wall  
where she walked. I kneel and pick it up  
as you would, hearing though it is noon  
the moony insects cry around her, hearing also  
the nylon flake like pieces of skin against my skin,

feeling the sound of its passage from her shaven calf, a screech  
like the hawk's when he is distant and not hungry.  
In this arroyo no one could have seen her stop,  
not as drunk as she pretended, sitting long  
and, in time, methodically undressing, beyond  
thinking now, placing her bundled shoe with care.  
She must have been small and would have borne the usual

bruises, so we would have had no fear of any we might add, earlier,  
when we stood smoking by the wall, cat-calling lightly.  
It would have been one of those nights the breath  
aches it is so pleased with itself, then she  
appeared in that red like the first cactus buds,  
something clearly wrong with her but that, by God,  
no concern of any red-blooded buck she might want.  
In the junk car someone squealed, some rose  
and fell. There were no names. I did not mean

whatever I said, but said it because she was so small, she  
could not hide her fear and shivered on her back.  
Such moments we tell ourselves to walk away from,  
and we do, as now I have walked in my hoping  
for absence, but here is no absence, only  
what waits, like this shoe, to reach, to say please  
as best it can for whoever comes along, as if forgiveness  
were what it meant, and love, as if any weather  
that red shining endured was the bruise  
you might have kissed and might not yet refuse.